

Goldie Gendelman

Tape 1 Side A

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Abstract

Goldie Gendelman was born Tillie Goldie Wolochiwianski on November 17, 1933 in Lechowichi (possibly Lyakhavichy, Belarus), Poland near Baranowichi (possibly Baranovichi, Belarus). An uncle in New York convinced them to leave Poland when she was almost four. Since they could not get into the US, they took a boat to Cuba where they remained for 11 years. Goldie attended private school in Cuba. It was difficult to keep kosher in Cuba and the family did not feel secure as the Cubans were anti-Semitic. In November 1947 they got a visa and flew to the US. They arrived in Miami and soon settled in New York. After two years of college, Goldie dropped out when she married Isaac Gendelman on June 27, 1954. They have two children and four grandchildren. She worked as a bookkeeper, in the Hebrew Academy lunch program and for the past ten years has volunteered at the Donor Desk at the Holocaust Museum.

Summary

00:00 Goldie Gendelman was born Tillie Goldie Wolochiwianski on November 17, 1933 in Lechowichi (possibly Lyakhavichy, Belarus), Poland near Baranowichi (possibly Baranovichi, Belarus). It was a poor town and they were all working class. Her father and the entire family made shoes. There were over 3,000 Jews in the town. She was four-years-old when she left the town. They lived with her grandparents, and her parents, Chaim Wolochiwiansky and Chana Tzvia Kaplan who was a dressmaker. Her younger sister, Libby Hirshenhorn (?), now lives in New York. Goldie's family was very observant of all the Jewish traditions. Shabbos was quiet and the people got together. It was a relaxing day. Her mother cooked and when she came to Cuba and the US, she still cooked the same foods. Goldie is named Tillie Goldie after her grandmother, her mother's mother. Her sister was named Libby after her father's mother. The family had lived a few generations in Poland. They would speak Polish to her and she responded in Yiddish. Goldie helped her mother with dressmaking by laying the material out and basting it. The family did not feel secure in Poland

05:00 Her father's oldest brother came to visit from the US and told them it was time to leave. She felt there was anti-Semitism shown by the Pole's actions. Her family spoke about it. The family wanted to leave Poland and come to the US but could not because they were Polish and Jewish. Her uncle later brought them to the US (crying as she talks about it). The uncle lived in New York and was a traveling salesman. Her uncle changed his name from Leon Wolochiwiansky to Leon Fianski and later to Leon Fay. He brought over the four of them and an unmarried brother. Since they were not allowed to come to the US,

they were told to go to Cuba first. They remained there for eleven years because War broke out. They took a boat to Cuba and in November '47 got a visa for the US. They took a plane to Miami in January '48. She went with her mother and sister to the Cuba. Her father had left in '36. She remained home without her father and lived with her grandparents, an aunt and a cousin all in the same house. She was under four and sick on the ship to Cuba.

- 10:00 Goldie brought some clothes with her but no toys. She did not regret leaving anything as she had few belongings. Goldie does not recall her parents talking about Hitler, probably because they did not want to upset the children. She was upset to leave her grandparents behind in Poland. The family did not know what they would find in Cuba but were looking for a better life. She could not imagine what life would be like in Cuba. Upon arrival in Cuba, none of the family knew the language. Her worse memory was when she was run over by a bus. A boy had a contagious sickness that you could get if he touched you. He tried to touch her so she ran away and got run over. People called her father and he took her to the ER as there was no 9-1-1 to call for an ambulance. Thirty-five years later she had a problem with her right hand which the physician thought was caused by the accident. Goldie attended a private school in Cuba because her parents wanted to do the best for her. The school had some yiddishkeit (Jewishness). They lived in a small town called Ragla which was near Havana and had few Jews. Many of the children were also immigrants from other countries.
- 15:00 Goldie studied language, history, spelling and math. She still counts in Spanish today. Her father and his youngest brother were in business making children's shoes and her mother helped out. It was hard to adjust as they could not live the same way as in Poland. For kashrus (kosher) they had to shop a few times a week for meat in Havana as they only had an ice box. They were able to get such things as bread and butter near their house. Another reason for the difficulty in adjusting was that they were Jewish and so were not liked which made them feel insecure. They thought their stay would be temporary and hoped to get to the US soon. The way the Cubans talked to them seemed anti-Semitic so they tried not to respond and walked away. Goldie received some religious education from a private teacher. At first the family kept in touch with their family in Poland. Her grandmother passed away and the rest died in the Holocaust. Her parents did not know how long they would be in Cuba.
- 20:00 Her parents heard that Germany attacked Poland but never told the children how bad it was. Yiddish was spoken at home. Her parents also spoke Polish and Russian as their town started out Polish, then White Russian and then back to Polish. Her parents knew that people were killed and were chased from town to town. They were in a Catholic country so did not talk much about the War, especially not to the children. They read a Yiddish newspaper at home and listened to the Yiddish radio station to learn about the War. Goldie had few friends as most were goyim (gentile) and her parents wanted her to

have Jewish friends. Others from their hometown lived nearby. Some immigrants sent children alone to the US but her parents did not want to do so. It was a big day in May 1945 when they learned the War was over.

25:00 The uncle who brought them to the US got married that day. Everyone was happy that the War was over. Their last contact with their Polish relatives was in the early '40s. Her parents knew more about the War than the children. The family tried to write to the family who lived around the world but could not find anyone. When Goldie was older she learned about the Jews being killed and persecuted so they ran from place to place. They felt persecuted in Cuba as it was a Catholic country. A few neighbors were nice. Their entertainment was visiting the Landsleit (neighbors from home) in Havana as they could not afford to go on vacations. From Cuba to the US, the family only took clothing and left everything else behind. She has photos from Poland of her parents and grandparents and some small items her mother managed to smuggle out. They expected to work themselves up in the US. They hoped to have a better life and get a better education. They arrived in Miami and their eyes opened up. It was summertime. Her father went to New York to find a job and the rest of the family remained in Miami. Later they followed him. It was a large city and they did not know the language so it was a struggle but they made it.

30:00 They knew when Israel became a country. They had hoped to go to Palestine but their uncle could not take them there. To build themselves up, they would get educated. Both parents worked. Goldie graduated from high school and went to college to get a CPA but after two years she got married and left college. She met her husband, Isaac Gendelman, summer of '53 on the boardwalk of Atlantic City. They got married June 27, 1954. Her husband was also a survivor and he arrived in the US in January 1949 from Kidner (?), Poland which is close to the Ukraine border. Her husband lived in Washington, DC so she moved there for eight years. Now she is 35 years in her home. Her daughter is 42 years old and she has children who are 13 and 16-years-old. Her son is 37 and has a four-year-old daughter and a 2-year-old son. Goldie worked as a bookkeeper in New York and in DC worked for neighbors as a hostess and did volunteer work and for 10 years she worked in the lunch program at the Hebrew Academy. Now Goldie volunteers at the Donor Desk at the Holocaust Museum to educate the public that the Holocaust truly happened and not perpetuate that it was a hoax. By talking to the visitors, it brings up ideas and broadens life. It is a sad experience but she enjoys it. People cannot imagine that you can flee from one country to another and arrive here. Goldie gets pleasure from volunteering at the Holocaust as it is something one must do.

35:00 Visitors cannot believe that what they see actually happened and that one person can do so much destruction for the whole world. She had many reactions from children. Negro children cannot believe that white people were persecuted. They thought that they were the only ones who were persecuted. Goldie has experienced very little anti-Semitism in

the US. It has been good for her here. She only speaks privately about her experiences in Poland and Cuba. **Tape 1, Side B.** It is wonderful the family left Poland as they missed the actions there and are alive. They struggled in Cuba but it paid off. Her father died 32 years ago and her mother 15 years ago in New York. Her sister lives in New York and has three married sons and grandchildren. Goldie never returned to Poland as believes she would not recognize anything. Even older Landsleit (from her hometown) who returned did not recognize anything so she feels she would not.

40:00 Her experience affected how she raised her children. She brought them up to be strong and with the knowledge of what went on. Her view of Judaism did not change. Both her children and her two older grandchildren have been to the Holocaust Museum. Her children were surprised by her story and realized her life was tough and are happy that they did not go through it. Goldie is glad she got to the US as it is a wonderful country and has not experienced anti-Semitism here though has heard of it. She hopes her grandchildren do not experience any anti-Semitism. If children and adults come to the Donor Desk and speak to her in Spanish, she will reply but does not approach them. Cuba was a beautiful country but they never felt secure there. It was a temporary stopover but lasted 11 years and they could not wait until they got to the US.

43:00