

**MANDEL, Maria**  
**RG-50.106.0157**  
**One audiotape**  
**In French**  
**October 17, 2002**

**Abstract**

Maria Mandel was born Maria (Miriam) Binkman in Otwock, Poland in 1938. The family lived in Czarnikau (Czarnkow). When the Jews were assembled to be deported, Maria's father hid the family in the grandparents' bakery, then in a cemetery and many other places. When the parents were denounced, they quickly got Polish families to take Maria, her brother Leib, and her sister Sophia. Germans shot the parents in 1942. Maria is the only survivor from her immediate family. Both of her siblings were abandoned by the Polish families.

While living with her Polish neighbors, Maria took their last name, went to a regular school, and participated in Catholic religious life. Through the studies, she became anti-Semitic. Maria did not know she was Jewish, but was aware that she was not really the Polish family's daughter. She believes she survived because some Germans "closed their eyes".

Maria was unaware that she had living relatives. But her father's brother in the United States and another brother made inquiries about the Mandel family and found out that Maria was still alive. They began making arrangements to bring her to the United States.

In 1947, when Maria was taken to a Jewish orphanage run by the Joint, the Polish man who had housed her asked to be paid by her uncle in the United States. Her uncle obliged, and Maria remembers a person from the Joint handing money to the Polish family.

While she was in the orphanage, from 1947-1949, the Polish family came to visit, but was advised not to return so that Maria could settle in. Maria and the other children were well-fed and educated, and she learned about her Jewish heritage.

Because she could not travel directly to the United States from Poland, Maria travelled alone for two days by train to Paris. On May 26, 1949, Maria met her uncle and aunt in Paris. When she learned that they were arranging to send her to America, Maria demanded to stay with her family in Périgueux. She had grown close with two of her cousins, and had begun studying French.

**Oral History**

**Tape 1:**

- 0:00** Maria (Miriam) Binkman was born in Otwock, Poland, likely in 1937. However, to be able to travel to France, she needed to be at least 12 years old, so documents issued for that purpose state that she was born in 1938.
- 0:16** Maria's memories of Poland are "war." She had one brother, Leib, and a sister, Sophia. Their parents were shot by the Germans in 1942. The children were hidden by Polish families. However, Maria is the only survivor. Her siblings were abandoned by the families who had been hiding them. Maria does not know the names of those Polish families. She believes that those events occurred between 1942 and 1947.

- 0:40** Maria's father had one brother living in New York and another in Périgueux, France. The brothers made inquiries about Maria and her siblings at their birth place. The brothers found out that Maria was the only survivor, and made arrangements to bring her to the United States via France. Her mother also had a brother in Paris.
- 0:50** Maria's uncles had left Poland in the 1920s and 1930s to escape Polish military service. Her father had been one of ten children. Only three children had survived. Two siblings lived in the United States, and one in France. After the war, Maria was placed in a Jewish orphanage that the Joint maintained in Otwock, where her papers were done. She was there from 1947 to 1949. The orphanage took photographs of the children, and sent the photos around the world to Jewish families who could adopt them. A family in Montreal, Canada selected Maria for adoption. Many of the orphans went to kibbutzim in Israel.
- 1:30** The children had been all alone when the Joint found them and brought them to the orphanage. While in the orphanage, the Polish family who had hidden Maria came to visit her. She had a hard time being alone. Maria found out later that the family was advised not to visit her anymore so she could settle in. The people who cared for the orphans were warm and supportive. They orphans went to school and were taught many things, including Yiddish and Hebrew.
- 1:43** When Maria lived with the Polish family, part of the house was taken over by the Wehrmacht. Although Maria acted as part of the family, it was visible that she was not. So it was important for her to forget her name. Maria says that she was allowed to survive because some Germans "closed their eyes". The Polish family had been neighbors and known as good people, especially the mother. Maria remembers they spoke Polish at home. Maria did not know about having relatives overseas. Her family had come from Czarnikau (Czarnkow), where her grandparents had a bakery. All Jews had to assemble at the main square to be deported by train. Amid the crowd, her father led the family to the bakery where they hid. In all, there were only two survivors, Maria and one other who is in Canada.
- 2:34** They hid in many places, even in a cemetery. They were then denounced, and Maria's parents gave their children to Polish families. Her parents were then shot in the village.
- 2:58** Maria took the name of the Polish family, Golddark, who took her in. She participated in activities of other Polish children her age. She went to a regular school and to Catholic services where she learned the catechism and participated in religious holidays. Through these studies, she even became anti-Semitic. Maria did not know she was Jewish. Her Polish guardians told her that she was not their daughter, but told her not to tell anyone. She later found out that she was Jewish, and acquired some knowledge of Judaism in the orphanage. For two years, Maria waited for her parents to return. Eventually, the woman of the house told her the truth about her parents' deaths. When the Russian troops arrived, they killed many Germans and collaborators.

**End of Side A**

**Side B:**

- 0:00** Maria finds it difficult to talk about her experiences. However, she feels that she was lucky that she was living with a good family. Many others were on their own.
- 0:58** Maria was never hungry while with the Polish family, although they lacked other things. At the Joint's orphanage, Maria had oranges, bananas, and chocolate for the first time. When Maria was taken to the orphanage, the Polish man who had housed her heard of her uncle in the United States and requested to be paid. Maria's uncle was well off, and gave a lot of money to the Polish family. Maria saw a person from the Joint handing the money to the people who hid her.
- 1:02** Due to questions about her papers, Maria could not travel directly to the United States, so she had to go to France first. She travelled alone for two days and two nights on a train, and arrived in Paris where her uncle and aunt were waiting on May 26, 1949. When they began talking about arranging her trip to the United States, Maria refused, wanting to stay with her family in Périgueux. Maria had two cousins who became like her brothers. The family spoke only French, so Maria started to understand the language. Maria was sent to a three-week camp for a vacation, and came back understanding quite a bit more. She went to school, and to improve her French, she was put in a French preparatory class for six-year-olds although she was 12.
- 1:59** Maria's "brothers" changed her name to Mireielle, thinking it was a better name. But documents state her name as Maria.
- 2:00** Maria remembers the difficulties she experienced while hiding.
- End**