

RG-50.120#165

**Warbin, Mira**

**Tape 1 of 3**

- 1.01.41 Mira Warbin, nee Schvetzki, was born in Vilna on October 25, 1919. The testimony was given only 8 years earlier – she only began talking about her life during the Holocaust in 1985. She concealed the story from her closest family, including her husband and children, who lived in the home during holiday eves and Yom Hashoa.
- 3.26 Vilna was a city with a large Jewish population and, accordingly, many Jewish institutions. Mira was one of two children. Her sister was 6 years younger. Her family was well off and lived in a large house with central heating and all of the equipment that existed then. They also had a horse-drawn carriage.
- 4.47 Mira's mother was studying to be a midwife when she met her husband, a yeshiva student. Her mother never worked in her profession. Her father was a crop merchant who supplied the Polish army.
- 5.54 Mira's parents employed a cook and a maid. The house was always open to their relatives who lived nearby – Vasillishki (where father was from), Noielega (her mother's birthplace).
- 7.04 Father had a very good relationship with officers in the Polish army.
- 8.00 Mother was always sickly. The family had a summer home, 25 km. from Vilna.
- 9.00 Mira went to schools in the neighborhood. Her parents were Zionists. Father was active in the Histadrut.
- 10.53 Mira went to a private Bund-sponsored high school and studied in Yiddish. At age 11, she joined the youth movement, Hashomer Hatzair.
- 14.17 Mira's sister was pulled in the direction of the communist party. He went to the Comsomol (?) Her parents were a little worried, but also understanding and permissive so that they did not stand in her way.
- 16.24 She remembers the anti-Semitism that was prevalent in her city and in Poland, in general. In 1938, Mira's father was fired from his job.
- 17.48 Mira credits Hashomer Hatzair for her survival.
- 21.00 Praises the Hashomer Hatzair in Europe.
- 23.45 Praises tolerance between the different movements in Europe.

- 30.00 Mira's parents were Zionists, but they postponed their immigration to Palestine because of their comfortable economic position. No one believed even after 1933, that it would be so difficult to live under German control.
- 31.51 In 1938, Mira went to Chestokhova to the "hachshara" to undergo agricultural training.
- 34.08 The war between Germany and Poland broke out.
- 35.12 Talks about life in the hachshara; Mira worked as a nurse.
- 40.13 The youth was not warned that war was about to break out. Mira feels that the youth group was abandoned by their leaders, and she cannot forgive them.
- 2.00.38 Mira did not participate in the Seders from 1939 until 1992 because she could not bring herself to enjoy a holiday. She has the feeling that survivors, and the depth of their feelings, are not understood.
- 5.10 Talks more about her family life. Chanukah was the most celebrated of holidays. Yiddish theatre was one of her favorite outings when her grandfather came to visit.
- 8.18 September 1, 1939 – tension is high, but at home they did not think much of it. Urged by others for the family to get organized and begin to flee – they did not know what direction to take. The Germans were already in the town. They joined thousands of other refugees, already on the main road. After an entire day of walking, the refugees found a forest to hide. German bombers decimated the group, in the first week. Mira walked 500 km. principally at night.
- 10.59 Arrival in Kovel, and arrival of Russians. Returned to Vilna, to the family home. Father had been taken to a concentration camp in Karutz-Bereza and was accused of espionage. He was returned home eventually, but his spirit was broken. Contact with Abba Kovner.
- 21.09 Father eventually found a job in the PX for officers, which allowed him to bring food home.
- 22.40 Attended open (?) university and Soviet (propaganda films). Talks about the beginning of underground organization
- 28.21 Discusses living conditions; forced to move from house to house.
- 28.54 Vilna is put under Lithuanian rule. Influx of refugees into the city. Arrival of over 500 members of the Hashomer Hatzair. Many applied to immigrate to Japan.

- 30.00 Russians applied the brakes to the above activities.
- 31.23 War between USSR and Germany broke out. Within two days, the Germans entered Vilna. Anti-Jewish laws were implemented. Jews were kidnapped for a day's work and then returned.
- 34.39 Father became more observant. One day, the Germans took her father on a day that he was going to attend some Jewish community business – he never returned. He was taken to Ponari and murdered.
- 40.00 The story of Mira's defiant visit to the Gestapo offices in search of her father. Mira returned home and was shocked at seeing her mother's hair turn white in a matter of hours. She was only 49 years old.
- 43.35 Shortly after, the ghetto was established.
- 52.10 Entered ghetto. There was confusion and it was very crowded. They were penniless.
- 57.23 Luba, Mira's sister, went into shock and never recovered. Mira's mother refused to eat. They lived in the ghetto for 2 years and 4 months.
- 59.00 The family was taken under the wing of a single woman who obtained bedding, food and money for them. Talks about this woman's selfless actions.
- 3.00.00 The large ghetto and the small ghetto (the latter was always empty and served as a transit station to the Jews being sent to Ponari).
- 3.20 Mira's family was caught without identification and was put in the small ghetto. They were saved by one of Luba's friends. Luba and her friend were married and she moved in with his parents.
- 7.42 Mira's protector offered to put Mira on her own ID to prevent her from being deported. The only one without ID was Mira's mother. Those without ID's (about 50 people) were hidden in a safe place. Being short 50 people for that "Action" the Germans looked for more Jews. A Jewish soldier found them in their hiding place and turned them over to the Germans. He was later killed by a German.
- 12.00 The sisters mourned and were in deep shock.
- 14.44 Mira's work in an experimental agricultural school. She was in a large group and the work was hard.
- 19.00 Luba was very weak and she worked sewing buttons in the ghetto. Mira had to provide for her.

- 20.46 The labor manager, a Lithuanian, decided that he needed a maid for his house. He chose Mira. The living conditions were excellent for the labor manager, but work conditions for Mira were more difficult than her previous job. Mira had a chance to steal food from their well-stocked basement to bring to her sister in the ghetto.
- 29.23 Mira's brother-in-law was beaten to death because he was caught trying to smuggle potatoes for her on a day that she was sick.
- 31.17 Luba could not come out of her shock. The funeral was attended by the entire ghetto.
- 33.06 Life in the ghetto entered a certain routine. The "actions" were specialized – small children, sick, and old people.
- 36.00 The story of the attempt to save Mira's mother.
- 41.00 Beginning of cultural organization in the ghetto.
- 42.07 Encounter with Rushka Korczak – she was given information on the underground that was being organized. Mira joined them and her spirit began to heal.
- 45.00 Hangings in the ghetto.
- 47.00 Mira moved in with 3 other girls from the underground. It became a meeting place for underground activities.

**Tape 2 of 3**

- 52.00 Mira criticizes severely the play "Ghetto" because its writers, despite their deep examination of the period and extensive meetings with Abba Kovner, came up with something closer to fantasy than to reality.
- 55.00 Mira met Abba Kovner when she was in the underground. Vitenberg was the commander of those forces (FPO) and it included representatives of all of the Zionist organizations. The underground was organized into groups of five. Talks about their activities.
- 4.00.00 The horror of life under 24 hour threat of death.
- 8.00 Daily schedule in the ghetto.
- 10.53 The "Avengers" group, of which Mira was a part, and their close ties.
- 11.43 Mira's opinion of Genz.

- 14.27 The underground got notice that all of the little villages around Vilna were marked for extermination. They sent information about it to the population, but the people did not want to believe it.
- 19.35 The underground was discovered when Glassman was taken. He was the commander of the Jewish police force.
- 20.00 There was information in all groups. Many times, the underground members had to hide or disappear for a few days.
- 25.55 The Wittenberg chapter.
- 29.00 Genz turns himself in.
- 34.00 Connections with other cities. Meetings with Haike Grossman, Tushia Altman, and others.
- 54.00 Not many suicides in the Vilna ghetto. Mira reflects on her survival, despite the fact that she was not interested in living. She just “lasted.” She did take care of her sister’s needs. The feeling of longing for the life she had and the family she lost accompanies Mira to this day.
- 5.02.00 Those who managed to get into the ghetto with money could afford to stay alive and to enjoy the cultural offerings of the ghetto.
- 6.24 Mira’s sister’s living conditions.
- 8.55 Mira’s sister decided to go to the concentration camp when the ghetto’s liquidation began. Mira tried to persuade her to hide in the forest, but Luba was too fearful. She died 6 hours before liberation.
- 9.50 The sad separation from her sister.
- 11.52 Departure to the forest on Saturday night. Point of meeting was the Jewish cemetery. They started on the road to the forest with the guide from Svenciony’s. Then, the guide disappeared and the group was left with no idea how to get to Narocz. After a week, they arrived at an area under the rule of communist partisans. They were there for 10 months.
- 21.00 Meeting with the partisans already in the forest. The stark reality becomes apparent.
- 30.00 When the ghetto was liquidated, many groups of partisans were sent to Rudnicki, not Narocz.
- 31.05 Talks about the Rudnicki underground.

- 33.00 Break up of the Narocz partisan camp for fear of the approaching Germans. In their retreat, the partisans decide to take the men only. Mira and her friend are left behind.
- 35.00 The demise of Glassman and his group of Revisionist Jews who were making their way to Rudnicki. The encounter with Abba Kovner's brother, Michael.
- 44.00 About Alexander Bogen, the artist, and Avram Sutzkever, the ?????
- 45.00 Talks about Shutan and anti-Semitism in Narocz.
- 56.00 Mira feels that the subject of the underground in Narocz is a neglected topic.
- 58.00 Speaks more about family life in the Narocz forest.
- 6.03.09 The Jewish population in Narocz were a separate group for a short time. When the German blockade began, and it became necessary to flee the forest, it was announced that the Jews were not wanted. Finally, a few more were taken to transport (the wounded) while the rest had to find a way out of the forest.
- 6.49 Mira and the other young women prepared for a 180 km. trek to join the partisans in Kazan. They were under the command of Kassimir, a fair and just man. Also, there was a large unit of Lithuanians, and weapons were easily obtainable. The other option would have been Rudnicki, but it was much harder to get there.
- 9.13 Encounter with a German unit combing the countryside.
- 10.00 Chance encounter with Kassimir, who told them they could not stay in Kazan because the Germans were coming. They had to go back to Narocz, after resting in Kazan. On the way back, they saw the fires set by the Germans who burned entire villages.
- 16.49 Women obtained essential items only through sexual favors.
- 20.15 Returned to Narocz, to a camp decimated by the Germans. Again, Jews were not wanted there.
- 23.21 Mira, her friend Shprin???? Nissan and Judith Ressnick decided to go back to Kazan.
- 24.40 A few of the names of the families who were in the forest: Gevind (from a little village near Vilna), the Kopansky sisters from Vilna, Yehuda Kushinsky, some from Grodno, Palevky (??), etc.
- 26.43 Arrival in Kazan. Mira knew only two young men who had arrived a few days before. No anti-Semitism there; however, where one of the young men was killed

- in action, the commander came to Mira with the victim's watch and said, "Here is the watch of the Jew who got killed. Do you want it?" Mira refused so the commander put it on his wrist.
- 31.31 Mira's short-lived romance with a Jewish doctor from Kiev.
- 31.50 Description of the camp in Kazan. The Lithuanian partisans. The demand for sexual favors from women was greater there. Some women did not venture out a step without an escort.
- 35.00 The Jewish wounded soldiers were not given priority for treatment. Mira had to care for one and then prepare him for burial.
- 36.24 Mira did not see Kassimir anymore, then. The rumor was that although he wasn't Jewish, his wife (a Lithuanian) was. In the 1980's, in Israel, Mira was invited to greet some of her husband's relatives who had immigrated from the FSU. She was the only one in the family who spoke Russian. It turned out that the relatives were Kassimir's wife and daughter. Kassimir had died suddenly of a heart attack and he was buried after an official funeral which all of Vilna attended. He is buried in a cemetery where Jews and non-Jews live together.
- 42.00 Talks about evenings in Kazan; Shabbat meals; and singing. Mira does not remember Jewish Holidays, only the great celebration of May 1, 1944.
- 44.37 Mira was a nurse there and also took her turn as a night guard. The latter was her favorite job.
- 47.35 Hygiene was impossible to keep. Women used leaves as napkins when menstruating. They learned that from the non-Jewish women. They also used ashes from burning trees as laundry detergent.
- 48.00 Mira carried a small sub-machine gun. There was no scarcity of weapons there.
- 50.00 Mira felt very isolated in Kazan.
- 51.53 Ways for women to repel attacks from men - to have a boyfriend or be very strong and know how to curse.

### **Tape 3 of 3**

- 55.23 The Red Army arrives in Kazan. The partisans are ordered to abandon the forest and gather in the village, all except for four Jews who had come with Mira. They were supposed to stay there until the journalists and the filmmakers came to document the life of the partisans. They were in absolute panic, as the order in the camp had broken down completely. After two days of waiting for the filmmakers, who never arrived, the four made their way to the village as well. Then, they were sent to Svencianys (???). From there, they made their way home.

- 7.02.00 Talks about the ay home and an encounter with the survivors from Rudnicki. Discusses the emotions associated with the liberation; still many were killed as the Germans continued bombing Vilna, which Zhukov had liberated.
- 6.47 Mira ran to see the ghetto. Only ghosts were there. For one week, she kept going back trying to muster the courage to visit the rooms she and her sister had lived in. She began to regret her survival.
- 8.22 After a few days, they were issued partisan ID cards. They received them from the same anti-Semitic partisan who threw them out of Narocz.
- 9.05 The Hashomer Hatzair group began to organize to look for work. It was easy for a partisan. Mira chose a place where there would be food available. She found work in a PX that served only the official dorm.
- 10.58 Beginning of liberation of concentration camps. 500 Jews returned to Vilna out of 80,000. Mira sought to find her sister.
- 12.41 The story of Mira's sister death in a concentration camp in Estonia, in a human pyre 6 hours before liberation. The camp was Kloeia.
- 18.00 The fruitless search for her cousin.
- 23.00 Ilya Ehrenburg was in Vilna. He interviewed the Jewish partisans, Abba Kovner researched the archives in order to save material on the ghetto.
- 27.59 The group decided to leave Vilna, far from the Russian zone. Anti-Semitism was noticeable.
- 35.52 Border crossings – Mira went to Grodno to wait for the chance. She did so on December 31, under the guise of being Polish and wanting to go to Lublin.
- 38.00 Arrival in Bialystok.
- 41.26 Encounter with Hayke Grossman.
- 42.53 Arrival in Romania, where it was easy to cross the borders via Lublin.
- 43.24 The “escape” movement began acquiring shape as more and more survivors converged from the FSU concentration camps, partisans, etc.
- 45.50 Mira's opinion on Abba Kovner's (and others) project to unify all of the youth movements.
- 47.44 The joint supported the rescuers in Romania.



- 49.50 The Avengers group begins to take shape. Mira was very active in it.
- 55.42 In Bucharest, there was a functioning Jewish community, with Jewish business, etc. Mira and her group were well received.
- 57.28 They were looking for ways to immigrate to Israel.
- 59.59 Mira was contacted to join the Avengers.
- 8.01.59 Mira was in Romania for 5-6 months; discusses what life is like there.
- 6.57 Arrival in Italy where the Jewish Brigade was already present. Encounter with Israeli soldiers began a relationship of generations with them.
- 13.47 The plans for revenge. Mira's group went to near Nuremberg, in Furth. Her role was to crisscross Germany to find where the Nazi officials were detained.
- 30.50 Mira did not have a specific job in either the implementation of plan "A" or plan "B". The group left Germany a day before the plan was "implemented." Three young men were in charge of it.
- 32.00 Encounter with Jewish soldiers serving in Nuremberg in the American army.
- 33.40 Mira and her group spent 8 months in Germany. Arrival of Jewish refugees, acquaintances among them, complicated Mira's group's "cover."
- 36.34 The center for information gathering of the "Avengers" was in Munich. Encounters with soldiers of the Jewish Brigade there, among them was Shaike Weinberg.
- 38.32 Plan "A" consisted of poisoning the central water system of Nuremberg.
- 39.27 The meningitis epidemic in Vilna, in 1941, was said to be related to the poisoning of the water.
- 39.35 Plan "A" was never implemented for a multitude of reasons.
- 41.55 Mira's disappointment at the cancellation of Plan "A."
- 42.43 Plan "B."
- 46.00 Last day in Nuremberg.
- 50.00 Munich. Group received uniforms of Israeli soldiers. Crossing to France on the day after the Passover Seder.

- 51.56 Plan B consisted of poisoning the bread that is distributed to camps where German soldiers were detained.
- 52.10 The news of their success reached them, through the press, after two days. Many Germans died, others were taken in serious condition to hospitals. The investigations began. The people in charge of implementing the revenge had already been whisked to Italy.
- 54.37 There was a little frustration in the group at the uncertainty of the number of victims.
- 55.00 The group was elated that they succeeded without being caught. There were spies everywhere and the Avengers could have become suspicious.
- 56.00 She praises the group that implemented the revenge.
- 9.00.42 Mira's deep hatred of Germans until this day.
- 3.23 Mira thinks that another holocaust is possible in Europe. There is no comparison between Avenging groups in Europe and in Israel. She also thinks that it should not take place in Israel, but in Europe. She says that an educational message has to be given.
- 5.55 Mira cannot answer the question of why the story of the Avengers was kept quiet for so many years, as she did not feel there was anything to hide. Mira elaborates on the 30-year silence on the subject as perhaps reflecting the pain and disappointment that the success was not greater. The group has stayed together in Israel despite their deep differences in background, in the beginning.
- 10.33 After its arrival in Israel, as a nucleus, to the kibbutz Eyn Hachosh, the group flirted briefly with the idea of reorganizing and carrying on more sabotage.
- 11.02 Prior to their immigration to Israel, the Avengers wanted to stay longer in Europe to continue their work. They were told that they represented a serious danger now and had to hasten their departure to Israel.
- 12.10 On her way to Israel, Mira was detained by the British for 10 months in an Atlit camp.
- 13.00 When the news of the arrival of the partisans to Eyn Hachosh spread throughout Israel. Many important people came to greet them: the poet Nathan Alterman, the Palmach founder Itzhak Sadeh, actress Chana Rovina, Abba Kushi, and many more. The kibbutz accommodated these guests and at the same time protected the partisans. Kibbutz members did not intrude in the pain of these refugees and did not ask questions. They just cared for them. Mira felt that they had arrived home.

- 14.00 With all of that, the beginnings in Israel were difficult, without language and no one to greet them – not at the port or at the end of the detention period. She says that the worst of all was with all of that freedom there was nowhere to go. She talks about the crying for all that was lost began on the ship carrying the illegal immigrants to Israel. The crying “went on and on” for all the years that they had controlled themselves. The yearnings for their lost innocence went on for many nights at the kibbutz.
- 16.00 The partisans were a “mixed” group whose members belonged to different youth movements of diverse ideologies. Eyn Hachoshesh was a Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz. The partisans slowly began finding their place in different parts of Israel. Mira ended up in Kibbutz Yakum.
- 17.56 Mira was sent by the kibbutz to work at a nearby restaurant. Its owner told her “You are a survivor; you just arrived. You will not be a waitress or wash floors. You will come in the morning to have breakfast with me, then got to the kitchen to prepare salads. You don’t have to serve. You already went through a lot.” Talks about the acts of kindness like this one that helped her to adjust to the new country.
- 18.46 Mira got married the day the partition vote passed at the UN. Three days later her husband was mobilized. She was done, again.
- 19.03 Mira was not worried while the War of Independence was going on. She felt safe and indifferent. She didn’t care about the lack of food or power at the kibbutz. She considered all of that a “small change.”
- 21.04 The fears and worries began again only after the birth of Mira’s children. She was afraid to lose anyone in her little family. The day her oldest son began his military service was the proudest day and the worst day of her life.
- 27.01 Mira was contemplating a trip to Vilna in order to find closure.
- 27.37 Mira confesses that after the first day of testimony, she had decided to call off the rest of the appointments. The experience had been too painful for her. However, her family encouraged her to “continued with what she had started.”

END OF TAPE

