

## **S H I F F E R, C L E A**

RG-50.120\* 0280

1:00 (start tape ½) to 1:29

### **Childhood**

She was born in Germany, her parents -- originally from Poland -- moved the family to Belgium when she was an infant. Describes her "Good and bad" childhood initially well (had textile and fur business), but lost everything (and father jailed for debt) and lived in poverty. Her mother was extremely hard working, which she only appreciated later. Her parents were traditionally observant. She loved learning, but had to go to work at 14. At 16 she joined the Bund movement and became an anti-Stalin socialist, and this became her important social and ideological base. In addition to poverty there were also difficulties and restrictions of life as foreigners. (Her two younger brothers and a sister were born in Belgium).

1:30 to 2:00

### **Initial War Year**

Towards the end of the 1930s she and her Bund friends knew about developing fascism but nobody listened. Knew about Jews' fate from German refugees, but it was all theoretical discussions, and as foreigners they could not engage in political activity. Preoccupied with their limited income, she describes her attempts to obtain money. Even though Germans entered Belgium in May 1940, Jews did not know what the Germans would do to them for a while (no camps in Belgium). Restrictions started very slowly. She had to terminate her job.

She and Phillipe (a young man of similar background) joined underground cells and got married in 1942. (Unmarried young people were sent to Germany. Her brothers escaped to a Belgian cloister and a monastery in Switzerland, respectively.). Her parents' families tried to leave for France but returned when the Germans advanced.

2:00 to 2:34

### **Life in the Underground**

She describes their activities and everyday life in the underground; sharing it with many gentiles, similarly poor and anti-German..

Restrictions started only slowly. Her sister was in camp Mallines and not well. Her father was picked up in the street by Jacques the Monster, who worked for the Gestapo, and was sent to a camp in Belgium. Her mother was kept in hiding in small room. Tells about Ernest Mandel (party head) and Albert -- among those in the underground involved in money transfer to free people, and how the underground cells worked in moving and freeing people. While she and Phillipe were helping free people from the Gestapo -- her father was caught in front of them.

2:35 to 334

### **Caught by Gestapo and sent to Mallines**

Describes how she and Phillipe were caught -- probably betrayed by Finkelstein (a Jew who was intimidated into becoming a 'Mosser') and brought to Mallines and how they met her father there (he had been 'traded' for someone else). They spent three months in Mallines. Describes conditions there, food, work, sleeping conditions, typical day. Describes the camp's hierarchy (in order of those guards nearest and most involved with the prisoners): 1) Jewish collaborators; 2) local fascist Belgian police; 3) Germans. She describes a woman who "sold her soul but saved for money" and could sometimes save inmates. Finkelstein killed himself later. (Mentioned later by the historian Maxime Steinberg).

334 to 4:00 (end tape 1)

### **Transport # 20 to Auschwitz -- Jumping Out**

Describes the underground activities while in camp Mallines. They knew the train was going to take them from Mallines, through Belgium and Germany to Auschwitz. She describes their state of mind and preparations for the jump. Her father and others got sick before the transport. He lost consciousness in the train. She did not know for a long time what happened to him, and felt guilty leaving him. She describes the jump -- 90 of the 270 who jumped died -- and their escape. They managed to escape, get some help and got to Liege by the one bus which was not stopped. She believes they had many instances of 'good luck' compared to other escapees who perished.

4:00 (start tape 2) to 4:53

### **Living 'under cover' in Belgium**

They reached Liege and eventually Brussels, were helped by friends and underground-related connections to find accommodations and avoid being caught. Stayed in Cherlovan (?) and met her brothers. Hid her mother in a friend's house. She received papers as a Belgian returnee from Congo and she and Phillipe acted as if not married. Eventually she obtained a job at the municipality to avoid being transferred to Germany. All these with the help of underground connections and friends (Jews and non-Jews). Describes her active work in the underground and social and family connections, all cautiously and constantly keeping identities secret. Describes an encounter with a German who was an anti-Nazi and a social-democrat who sought their help for an escaped Jewish inmate (but was subsequently beaten so badly he could not be saved). The Germans left Belgium in 1944.

4:55 to 5:57 (end tape 2)

### **Post-War Period**

Describes that period and the reaction of friends and neighbors to their uncovered Jewish identity; her mother's coping with her lengthy isolation, her older brother's return from Switzerland where he was mistreated and her younger brother slow adjustment from the monastery's Catholicism to Judaism.

They left for Uruguay -- attracted by its democratic regime -- but after two years of struggling economically left for Brazil where they lived for another eight years, until the

regime there changed. They maintained their socialist/liberal orientation as in Europe (though not political activism) but became increasingly more Jewish/Zionist (not religious) in their identity and contacts. They made Aliyah and moved to Israel.

She describes her growing family and ongoing contacts with her brothers who stayed in Europe. A chance meeting in Tel Aviv with a former inmate informed her how her father died on the train before reaching Auschwitz absolving her of the guilt of leaving him. She is active in WIZO and other organizations promoting Judaism (not necessarily religious) and its self-actualization in Israel. She has written a book and many articles relating her experiences.

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Translated and transcribed by  
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