

HELEN MASTBAUM

Born Hinda Kornwitz 7/12/19 in Skalat, Poland. Father, Nachem, owned a hardware type store. Mother, Shaindel, a seamstress. Maternal grandparents Jacob and Esther (no last name given). Paternal grandparents David and Havah Kornwitz. Spoke Yiddish and Polish. Belonged to Zionist organization, Batar. Had 3 brothers and 2 sisters. Poles threw stones at the girls. Father thought the rise of Nazis was just "propaganda."

September 1939, Russians occupied Skalat which was near the Russian border. Brothers taken into the Russian army where they remained until 1945. Nazis occupied town in 1941. Men taken to work and never came back. Father hid in a cellar bunker for 2 weeks. Once he emerged, he was put to work in German kitchens. Mastbaum and sister worked on farms until ghetto established 1942. Moved from own house to small rooms in ghetto, living with 3-4 families. Typhus broke out. Late in 1942, ghetto surrounded by Gestapo. She and father hid in attic for several days. Came out and heard many families taken, likely to Auschwitz. A neighbor, a tailor, allowed to work outside the ghetto and he requested Mastbaum to help him, calling her his daughter. Lasted 3-4 months. She heard Gestapo rounding up remaining Jews, so she ran out of tailor shop and hid in a stable in the hay. Father taken to a nearby labor camp. She left the stable to find father in the camp and crawled under the wire to get in. Found father, but sister gone. She hid under piles of furniture and later in a bunker in a gentile's kitchen. Father and others killed in the meantime. She got back in the camp and worked 2-3 months. She heard Gestapo was coming to liquidate the camp, so she escaped back to the gentile woman who would no longer hide her. She then hid in the bushes, ultimately linking up with a few other survivors, walking through the woods and fields. They made a bunker in the woods to live in and stole/stockpiled food from farms. Stole rags to use as shoes. March 12, 1944, Russians liberated area after a 12 day battle. Russian Jewish major gave them food. She went back to her house in Skalat which was occupied by a Pole. A Russian Jewish doctor came and treated her boils and went to the house to get pillows and blankets. She went to the police and had the Polish family evicted. She worked in a restaurant for a while until she became sick. Brother wrote her from Siberia and told her to leave the house. She went to Gliwice In Germany where she met her husband in 1945. They went to Valdenburg, Germany. They contacted Haganah and were able to get to a DP camp in Ulm, Germany in the American Zone. They stayed there 1946-9 and then to another camp in Hamburg. They contacted Husband's uncle in St. Paul and were able to emigrate in 1951.

Husband has 3 cousins in area, Leonard Mastbaum, MD, Joe Mast, a lawyer and Sam Mastbaum. Their daughter is a library scientist and son in law is a child psychologist. Son Norman is a psychologist and second son Ozzie is disabled. Mastbaums going to Holocaust gathering of survivors and families in DC with 15,000 others (1983).