

Makuch, Barbara

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2 Audio Tapes

Interview at Faith in Humankind Conference, September 19, 1984

**Abstract**

Barbara Makuch was born in Russia in 1917. She grew up mostly in eastern Poland, in a Catholic family. Beginning in 1942, several Jews came to Barbara seeking help. She sheltered Malka Glass, a six year-old girl, for approximately six months, telling neighbors that Malka was her cousin. As it became more dangerous, she found a convent that agreed to accept Malka. She helped another Jew, Sophia Price, by buying her a train ticket to a large city. She aided a pediatrician, Dr. Olga Lilion, by telling the director of the school at which she worked that she had a friend who needed a job. Barbara helped save another young Jewish boy, Stefan Jacobchek, by getting him enrolled at the school. Eventually, Barbara joined an underground organization that provided false documents, money and food to Jews in hiding. While acting as a courier, Barbara was caught by the Germans. After being held in prison for a month, the Germans were bribed and Barbara's life was spared. She was sent to Ravensbrück, where she remained until the end of the war. Barbara made her way back to Poland and later traveled to Canada, where she met her husband and settled in Montreal. She has stayed in touch with several of the people she saved during the war. She has been recognized for her heroism by Yad Vashem.

**Tape 1**

**Side A**

- 0 – 2.2** Barbara Makuch was born on October 17, 1917, in Russia, where her parents had gone temporarily. When she was eight months old, they returned to their native Poland. They lived mostly in eastern Poland. Barbara had two younger sisters. The family belonged to a Catholic church and attended church every Sunday. They were not active in politics.
- 2.7** Barbara was in Warsaw when the war started in 1939. She had finished agricultural school and was preparing to go to university. She lived in an apartment with relatives.
- 3.4** As a child, Barbara had Jewish friends in school (Jews mostly lived in small towns in eastern Poland).
- 4.0** Her family did not discuss what was happening to the Jews. She began to hear of anti-Semitism at the university.
- 5.4** From the beginning, Jews were segregated. They began wearing a yellow star. Often, because Jews spoke German, they were used by the Germans as translators. When they were no longer needed, they were kicked out or even killed.

- 6.7** Before the war, some businesses had urged Poles not to trade with Jews. Barbara did not agree with this – her family was not anti-Semitic. She saw Jewish children beaten in the streets. At times, hungry children took some food. If the Germans saw it, the children were beaten or killed.
- 8.3** Barbara did not “decide” to help Jews; rather, she was there at the time when help was needed. Strangers started to come to her. The first people that Barbara helped, in the summer of 1942, were Malka Glass (who was six years old) and her mother, Sarah Glass. This was when Barbara was living with her mother in the small town of Sandomierz.
- 10.0** At that time, Barbara was a teacher at the agriculture school. Mrs. Glass told Barbara that someone (possibly her aunt) had told her that Barbara was a very good person. Mrs. Glass told Barbara that she had just one child and asked for help. She stayed one night, then left Malka with Barbara and went to join her husband who was already in a forced labor camp.
- 1.15** Barbara, who was 22 at the time, told people that Malka was her cousin. Malka liked Barbara’s mother, Janina, very much.
- 1.27** Germans were looking for Jews at that time. Malka stayed with Barbara and her mother for about six months.
- 1.42** One day, another Jewish woman, Sophia Price, came to ask for help. She was the daughter of a drugstore owner from a large city. Since people knew Sophia, Barbara knew it was not safe, so she bought her a train ticket to go to another bigger city.
- 1.55** Later, neighbors suspected that Malka was Jewish.
- 1.63** Next, an older woman, a pediatrician named Dr. Olga Lilion, came to ask for help. She didn’t look Polish, so her appearance made her dangerous. She was from Lwow (Lviv), and Barbara’s sister knew her. Barbara told the director of her school that she had a friend who needed a job. She did not tell the director that Olga was Jewish. Olga stayed at the school until the end of the war, working as a dishwasher and doing other kitchen chores.
- 1.86** The school director’s niece was from the same town and told the director that Olga was a Jew. The director had a big heart and told the niece not to mention it again. Later he asked Barbara and she admitted that it was true. The director spoke German (he was from western Poland) and took responsibility for his people, protecting them from the Germans. Olga was the doctor to the director’s children. As of the time of the interview in 1984, Dr. Lilion was still working at the school, feeling that this was her duty. The director’s name was Polonsky(?).
- 23.4** Many neighbors tried to discourage Barbara from helping Jews.

- 23.9** One day a girl of about twenty came with her brother for help. Their parents were dead. The brother was Stefan Jacobchek, age 14 or 15. The girl left, and Stefan started attending the school as a boarder. There he became Catholic and survived the war. When he finished school, Barbara helped him find a job. She doesn't know whether the sister survived.
- 29.0** It was getting dangerous for Barbara's mother to stay with her because they were afraid that someone might tell the Germans about Barbara's assistance to Jews. Barbara's younger sister lived in Lwow, so they went there with Malka.
- 30.4** Żegota was an organization sponsored by the Polish government in exile in London to help Jews. They printed false documents and delivered medicine, food and money to Jews in hiding. Barbara joined this underground organization. Because this was so dangerous, they decided to move Malka to a convent. The convent had an orphanage, and they already had many Jewish children staying there. They accepted Malka.
- 34.3** Barbara worked with the underground organization delivering papers and preparing documents. She brought papers for Olga's sister and her husband (Eva and Shimick) to leave the camp, but they didn't accept help, and stayed. They later died.

## Side B

- 0 – 1.1** Barbara was often afraid for her life. The underground sent her to the town of Stanislawow, one hour from Lwow by train. She went to a house where a Jewish woman was hiding to deliver papers and a small package. The woman came from her hiding place, started crying, and asked Barbara to take her from that place. Barbara was scared. She was not allowed to move people, but finally agreed to take the woman with her. They went on a train in separate compartments. One hour later, the train stopped and a few Germans got on, began searching the compartments, and took the woman off the train. A few minutes later, Barbara heard shots. When she returned, she was reprimanded for what she had done.
- 5.0** Barbara's sister Jalina and her future brother-in-law were also in the underground. Along with two other members, a brother and sister named Maria and George Fiderel, they lived together in a large apartment. Barbara didn't know the names of any other members, since it was much better not to give names.
- Barbara's mother was scared, but felt that Barbara should do her duty. Her mother was her biggest influence growing up. She had had a hard life, working from a young age as a dressmaker to keep her family together and raise her siblings. After she married, they escaped briefly to Russia so that her husband could avoid military service, and Barbara was born there.
- 11.7** Barbara was a courier between Lwow and Warsaw, carrying documents and money. In August or September 1943, the Germans caught her with documents.

They took her to prison in Lublin, where she remained for a month. At around the same time, they arrested 26 underground members. She thought she was to be sent to Treblinka and killed. She told a false story, which the Germans believed. After a month, during which she was beaten, the Germans decided to take her to Lwow to finish her interview.

- 16.4** Her sister had cleaned up the evidence of their work once Barbara was missing. Barbara wanted to keep her family safe, however her camp card had her address. When in prison, her sister left a package for her; this let Barbara know that her sister knew where she was. Friends had seen her at the station with Germans, handcuffed, and followed to see where she was being taken. The underground organization bribed the Germans. Before Christmas, the Germans took Barbara to Ravensbrück instead of killing her.
- 21.0** Barbara remained in Ravensbrück until the end of the war, in May 1945. Of her time there, she remarked that one could not imagine what humans could do to one another.
- 22.4** At the camp, she received one piece of toast per day and a cup of black coffee, lunch and coffee, and vegetable soup for dinner - one bowl, no meat. She slept in barracks. Around one thousand women slept there, with straw for a mattress on wooden beds, with no pillow and sometimes only a small piece of blanket.
- 26.9** Prisoners were in quarantine for one month. Barbara was an “aristocrat” because she worked in the kitchen and got more food. Kitchen workers had a duty to steal food for sick people. They made up stories and hid food in their clothes. This was dangerous; if caught, there would be no food or sleep for 24 to 48 hours. She had one dress, which was blue with stripes, nothing underneath, and one pair of shoes.
- 31.3** Barbara had a friend who worked doing sewing and knitting for the Germans. She snuck Barbara some underwear.
- 32.0** Jews and non-Jews were together in the camp. It was international; people were there from different countries. Jews wore a Star of David. Polish prisoners were designated with a “P” and their number. Barbara was friendly with Jews at the camp.

Tape 2  
Side A

- 0 - 1.45** Barbara’s best friend was the wife of another doctor, Dr. Meisel, who had discovered the inoculation for typhus. The wife was also a doctor. They were together at the prison in Lwow. One guard, who was from Hungary and not as bad as the others, confirmed that the doctors were there at the prison. Barbara’s sister had sent her a package with medicine, underwear, etc. (this was allowed). Barbara left the package behind the toilet and told the guard to tell the woman who

cleaned the floor that she had left it for her. That is how she found out that the doctor and his wife were in the jail.

**1.45 - 2.30** The Germans took care of the doctor because they needed him to make the typhus inoculation. She did not know if the woman was also at Ravensbrück because there were so many people there. After the war, she met them again in Krakow.

**2.30 - 4** At liberation, people divided into groups based on the city to which they were going. The Germans wanted to destroy the concentration camps because they were afraid of the Russians.

There were a lot of really sick people in the concentration camp; so sick, they couldn't move or talk. A few of her friends volunteered to stay with the sick people and not to leave with the rest.

**4 - 6.30** The guards were scared of the Russians so they walked west on an aimless path in order to avoid them. Traveling by foot, they walked day and night until May 3, with no food. On a rainy night they stopped in Parchim, not far from Hamburg.

**9.30 – 11.30** Americans did not understand how dangerous the Germans were. Initially, Germans told the Americans that they were escorting dangerous political prisoners. Then several of the prisoners told the Americans who they really were. The Americans took control and took the former prisoners to two big schools to rest.

It was dangerous. They were all very hungry and they did not know how to control the quantity they ate. Now that they were able to eat, some people overate and died.

At one point, Barbara asked the Americans what to do, and they said she could do whatever she wanted, because she was a free woman. This was hard to understand.

**11.30** Barbara had not heard anything from her family, so she joined a group that went back to Poland. Walking back to her home took her past Ravensbrück again. She walked during the day, and hid at night in vacant houses. The soldiers were animals around women.

**13 – 14** Sometimes they went in a coal train or a truck, otherwise they walked. The journey lasted for about a month. When Barbara arrived home, she found her mother, her aunt and uncle. They spent a week talking.

**14 – 15.45** After the war, she looked for a job. She needed to support her mother and sister. There was a lot of empty space in western Poland. She went there with friends and worked for a while and gardened.

**15.45 – 19** Barbara relates that Malka's mother had ended up in Auschwitz and had escaped death twice. Auschwitz was liberated before Ravensbrück. So Malka's mother went to look for her daughter. Her husband had been killed.

Malka's mother went to Barbara's mother to ask where Malka was. She then found Malka at the convent and decided to take her to Canada where her husband had extended family. They traveled from one displaced persons camp to the next for two years before reaching Canada.

**19 – 21.30** Barbara and Malka kept in touch writing letters. Eventually, Malka moved to Toronto and invited Barbara to come to visit. At that time, only family members went to Canada. Barbara told her story to the Canadian ambassador, and got approval to visit in 1958. She went on vacation to Canada in March 1959.

**21.30 – 23** Malka and her husband, an Indian Jew educated in England, wanted Barbara to stay in Canada.

Barbara met her husband in Canada. He had moved there in 1947 after service in the Polish army. They live in Montreal.

**23 – 24** Barbara is still in touch with Malka and her mother. Barbara attended the Bar Mitzvah of each of Malka's three children.

**24 – 24.45** Barbara has stayed in touch with some of the others she saved. One is Dr. Olga Lilion, who still lives in Poland. She took care of Barbara's mother and their family for many years.

Barbara's mother died in Poland. Her sister lives there.

**24.45 – 26.15** Barbara does not feel that she is more religious now. She has times when she stops being religious, but she always goes back. She is not devoted to the church, but she is a believer.

She feels normal about everything she did. It was never something special to help another person. "If you see someone jump into a river and you know how to swim, you jump too." You have no time to think about the risk to yourself before you jump.

**26.15 – 27** Nobody talked about the story for many years. She actually felt shame in sharing her story. Many people did not understand or even believe her, especially in Poland.

**30.30 – 31** Barbara told her close friends about her experiences in the Holocaust. Then a movie came out about the Holocaust. People saw this movie on television with so much cruelty in it. They wanted to show stories of good people in Polish society.

**31 – 32.3** Someone told the Jewish Congress in Montreal about Barbara. She had to be interviewed and have firsthand witnesses. Malka agreed to be the witness. Barbara wasn't looking for money or honor. After telling her story, she was given a big honor and asked to come to Israel and plant a tree at Yad Vashem.

### **Side B**

**0 – 2** Barbara brought some things with her to this interview:

- a medal and a diploma of honor from the Knesset
- a document showing she planted a tree in Israel for her mother
- a picture of the tree planting ceremony with Malka's whole family

**2 – 3** There have been articles written about her – one when she went to Israel and one in the Canadian Jewish News, January 3, 1980.

**4.10 – 5** Barbara found out that Sophia Price was in Canada. Barbara wrote her a letter and Sophia rejected connection, saying that she wanted to leave the past in the past and that she did not have money to pay her back. Barbara hadn't asked for anything, but this was the answer she received, so she never contacted her again.