

MERENHOLC, Helena  
Polish Documentation Project  
Polish  
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## SUMMARY

*[Approximately 130 min]*

Helene Merenholc, born on March 15, 1911, is a lifelong resident of Warsaw and talks about her life in a well educated Jewish family, where Polish was her first language. She comments on the occupation of her parents and on her family's high social standing before the war; she introduces her five gifted siblings, who pursued higher education and excelled either in music or science. She remembers the lives of three of her siblings as well as their deaths, which were not directly related to the Second World War. Most of her other family members died in the Ghetto or in the death camps, such as Treblinka. Ms. Merenholc talks about her progressive education and her passion for Polish literature and psychology, and comments on her parents allowing their children to make liberal religious choices. She talks about studying and completing psychology degree before the Second World War; and then working as a counselor with the special needs children, among the best Polish and Jewish doctors in Warsaw. Ms. Merenholc comments on problems related to the closing of centers for children with special needs due to the outbreak of the war. She remembers Centos, an organization which provided care for these children in the Ghetto. She discusses being employed as a social worker in the Ghetto and comments in detail on various forms of aid, such as soup kitchens, learning centers or theatre clubs, provided to the orphaned, handicapped or mentally challenged children. These endeavors were financed by an American organization JOINT as well as well-to-do local Jewish families. She talks of her acquaintance with the internationally renowned doctor—a progressive psychologist and a charismatic children's activist—Janusz Korczak [*real name, Henryk Goldszmit*], who later established orphanages in the ghetto. He was able to inspire children and adults alike. In a final act of heroism, he refused to be pardoned from Treblinka deportation and went to his death accompanying his pupils. Ms. Merenholc dramatically describes his march alongside the children to the Umschlagplatz [*the Ghetto deportation center*]. Ms. Merenholc comments on Adam Czerniaków, the Judenrat leader, who in her opinion was a brave and tragic figure. She describes her life in the ghetto, the sickness and hunger, and comments on the deplorable living conditions – deaths from hunger, and the gradual dehumanization of the Ghetto population driven by survival instincts. After finding employment in the ghetto brush shop [*szop*

*szczotkarzy*], she manages to survive, being passed over during random selections for deportations. She mentions her acquaintance with communist sympathizers: Mordechaj Anielewicz, Marek Edelman and the historian Emanuel Ringelblum. She comments that the majority of the Jews considered escaping from the Ghetto a betrayal of their own people and heritage; Jews leaving the ghetto were mainly assimilated and baptized. Due to the skillful and gradual implementation of terror by the Germans, most Jews did not realize their fate until the end. Ms. Merenholtz understood it only on March 6 *[likely 1942]* when she left the Ghetto to engage in underground activity on the Aryan side. She comments on the life of her remaining family members on the Aryan side, and talks about her work for Żegota *[the Council to Aid Jews]* alongside Antek *[real name, Icchak]* Cukierman. She gives detailed account of her underground work related to saving the Ghetto survivors and talks about her encounters with szmalcownicy *[mercenary collaborators]*. She remembers that part of the Polish population had negative attitude towards the Ghetto uprising. They were happy to be rid of the Jews and see the Ghetto burn. Ms. Merenholtz briefly mentions her deportation to the camp in Pruszków *[a temporary relocation camp for the citizens of Warsaw]* and talks about her work in Poland after the war. Because of her haunting wartime memories, she refused to follow her profession, instead she devoted herself to work in the Centralny Komitet Żydowski *[a Polish organization involved in providing aid to the Holocaust survivors]*; because of conflicts with the socialist management she later terminated her employment and subsequently worked for the radio and the theatre.

*[Prepared by Agnieszka McClure on 08/18/2010; the restrictions are not known]*