

## **Summary of Oral History: Oral History Interview with Pola Nirenska**

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**This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer**

### **Summary**

Pola Nirenska was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1910. Nirenska was the youngest of one brother and two sisters. Her father owned a tie factory, and the family was well off. Her father also played the violin. Her sisters married and divorced.

From a young age Nirenska wanted to become a dancer, though her parents opposed the idea. She used to compose and practice dance in her large kitchen. She studied religion and philosophy in high school.

After threatening to jump out a window, her parents finally agreed to let her take lessons. At 17 and a half she left home and went to Dresden. Attending the Wigman school. It was difficult at first since she did not know German. Her studies with Tina Flade.

Nirenska said that she lacked discipline and refused to do anything that she did not feel was true to her style. At one point, she went to Munich to do percussion. She toured Germany and the United States, where, she said, she became a star. When she returned to Germany Hitler was in power. She discusses what she learned from Mary Wigman, including space and discusses her love of diagonals (part 1, timestamp 00:27:59).

Her teacher had a large picture of Hitler which apparently disturbed Nirenska and the other Jewish students. Nirenska ended up living with a family whose two brothers were Nazis, but they assured her that the Nazis were only opposed to German Jews. Around this time (1933 or 1934) her parents left Poland for Palestine with her brother. Her two sisters stayed behind, presumably with their spouses, and were killed during the Holocaust. Nirenska didn't say when or how.

In 1936 or 1937 Nirenska traveled with a dance troupe to Italy and Austria. At the recommendation of friends, she decided to leave Austria just before the Anschluss and went to England (1938) and, she said, stayed for 16 or 17 years. Nirenska continued to dance and teach with famous people. She discusses the people she knew who died during the war.

Once in the United States Nirenska continued to dance and teach in various parts of the country. It took her several years, however, before she made enough money to live comfortably. She eventually gained citizenship and married. Again, she mentioned the various famous people she studied or performed with.

Nirenska never returned to Poland. She referred to a breakdown she had and many others over the years, but she did not want to talk about it. She ended the interview by saying that her parents asked for forgiveness for opposing her childhood desire to become a dancer.