

Sara Shur Lamdanskaia, interviewed 17 December 1995

Family

Sara b. 1911 in Tel'shai, Lithuania (Tel'shi in Russian, Telschi in German, Telsze in Polish)

Father: Leibe [no more name given]: a timber and grain merchant in Tel'shai

Mother: Hannah neé Broide, born in Lithuanian village of Alikshai

Sara had 2 sisters: Rakhil (Rachel) b. 1906 and Adasa (?) b. 1909 and a brother [no name given] b. 1913

Paternal grandfather had 3 sons, 1 daughter [no names given]

Sara's husband [no name given] and daughter Lilia??

A cousin, a printer and a baker, lived in Berlin; fled to Vilkavishkis, Lithuania [not clear when]

Sara mentions an uncle who lived across the street in Tel'shai

Family lived near Lake Mastis

Prewar life

Sara went to Jewish school and Jewish gymnasium in Tel'shai, then in 1927 went to university in Kaunas (Kovno)

German Yeshiva sent graduates to teach at Sara's gymnasium; Sara learned German

Describes Jewish community and good relations between Jews and Lithuanians

Isolated incidents of anti-Semitism; husband beaten up once; Sara thinks that Lithuanians envied Jews

Before war Sara and husband lived in Kaunas; Sara was an accountant

Just before war husband transferred from Kaunas to Vil'nius (Vilno) to work as chief engineer in a design bureau

War years

Germans reached Kaunas on 25 June 1941

Sara prepared for evacuation but no evacuation; instead Jews forced to live in a ghetto

Most Lithuanians turned on their fellow neighbors and aided the Germans; stole Jewish possessions

Describes conditions in ghetto; wore yellow star; saw killings from window

Head of Kaunas ghetto Judenrat was a Dr. Elkes; Sara also mentions a Margolis

Describes periodic Aktion: Jews rounded up, told they were being sent to work, taken to Ninth Fort [a part of the Kaunas Fort] and shot

Describes childrens' Aktion when mothers and children shot

During one, Sara hid in the attic of nearby barracks along with 30 children, including her daughter; a Lithuanian family agreed to take her daughter ("saved a Jewish girl")

Describes liquidation of Kaunas ghetto; Sara dates it as July 13, 1943 [but 1944?]

Describes how she hid, and a German discovered her but did not kill her ("saved" her); told her she could work as a seamstress

Sara sent to Stutthof concentration camp; describes journey on train and describes camp

Describes a Selection during which another SS officer “saved” her by directing her away from the line of prisoners to be killed and then did not stop her when she ran away

Lithuanian and Ukrainian guards were very cruel

Transferred to Malken camp

[Perhaps describes “death marches” but it is not clear; those who could not walk were shot]

Fate of sister Rakhil (Rachel): She was a teacher in Tel’shai and her husband [no name] was a shoemaker; he was killed; before the war a family by the name of Chinchikas (?) had befriended Rakhil; after German invasion, Rakhil and her baby went to hide with the Chinchikas family in their village; however a Gestapo man saw Rakhil and killed her and the baby [It is not clear from Sara’s story whether Chinchikas betrayed Rakhil.] Sara learned about what happened to Rakhil after the war from Edwiga Yanovskas (??), the maid of the Chinchikas family

Postwar

Describes liberation; she is among German refugees

Russians suspicious of Jewish survivors; thought they must have collaborated with Germans; no one helped Jewish survivors

Husband had been in Russia during war and returned to Vilnius; later killed in an automobile accident in Moscow

Sara reunited with daughter

Sara’s brother and sister (Adasa?) and their children went to Israel

Describes postwar life, trials, imprisonment of Lithuanians; fear in Soviet Lithuania of communicating with outside world

Sara worked at the government publishing office, 1951-1973

Daughter went to Australia and Sara joined her; now lives in Montefiore community

Sara suggests what saved her:

1) intelligence, being able to orient herself quickly; 2) bravery; 3) luck, saved twice [maybe 3 times?] by Germans

Pictures at end of interview

#1 Sara in 1927

#2 Older sister Rakhil (Rachel) holding her baby

#3 Lithuanian woman who saved Sara’s daughter Lilia?; woman has no name except “Mamita,” which is mother in Lithuanian

#4 A Lithuanian woman who telegrammed Sara that her daughter was alive

#5 Daughter [and interviewer? Not clear] in Australia

#6 Sara’s grandson Leland, a Ph.D. student in U.S.

#7 Sara’s granddaughter Rita and her children Masha (“Marita”), Igor and Richard

#8 A Soviet medal given to Sara after her husband’s death

#9 A certificate, in Lithuanian, on the occasion of her 60th birthday

Summary by: Joseph Bradley, November 16, 2018