

## **Oral history interview with Helena S. Jacobs**

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Interview date: 05. 12. 1995

Interviewer: Geri Kras

### **Summary**

Helena S. Jacobs, born in 1931 in Kalisz, Poland 1931, in a middle class family, was an only child with mother (Ginya) and father (Hersh Storch/Sztorch), father's family emigrated from Poland to France, father worked in a Polish printing firm, because he was the only Jewish worker he was thrown out of firm around 1936 or 1937, moved to Brest, mother was a kindergarten teacher in a Jewish school, parents were also amateur actors in Yiddish theaters, spoke Yiddish at home and Polish, did not learn Hebrew, father was a prominent leader in the Bund political party, Helena was not entirely sure why the Germans and Russians invaded the area at the time, when the Germans arrived, Hersh ran away and returned when the Russians arrived, like "a big game" to see the Russians and the tanks, father was arrested at work in October 1939 (printing firm), Helena never saw him again, Hersh was beaten and tortured in a Russian-run prison, on April 13, 1940 at 2:00am Helena and Ginya were told to "evacuate to somewhere in Russia," two Russian soldiers helped them pack, Ginya was 33-years-old, trucks arrived at 5:00am, 60 people loaded into one carriage, all the families of the individuals who were arrested, did not stop at any major stations, prohibited from leaving the train for 6 weeks, told that their families would be waiting for them at the final destination, arrived in Siberia/Kazakhstan and remained there for 6 years, grew accustomed to the circumstances, food was grown in the neighboring fields, Helena and Ginya sold clothing to the Russian "peasants" who each had their own land and a cow for produce, milk, and cheese, lived with the peasants in their houses (10-12 people per house), cow manure collected during winter, dried and formed into bricks to be used for fuel/heating/cement, teachers came from Moscow and Leningrad, forced to learn Russian constitution, rationed amounts of commodities like sugar, around 1941 they started receiving parcels from the USA with safety pins, powdered milk, they would trade these items for other items like eggs, at first neighboring children were suspicious of the foreigners, detainees were prohibited from leaving the village, not made aware of current events, Helena was prohibited from competing in a district competition (outside of the village) despite having won the opportunity to do so, the return to Poland was 4 weeks long, the authorities informed them they would be traveling by truck then by train, Helena describes the arrival in Poland as shocking and the worst experience when she discovered no one was left in her hometown, Helena and Ginya went to France, shared a flat with a family called the Rosenbergs, the Rosenbergs had a brother in Australia, Helena and Ginya joined the Rosenberg family when they moved to Australia, Ginya married again, Helena got married before traveling to Melbourne, worked in a Jewish firm, worked in a knitting factory and then as a shop assistant before developing her own shop, lost her first child in 1951, two sons were born in 1965 and 1967 (Harry and Neil), third son (David) by her second husband