

Oral History: Lola Schindler, December 20, 1998

Lola Schindler, born in Novisanch*, Poland (no date given), to wealthy parents, Joachim and Sally Reicher (née Schnitzer*), with three brothers, describes: a very happy childhood; being much loved; a strictly observant family but her mother being very progressive and insisting on the children being given every educational opportunity; speaking German at home; belonging to a Zionist organization; being subjected to intense anti-Semitism; being familiar with Hitler's rise to power; in 1935, marrying Yehuda Schindler, a banker from Turka* / Turkanastrim*; giving birth to a girl in December 1935; not being aware of the danger of German expansionism until the outset of the war; her family planning to flee to Romania but being dissuaded by the idea that the Russians, not the Germans, were a threat to them; her family seeking refuge in Turka; finding themselves in the Russian zone and the Russians confiscating the family's considerable possessions, including her husband's bank; fearing they would be sent to Siberia; leaving Turka for Lvov, Ukraine, and sharing an apartment; not getting news in Lvov of events in German-occupied Poland; being detained by Ukrainian militia, which wanted to deport the family to Russia but then allowed them to return to Lvov; calling their return to Lvov the biggest mistake, because had they gone to Russia, much subsequent "hell" would have been avoided; the German invasion of Lvov in 1941; seizure of Lvov men amid a pogrom; being protected by a neighbor as SS went house to house looking for Jews; hearing that groups of Jews were being taken to the outskirts of Lvov and shot; creation of a ghetto in Lvov; fleeing again to Turka, where they were helped generously by a former employee of her husband's bank until they were able to find other accommodations; planning to flee to Hungary and hiring smugglers; Lola, her child, and her mother going first and being apprehended; being returned to Turka; fleeing across the Hungarian border using a harrowing chained route; encountering a good friend of her husband's, who promised to get them to Budapest; arriving in Budapest; connecting with a brother; being introduced to a high-level Communist Party official, who helped them; (recounts) some earlier incidents of narrowly avoiding arrest; searching for her husband and other family members in Budapest; after several attempts, finding her husband and one brother, her father and another brother having been arrested; Lola, her daughter, and her mother being arrested near the Hungarian-Polish border and taken to a transit camp, where her identity was compromised by a Jewish collaborator and the whereabouts of her mother and others also being exposed; being transported by train to the Polish border; helping two young people escape from the train; men and women being separated and then taken to a labor camp in the village of Ritche* (in Hungary, winter of 1943, but date and further location information uncertain); Lola and her mother and daughter posing as gentiles; surrendering her daughter, supposedly to be taken among children to Budapest; finding out later that the daughter was taken to a camp in Budapest where the child's father also was being held; the child being taken in by the president of the Jewish community in Budapest, a Dr. Polgar*, to a villa for children; her mother being arrested for not going to work, then being released after Lola appealed to the camp commandant; performing in the camp with a music group; striving to maintain the fiction of their gentile identities; being released from the camp, returning to Budapest and reuniting with her daughter at the children's villa; being reunited with her husband, brother, and mother, and the five of them being moved under Polish auspices (still under false papers) to a series of villages; the situation changing drastically when German

administration of Hungary became German occupation; fearing that they would be denounced by fellow Poles and their false identities revealed; returning to Budapest and finding an apartment, which was the “turning point” in the family’s survival; being reunited with her father but having to hide him because he did not have false papers; being caught in the crossfire between Soviet and German forces; being relieved when the Soviets arrived; being told by a friend about a transport to Switzerland; becoming suspicious and not joining the transport only to find out later that it was diverted to Belsen; traveling to Bucharest in hope of transiting to Israel; the family deciding to go to Prague; preparing to immigrate to Australia, but her daughter becoming ill and hospitalized for two months; arriving in Australia in 1948 but having difficulty finding work; again considering moving to Israel but deciding to remain in Australia, which she came to love.

*As heard/transliterated