

## **RG-50.407.0205**

### **Summary**

Maria (Marisha) Kohn was born October 28, 1924 in Zgierz, Poland. Her parents were Cecilia and Jacob. An only child, she attended Christian schools as a child and a public high school. Maria felt that her parents hoped for her to assimilate into Polish culture, making her feel that she was always "on the fence" between the two cultures. She often heard anti-Semitic remarks and experienced periodic direct discrimination.

Her father considered joining his sister in Paris before the war started, but decided against it. Shortly after the war started, they were given short notice to pack rucksacks and leave the town, going to stay with a friend of her mother in Aleksandrów Łódzki; her father was away on travel. Though planning to join her mother's parents in Warsaw, they went to Łódz instead, where they entered the ghetto when it was set up in 1940. Her father had privileges as a director of a factory making raincoats, but an infraction cost him his position causing their life to turn much harder in 1942. Her childhood camp friend, Jacob Skopinski, accepted a labor position in Poznan where his wages would be sent back, half to his mother, half to Maria's mother; he died shortly upon arrival.

As the ghetto consolidated, forcing their relocation, her mother chose to divorce her father; the relationship had long turned bad and, he had been stealing from them. Maria and her mother stayed with a family friend for a short while, but they were pilfered from there as well. Her father died from an illness in the winter. She describes various aspects of her life and experiences in the ghetto.

Maria and her mother were eventually deported to Auschwitz, whereupon Dr. Mengele conducted the separation of the incoming prisoners; she was not assigned a number her mother was separated. Only her cousin, Renia Szerakowska, remained with her.

They were both transferred to Halbstadt Concentration Camp in September 1944. The machine shop work was hard, which, combined with emotional oppression led her intentionally to injure her hand in the machine. She met and befriended a young, dying woman, Hannetchka Kaufmann. Marisa relates a number of hardships she experienced.

Her camp was liberated by Russians troops ("boys on bicycles"). They provided tinned pork, but it sickened many in the camp either by the effects of malnutrition or due to spoiling. Maria began to work in a local Catholic hospital. After a few weeks, she decided to join a male childhood acquaintance, Julius, and a few others to go to Russia for an education, but, absent papers, were denied entry. They returned briefly to Łódz, but while there she and Julius married. They went on to Munich, where he studied pharmacy and she worked in a hospital. In June, 1947, they prepared to go to Australia. She was given \$100 for the voyage by a virtual stranger, and, after a long search, in the 1970's Maria was able to find and thank her.