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Summary

Irene Hall, born on November 4, 1925 in Warsaw, Poland, an only child. Father, a neurologist, Yakov Mackiewicz (?), born 1887. He was trained at Moscow University and in Paris and London. He spent WWI in the Russian army. Mother, Cecilia, born 1888, married 1912, taught languages. Maternal grandparents were merchants. She had an uncle who changed his name to Kristof(?) because he was ashamed of being Jewish, although in later life he collected Judaica which Irene inherited and gave to a museum. She went to a Jewish kindergarten and then to a private girls' school after being rejected by a Polish state school for being Jewish. There were 7 Jewish girls in her class of 22. Jews had to enter through the servants' entrance. Non-Jewish students paid less in tuition than the Jews. By 1938, 3 of the Jewish students converted and were ostracized by the remaining Jewish girls. She had no Jewish religious instruction as a child. Family lived near the Jewish quarter so traditional Jews could come to the father's office. Some Polish patients came until they found out he was Jewish and then left the practice. Father a member of the Polish Socialist Party. Very political family. They had a holiday home in Konstantin(?). By 1939, they were aware of imminent war as Polish Jews in Germany had been sent back to Poland. In 1938, Poland banned Jewish ritual slaughter. Relatives in Chicago urged them to leave Poland.

When war broke out, they were at their summer home, not in Warsaw. After returning to Warsaw, they evacuated on 9/7/39 to Minsk. Which was under Russian rule. Father decided to go to his birthplace, Wolkowysk (now Vawkavysk, Belarus), where they stayed 6 months with relatives. Irene went to a Russian state school. Father became head of a local hospital and wanted to become a Russian citizen. At some point, the family was taken by train to a labor camp. Father became a lumberjack and mother sawed wood for 2 months. Father promoted to medical orderly, but was denounced as a capitalist until he obtained proof of education at Moscow University. and was accepted as a doctor. Irene put in a brigade to collect rocks and moss, but became ill and was bedridden for 2 months. They lived with a middle-aged Russian couple. Father promoted to head of regional hospital. When Germany attacked Russia in 1941, classmates blamed her, as a Jew, for the war. In February 1942, they moved to Tashkent by train which took 6 weeks. They could not stay because there were too many refugees. After traveling around for 3 months, father went to Tehran, Iran and family followed in August 1942. No antisemitism in Tehran and she went to synagogue for the first time. She says Tehran was a "pleasant time" after living in Russia. They heard about the Warsaw Ghetto through smuggled out letters. In November 1943 they left for Palestine, settling in Jerusalem, living with cousins. She enrolled at Hebrew University. and worked in the Polish consulate. She felt like "a gypsy," having moved from place to place. After liberation, she learned that much of family and friends had died. She met her husband, a chemist from Krakow, who had come to Tel Aviv in 1939. He was in the British Army when they met. Married 1947. Parents also in Israel.

In 1949, they immigrated to Australia where she worked in a clothing factory, and then for International Harvester and then an ad agency. Later they started a clothing business which she stayed in for 14 years. She has 2 sons—Steven and Jeff, and 4 grandchildren. She took Steven and 2 grandchildren to Poland and became “very emotional” after visiting Warsaw Ghetto site and Auschwitz. Parents came to Australia to live at some point. When they lived in Bentley, it was a Jewish area like a “shtetl.” Irene found that school parents were unfriendly toward her and children were called “filthy Jews” when they moved to E. Brighton. Son Steven “very Jewish” and his wife is the cantor in their synagogue. One grandson also very interested in the Holocaust. She says the Melbourne Jewish community because it is a “Holocaust community.” She always identifies as Polish/Jewish.