

RG-50.407.0258

Oral History: Sophie Prysten, February 5, 1997

Summary

Sophie Prysten (née Szlosberg), born on December 6, 1918 in Warsaw, Poland to Hannah [née Feigenbaum] and Maksymilian Szlosberg, describes: having a sister, Helen; attending a Jewish private school; her sister marrying and emigrating to Palestine; she and her mother joining her sister in Tel Aviv, but returning to Poland upon the illness, then death, of her mother; her father, an accountant, remarrying; wanting to return to Palestine but by then (1939) being trapped in Poland; having a happy childhood and an observant, but not orthodox, religious life; her extended family dying in the camps and she being left alone; living in a Jewish area of Warsaw; having little contact outside the Jewish community; enjoying work as a secretary in a Jewish-owned factory until Germans took over the factory and removed Jews; having friends who were sent to Ravensbrück and died there; being informed that her father had been taken to the Umschlagplatz [departure point for Treblinka] and trying, unsuccessfully, to find him and his wife; brutal behavior of both Germans and Poles; witnessing actions and roundups; moving in with a friend in an area that became enclosed by the ghetto; life in the ghetto and functioning of the Judenrat; starvation and suffering in the ghetto; initially there not being resistance in the ghetto and people not believing reports of death camps; learning to live with fear; escaping the ghetto in 1942 with the help of her future husband, Marczak [ph], who was living on the Aryan side; feeling very lucky to escape prior to the uprising; from outside, witnessing fire and hearing screams during the uprising; experiencing the horrible conditions and misery in the Umschlagplatz when she tried to find her father; being hidden in several places on the Aryan side, some for pay and some for compassionate reasons; becoming accustomed to living in constant fear and danger; benefiting from not appearing Jewish but fearing Poles would betray her; being pregnant and giving birth to a son in Lodz in March 1945 as the Russians captured Warsaw; living in Lodz among gentiles with her second husband, a gentile, until 1958; immigrating to Australia; having grandchildren; feeling strengthened by her survival; wanting her successors to recall the difficulties she faced and prevent such events in the future. Shows photos.