

MYRIAM CARMI¹
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She starts the interview by telling about the city she was born at. The name was Minsk Mazowiecki in Poland. It was a medium-sized city and had about 6000 Jews living there at the time.

They had all sorts of classes among the Jews: high class, middle class and there also poor people. They lived a good life, everyone knew each other. The houses had yards where all the neighbors met.

They had schools there. The Jewish kids went to the polish school "pebesht" until the Jewish school "tarboot" opened. All the parents wanted to move their kids to that school but after the first year they started charging money for it and they took their kids back to the polish school. She tells how when she was in the first grade there were 30 students with her and the next years the numbers decreased.

She tells about the youth movements they had there and naming a few like "beitar", "the communists" and "ha-noar ha-tzioni" whom she was took part in' claiming that the parents were happy the kids are busy in those movements instead of being in the streets.

Until 1936 when there was a pogrom in the neighborhood. She said there was always antisemitism in the air but they never felt it until that day. A few Jews were killed and a few ran away to Warsaw. A week after came the police from Warsaw to calm down the situation and the Jews came back.

They lived in fear. Those who had money left to Israel but they were scared because they knew there isn't much business to do in Israel in those days.

She then name a few of the rich families in the Jewish community like: weissbrot, mikanovski, Rosenberg, korman. She said its not about the money but more about the status of the family.

Her family was considered middle class.

¹ Myriam Carmi was born as Myriam Furmanski in 1923. (taken from and interview made with her. Can be found on www.sztehl.org.pl where she is listed as Miriam Carmi)

The ghetto started in 1939. On the evening of rosh hashana. The Germans arrived from the city of Kaluszyn and fired at Minsk. The street her family lived on was called "Siennicka" and was close to the road the Germans came from so it was burned almost completely. The Jews came back the next day. Those who still had a house went back to it and those that their house burnt stayed with other families. Myriam's family's house was burnt so they lived with the family of her friend, the Friedmans.

The Friedmans had a small house with 2 bedrooms, they had 4 girls and Myriam's family had 8 people in it- her parents, herself and her five siblings.

Her father left everyday to fix their house. He took a professional to help him and his son Yosef who was 3 years older than Myriam. After 6 months they returned to their house and they were the only family living in "Siennicka" street.

In 1940 the Germans came to town and formed the Judenrat. They grabbed men in the street and forced them to take part in it. They had to do everything the Germans asked them to and catch Jewish men in the streets and send them to work. A lot of them paid money to get out of the Judenrat as everyone knew everyone so they felt ashamed to pick out other Jews. But some stayed, including a guy named Kramash who was known in the city and a guy name Lipchinski who was the commander of the Jewish police.

The police was good with the Jews and used to speak loud when they arrived to a house so that the young men will hear them and have time to run and hide.

Her brother was one of those who got caught in the street and he was sent to a work camp close to Russia, probably by the city of Lublin. After 6 months 2 men were killed in the work camp and the rest came back. They were treated as heroes for surviving and making it back.

After that came the Germans and started to take out all the Jews from streets like "Warsawska" and started building the ghetto in the streets "Siennicka" and "Nagechna". Half belonged to the Jews and have to the polish people. They paid the Judenrat to stop

building the ghetto and that how they had an open ghetto. But the police surrounded it and Jews could not leave and others couldn't go in.

They men that came back from the work camp we enlisted to the police.

It was hard, a lot of poverty, many families had to take other families into their homes and from all the crowded areas started the type disease.

They did not have a hospital but the Germans let them form one in the neighborhood.

People were scared to go there because they knew that if they had the type disease and went to the hospital they wont come back. They didn't have a doctor, only one guy who was like a doctor who gave the sick people shots without the Germans knowing they have them.

She then tells how she used to go to Warsaw with chickens they slaughtered in a kosher way in Minsk as it was forbidden in Warsaw by that time and sell it so that the family could have money. They sold other things that weren't allowed for Jews in Warsaw to have like salt.

Anyone who could sneak out of the ghetto to do that did so.

One day they heard about a train that stands in the train station and voices coming out of the wagons. The Judenrat went to check and found out those were Jews from the town of "kalish" back then Treblinka was still being built so they did not have where to kill all of the people so they just left them in the wagons. The Judenrat fixed it so that they let the people go and they joined the other families in the ghetto. Myriam's family hosted the kava family.

And so they lived in fear and every night nothing happened they were happy.

Until 1942. Around rosh hashana in September the Germans surrounded the ghetto.

The Jews already heard about Treblinka but refused to believe it and thought the Judenrat was good to them so they will not let it happen.

But they couldn't help. The Germans gathered all the Jews in the city market and told them that they are being sent to work. The Jews already heard about transfers from Warsaw to Treblinka so people tried to run and hide.

Myriam's family lived in the far side of the ghetto, close to the polish side. They had a hiding spot under the house where the stored potatoes. Her dad, with her older brother and younger brother named Reuven, went to work while she hid in the house with her mother and other siblings for 8 days. After 8 days her dad came back and took the family to the kupernik².

While they were in the kupernik Myriam was taken to work. Every day came groups of Germans and took Jews to work sites.

She used to go with a woman named Berger and as they were going came a polish lady who gave Berger a piece of bread. That was her sign that the two little baby girls she left with the polish lady are still alive and ok. Those girls live in Canada on the day this interview was conducted.

After work they go back to the kupernik where a few women were left to cook for the workers when they return. Myriam's mother was one of them.

She had a 6 year old brother and 2 sister age 9 and 12 left there. The kids knew that when the Germans arrive they have to run and hide.

There was a lot of chaos and most people were alone or most families lost a member or a few even.

Myriam's family was still whole. People used to say that Paltiel (her father) was a lucky man to have his whole family still together and alive.

One summer evening they came back from work and it was very hot. The well in the yard they used for water to wash themselves was almost dry so her brother took a bucket and went outside of the kupernik to bring water. A German that passed by saw him. He shot him dead and kept going. They heard a gunshot and ran outside where

² Kupernik was a building on siennicka street that used to be a school. The Germans turned the 3 floor high building into a work camp for Jews. (taken from the yad vashem information center www.yadvashem.com)

they saw her dead brother laying. They brought him in and everyone started crying. Her mother didn't cry but raised her hands in the air and said to god that if everyone needs to sacrifice something she did to and maybe now it can stop. They asked a polish man to take the body to the cemetery and paid him a lot of money but they never knew if he really took it there or not.

She doesn't remember the exact day that incident happened but she remembers it was before yum kippur because she remembers her brother said he will fast on yum kippur but now he didn't have to do it.

After yum kippur the Germans did a transport from Warsaw to Treblinka and saw they have one empty wagon so they can load people from Minsk to it. They came to the kupernik and went to the women who worked the kitchen. The women said they have papers to prove they are allowed to stay but the Germans said they heard there are people without papers and either they give them up or they are all going.

Myriam heard at her workplace that her mother was taken, she wanted to go back to the train but knew she had young siblings she will have to take care of now. Her friend Regina Grinshpan, who was her brother's wife, was there with her and told her to stay and work. Regina lives in Costa Rica on the day the interview was conducted.

They came home and everyone was crying. Her father was mourning for almost 3 days. And then again life went back and continued.

Her brother was a good electrician. They took him to a work camp that had Russian prisoners. The Russians planned to escape and because they liked her brother they invited him to join them.

On December 24th it was a polish holiday. The Germans loved doing something to Jews on holidays and came in to the kupernik.

Myriam left for Warsaw to work on the 15th, 9 days before.

The Germans took out 218 Jews from the camp, took them to the cemetery and made them dig a hole. After that they shot all of them. The polish man who took her and Regina to Warsaw to stay with his brother saw it and went to Warsaw to tell her. He knocked on the door in a way they agreed on in advance because otherwise they wont open, and instead of saying hello he told her she doesn't have a father anymore and told her how it happened.

Again she wanted to go back to help her siblings but she got a letter from her brother that told her not to go back to Minsk because the angel of death is there. He said he will go back and will take their siblings out of the kupernik and find places for them to stay. In the meantime she and Regina had to leave the place they stayed at on brodnoska street in Warsaw because the Germans heard there are Jews there.

She tells how she and Regina used to lay at night in bed and look at the walls thinking that if the Germans will come to kill them they at least be in bed.

Then she tells how on the next day they went to an old polish lady that let Jews stay with her. The lady said she is scared but had a daughter who us a nun and she can ask her if the convent can take them. The girls said they have a lot of property back in Minsk and they will sign it all to the convent if they take them.

The nun asked the minister and told him that she knows them and that one of them (Myriam) was there with her once and even tasted the holy water so she is half Christian already. He told her that he can take that girl but she needs to get rid of the other girl. The nun told that to the girls but the refused to be separated.

They left the old lady and went out to the street right when a polish man passed by. He took them in and they paid him a lot of money. But the next morning his wife told them she is scared and they have to leave. They asked for their money back but she spent it all during the night and off course they cant go to the police.

They stood outside where the husband saw them and they told him what happened with his wife. They told him they know of another woman on this street that takes Jews in but they don't have anymore money because he and his wife took all they had and they have no more family left so no one to send them more money. He offered to go

speak to the lady and she agreed to take them. She had a daughter. The woman and the daughter were scared but the daughter said they are going to a village the next day so the girls can stay and when they come back they will see what they will do. That's after the girls said they are rich back in Minsk so the woman intrigued by that.

The daughter, named Tushka, told Myriam she looks Christian and acted like a Christian so she will teach her everything about Christianity and give her a job.

Then Myriam remembers how she didn't want to go to Warsaw in the first place but her father said she has to so she can make it to Israel. He felt bad for not selling the house so they will have money to go to Israel before the war started.

The second time the polish man came to her he told both girls they have no more family left because the Germans burnt the kupernik. Myriam had her brother there who said he will go to help their younger siblings and Regina had both her parents there and now they were both all alone.

They asked him how did it happen and he said the Germans came on January 10th before the morning and poured gasoline on the kupernik with the excuse that they heard the partisans are hiding inside so they have to burn everyone.

She say the gentiles stood and saw it all happening, including the polish guy who came to tell her. He told her how people jumped out of the windows of the kupernik in flames. How one man named Shifman made it out and went to Warsaw and was killed there, how another woman named Miriam survived also and lives in the US on the day this interview was conducted.

Then she tells how she worked as a maid for Christians in Warsaw all this time.

When the Russians freed Minsk Mazowiecki she walked back with Regina, another friend and the mother and daughter they stayed at.

They found 9 more Jews there and were happy to see them but the happiness turned to sadness when they realized what happened.

They were also told not to go on the streets as the polish people still kill Jews there.

She met her husband when he arrived to the city with the partisans. He started working for the police and came every day to ask if new people returned. Her friend told him that she arrived and that's how they met. She said they didn't have a lot of food and he brought her soup whenever he could.