

DONOR: REGINA and MIRIAM FLEISHER  
 INTERVIEWER: SANDRA ENGLISH  
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Tape Footage: Background

1-320 Regina was born in August, 1911 in Telesheu (Dalusha). When the war broke out in 1939 she was living with her husband in Laszczow. They then lived in the ghetto at Blaszkowa, and the working camp of Rushnika. They were liberated in Czakjow by the Red Army.

321-703 Before the war Regina's husband owned a mill. Regina was a housewife. They had a nice home, and were rich.

Regina never knew her father. He died in 1916 during WWI. He had been wealthy and left behind money. His wife looked after Regina and her sister.

Regina's grandmother Baila was particular about who her daughter would marry because her family was wealthy and descended from the Ba'al Shem Tov. Regina's father was a plain laborer. He had been taken to Vienna to join the army, and attended officers' school there. He became a lieutenant, and then a captain during WWI. It was an exception for a Jew to become a lieutenant in the Austrian army. Regina's mother and father met and corresponded. Regina's grandmother disapproved of the romance because the boy was not learned and not from a Rabbinical family. He was lower class. At that time, the amount of education you had and the number of Rabbis in your family were very important. But one day Baila dreamt that if Raisa did not marry this boy it would cost Baila her life. This was just like in the Shalom Aleichem story.

Regina's father was a conscientious objector during the war, so he served as a medic in the Austrian Army. As a medic, he carried the wounded on his shoulders. One time he carried a general to safety and was wounded in the head in the process. When the general heard that he died from his wounds he cried more than he did for his own father. The general visited Regina's mother at the beach every summer after that.

When her husband died, Regina's mother received a pension and the monopoly to sell liquor and cigarettes in the entire province. She bought a lot of land with the money she made.

Regina's grandmother was close to 90 when she was killed at the camps.

In 1934 Regina's sister Fruma left home for Israel. She now lives in Beit Hashita. She was a rebel. When she first announced she was leaving for Israel, her mother said she would kill herself. Fruma said 'go ahead.'

1286 -1429 Regina's mother got along well with the Gentiles. Her mother Raisa had been an alderman. All the women on their side of the family made the living. The men were Rabbis and studied. Regina's father was the exception. The women were strong.

1430 - 1678 Regina first met her husband when he came to her village with a friend who was a cattle buyer. This friend liked Regina but he was already engaged, so he suggested his friend Sam meet her. They arrived on a Sunday, and Regina invited them in. The next week Sam came alone and uninvited. Regina would not invite him in because she had not asked him to come. In Poland at that time, if a girl did not invite in a boy, it meant she did not like him.

Gorodnya (Horadan) was the closest town to Regina's village. It had a population of 18,000, 12,000 of whom were Jews. They were all killed during the war.

In the fall of 1936 Regina and Sam became engaged. They married on January 31, 1937.

1679 - 1784 Regina attended public school in Gorodnya, and Hebrew school in the afternoons. She finished grade seven, then a three year home economics degree at age 15. After that she helped her mother around the house. Her sister Fruma was a bookkeeper. She was 19 when she left for Israel. Regina's mother cried when Regina mentioned she also would like to leave home, so she didn't.

At 17 Regina was engaged to a rich man who was 29 and in the Polish army. But when he told Regina he needed his sister's help in choosing a gift, Regina decided she didn't want him.

Regina's husband was 29 when they married. They moved to Laszczow. Sam was a cattle buyer. He then bought a mill, and used the dowry money to expand it.

## WWII

1785 -2418 In 1939 the mill was confiscated, and Regina's husband was jailed by the Red Army because he was rich. Today the mill is part of a collective farm. When Sam was arrested, Regina's mother came and took her home. Sam escaped from jail, hiding on a roof all day. At night he walked to his mother-in-law's. Regina's grandmother was living with them at the time.

Fruma initially went to Palestine for a short visit. She returned home and made the decision to emigrate to Palestine.

Regina had a few good Gentile friends, one of whom kept her photographs for her during the war.

Life was not too bad under the Red Army. But in 1941, the Germans arrived and the Ukrainians helped them round up the Jews. Regina's mother's land had been confiscated by the Russians, and the family lived on a small parcel of land and had two cows.

In 1941 Regina and her family escaped the ghetto and ran to the Nester River where a Ukrainian man they knew helped them cross for free. He was a fisherman and his wife used to bring fish to their village every week.

They lived in the ghetto for one year, and then were sent to work camps because they had farm experience. In the spring and fall they were taken back to the ghetto.

2419 - 3102 In the ghetto, conditions were very bad. There was no food. Regina's daughter Miriam was born in the ghetto and lived with her parents at the work camp.

#### Miriam's Birth

When Miriam was born the Nazis ordered all small children be killed. Regina therefore made plans to take Miriam to a convent.

In the ghetto every minute was bad. The SS would grab people off the street and kill them. There were actions in the middle of the night.

At the camp they were each given half a pound of bread and some potatoes and barley. They slept on boards, the men and women separate. There was no running water.

A Jewish woman helped deliver Miriam. She was six months old when her parents took her to the work farm. When they returned to the ghetto the Gestapo ordered all children be brought to them. If they found a child in a house, they would kill everyone in that house.

Regina had met a bishop through a priest who was a customer at the mill. She went to him and asked him what she could do with her daughter. He discussed it with the Mother Superior at the convent and she agreed to take Miriam into the convent. Regina had some money to offer them.

Regina left Miriam crying for her momma, and Regina kept hearing her cries. They delivered Miriam during a winter night with the help of a Polish friend who had a sled. The Bishop claimed the baby belonged to the maid of a count who had been sent to Siberia, and gave her the Polish name Maria. Miriam's real name was Shulamis, but she changed it to Miriam when she arrived in Canada. Regina wanted Miriam to be baptized because she thought she would be orphaned, and because she thought the nuns would take better care of a baptized baby. Only the Superior Nun knew the truth about Miriam.

3104 - 3347 Regina visited the convent once pretending to be a farmer who wanted the nuns to make her a sweater.

Back in the ghetto Regina gathered up clothes of people who had died and sold them to neighboring farms. One day the SS took 40 men out of the ghetto, injected them with typhus and returned them the same day. A few weeks later they all got typhus and an epidemic started. In 1943 Regina got typhus from selling contaminated clothes in exchange for flour, cheese and other bits of food. Otherwise they would not have had food.

There was no medication, and the doctor said it would be best if Regina died. Regina's mother gave her a cold compress and her fever went down. Her mother said "I pass on the years I have left to you."

3348 - 3485 In 1943 the Nazis sent the remaining strong Jews to a larger working camp. The sick were killed, and the city was Juden-free.

Regina and her family were taken to a closed ghetto/camp. Her mother was killed in the middle of summer. Regina escaped after being shot in the finger and left for dead in a mass grave. In the morning she escaped from the grave and made her way to a Polish friend. She was covered in blood and wore only a night shirt. Her friend cleaned her up and gave her clothes. Then Regina went to the convent.

### The Convent

3486 - 3728 The nuns were afraid and would not let her in. Regina stayed in the garden, hiding among tall stalks of corn, making sweaters. When it rained, she hid in the convent mausoleum. The nuns had given her a key. She was able to see Maria, who called her auntie.

In the fall when the corn was harvested, Regina cried and the nuns hid her in a closet with another girl. Twice a week, Regina baked bread and cooked. The Superior Nun liked her and told Regina she would make her a nun. Why admit you're a Jew, she asked her, when all the Jews have been killed. She offered to let Regina live at the convent. Regina agreed. She had not heard from her husband. She learned the prayers and rituals. Then in mid-winter her husband appeared. He stayed at the convent six weeks, hiding in a bunker in the cow shed. This was very risky because German officers often visited the convent to converse with the Austrian Mother Superior in German.

Once a German officer bounced Maria on his lap and remarked, "I swear this child is Jewish." The Mother Superior denied it and showed him the false papers.

3729 - 3893 Miriam remembers playing outside in the convent garden and the Mother Superior telling her to pick flowers for Uncle Janek, a dirty old bum. He hugged Miriam when she gave him the flowers. He was really her father. He had arrived at the convent after walking 12 miles by foot.

When her father first took Maria to the convent he almost killed a Ukrainian police man.

Both Miriam's parents took many chances. They had to.

At the convent there were three other children in hiding, two of them siblings and the children of two famous doctors who did not survive. Every child had a 'big sister' who looked out for them. Maria's sister Milka was lame. Maria remembers waking up when the convent was being bombed, and wetting her bed and screaming. Milka was supposed to have taken her down to the shelter.

3894-4156 Whenever she baked, Regina would give Miriam a piece of wet bread with sugar. Miriam did not know she was her mother. The bishop was Miriam's father figure. He took a liking to her, taught her things and called her 'the delicate one'.

In Miriam's mind the nuns were her parents. She was raised Catholic and used the amulets and prayers. At the convent she had books and playmates. She was taught the Jews killed Jesus. It was ironic, because the nuns were keeping Jewish children, yet teaching the Catholic dogma of hating Jews. Miriam's parents had told the Mother Superior that if they survived the whole family would become Christian.

Miriam had what she thought was a normal childhood.

### Family Reunited

When Miriam's parents came to get her after the war, the Mother Superior did not want to give her up. But she had promised them that she would if they survived. She told Miriam that this couple were her real parents.

Miriam's parents took her to their little hut in Czakjow. There were dozens of orphans living with them. Miriam hated her parents, and said she hated the Jews. She kept praying to Jesus. The other children would tell her she was Jewish and make her cry.

4157-4592 It was difficult for Regina to adjust to a family life again. Her husband would pick up orphans off the street and bring them home. Most of these children went to Israel.

Regina became pregnant right after being reunited with her husband. She was bootlegging whiskey, jumping on and off trains and on May 23, 1945 still gave birth to an 11 pound, gorgeous boy they named Frank. That was when Miriam accepted that they were really her family. Now she had a baby to love. They were living 200 meters from the KGB then, and Miriam remembers running to tell them that she had a new brother.

The family moved to Lipnitz where Miriam's father started a meat and sausage factory. They stayed there three years, then left for Canada in 1948. Communism was very strong in Poland at the time. Most of the Jews were going to Israel, but Regina received a letter from her sister there saying it was very difficult to live there.

### Canada

Miriam's father had a distant cousin who had settled in Montreal before WWI. Sam put an ad in the Jewish papers and his cousin saw it and agreed to sponsor him to Canada. Three weeks before Sam and his family arrived, the cousin died.

On the crossing to Canada there were 12 Jews on board. The Fleisher family had a small Israeli flag at their table at the farewell dinner.

In 1950 their son Willy was born. He is now a psychiatrist. Frank is a poet living in Amsterdam.

4593-4761 In May, 1945 the Fleisher were living in Czakjow which was part of the Ukraine. On VE day the Ukrainians started attacking the Poles. They killed the Bishop, Mother Superior and one of the boys living at the convent. That was when Sam and Regina decided to return to Poland. Frank was six weeks old. They travelled by coal train to Lipnik, where Sam started his factory. He was well off, but Jews in Poland did not feel comfortable. Most left because of the memories. They really couldn't say they were citizens.

After three years the family traveled to Warsaw to receive papers to emigrate. They bribed the government in order to leave earlier than permitted.

Of the other children hidden at the convent, one was reunited with her mother, one with an uncle, and one with a very assimilated cousin.

4762 -5051 Miriam sees herself both as a survivor and a child of survivors. Her brother are not as affected by the experiences. Her two best friends are Catholic, and she continues to feel a strong empathy towards the Catholic religion.

When the family arrived in Montreal they did not hit it off too well with their dead cousin's wife. Sam worked for Canada Packers, but there was a housing shortage and children were not welcome at most places. They rented a room from the cousin's wife for \$40. a month.

Sam had friends in Winnipeg and heard there were a lot of Ukrainians and Poles living there. He spoke both those languages. So they moved to Winnipeg.

In Winnipeg they lived at 356 Stella, renting three rooms for \$28.00 a month. Sam worked as a janitor in the Jewish old age home. He then became a cattle buyer, bought a truck and got a driver's license. Then he became a wholesale grocer. Miriam did all his deposits and statements for him for 10 years beginning at age 12. Sam retired at age 70. Fleishers Meats is still in St. Boniface.

5052-end Miriam lived in Toronto for five years, and then moved to Los Angelas where she worked in mutual funds.