

DONOR: SARAH HENOCH
INTERVIEWER: NADA RUBIN
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running time: approx. 1 hour, 30 mins.

Tape Footage: Background

1-384 Sarah was born on May 25, 1929 in Kopochinska, Poland. Her family included her parents, a younger brother, grandparents, four aunts and seven cousins.

Her brother Abe was two years younger than her.

Sarah's family lived in a house in a Jewish area. Her grandfather lived with them.

Once in a while her mother would have a cleaning woman come in.

Sarah's father bought fruit from the plantations outside town and shipped it to cities like Warsaw and Lodz.

Sarah went to Polish school where she learned Ukrainian. There were many Ukrainians in her area. At night she attended Hebrew school. All day Hebrew school was not allowed.

385-912 There was one large and two small synagogues in town. There were Poles, Ukrainians and Jews in the area.

Sarah wore a school uniform. Most of her friends were Jewish. A few were Gentile. Sometimes she was called "dirty Jew," and she often heard that she "killed Jesus." Sarah's grandfather explained that this was not true.

Sarah's family attended the theater and movies. They celebrated the Jewish holidays together. They were religious and kept a kosher home and attended synagogue all the time.

On Saturdays they went for walks or to the park, and to shul.

In the summer they vacationed on the Rumanian border where there were orchestras on the lake, dancing and restaurants.

Sarah's family was financially comfortable. Her father had employees.

Sarah's mother cooked and baked for poor Jews in town and for some Gentile friends also. Her father did business with the Gentiles.

WWII

913-1325 In September 1939, when Sarah was 11, the Russians came to town. Most of the townspeople stayed in town. Sarah still attended school, where she now had to learn Russian. She still attended Hebrew school. There was no concern for their safety at this time.

People talked about what the Germans were doing in the rest of Poland. Many refugees from the German side came to Sarah's town. Her parents gave a room to a wealthy couple from the German side. They were smart to run away.

Many didn't believe the talk about the Germans. Afterall, the Germans were so advanced and intelligent. Many wealthy Jews use to send their children to Germany to become doctors.

German Occupation

Life went on as usual for Sarah until the Germans attacked. Then there were bombs and killing. People hid in bunkers and cellars.

One morning in 1940 Sarah's mother was cooking when there was a bomb attack. She didn't want to leave what she had in the oven, and told her children to go down to the cellar without her. Sarah took her brother and then ran back for her mother while bullets flew past.

Escape to Russia

1326-1658 Until then Sarah's father was still working. The Russians warned the Jews what would happen to them under the Germans, and told them that anyone with a horse and wagon could escape with them. That is what Sarah's family did. Her grandparents and aunts and uncles refused to go.

Sarah's family followed the Russians into the Ukraine. Sarah travelled in a wagon with her friend's family. When they arrived at the train station bombs were falling and there were fires all over. Sarah's parents hadn't arrived yet. The other family told her to get on the train with them but she wanted to wait., so they left her alone. There was blood and people falling every where. Half an hour later her family finally arrive and they boarded a cattle car to Russia.

Russian soldiers and the Red Cross were in the back of the train, so the Germans kept bombing it. Sarah and her mother began laughing hysterically.

They were on the train for weeks, travelling at night and stopping in the forest and taking food from farms.

1659-2084 In Kasakhstan, Siberia the Russian people greeted the train and took in families. The people were very nice and didn't ask any questions. The family that took in Sarah's had two rooms and a tiny kitchenette, and gave Sarah's family the bigger room. They stayed there until the war was half over.

The woman of the house had two sons from her first marriage, one of whom was a major in the army, and two young girls from her second marriage. She played the guitar and sang. She wrote her son in the army that she had Jewish people staying with her and he wrote back that she was to take real good care of them because of what was happening to their people. Sarah's family knew him through his letters. He was later killed by Stalingrad.

In Russia Sarah's mother worked in a NKVD restaurant from nine in the morning

until after midnight. The woman they lived with gave them vegetables from her garden and milk from her cow.

Sarah's father had joined the underground just before they reached Kiev. That was the last time they saw him.

Sarah and Abe went to Russian school. In the summer they worked on farms, because all the Russian men were in the army. All the horses were in the army too, so they used mules on the farm.

2085-2586 Some of those who'd arrive with Sarah's family were Jews. Others were Russians from other parts of the country.

Halfway through the war the government gave Sarah's mother a one room apartment because she was working. They lived there until the end of the war.

Return Home

After the war Sarah's mother wanted to go home to see who survived.

She had been given some land too where they grew potatoes from potato ends. The sell of potatoes paid their way home.

Sarah's' mother had a fur coat, fur jacket and some jewelry she had brought from home. She later sold the coat for a sack of potatoes.

It took Sarah's family a long time to get home. They travelled on cattle trains and there were a lot of Russian soldiers. When they stopped they got food from farms. They built fires with two stones, and boiled potatoes.

There were many nationalities on the train. Someone always helped Sarah and her mother up and down the train. Her mother was 34.

Back home they found her father's two sisters and husbands had survived by hiding in a forest bunker. Sarah's grandmother died from typhus in the bunker. Sarah's mother tried to find her husband through the Red Cross. Then she heard that he had been killed two months before the war ended.

Sarah's family stayed in town less than a year. Their house was a big hole. From her whole group of friends, only Sarah and one other boy were left. This boy had lived with a Polish family.

Some of her Sarah's distant cousins survived. The town was not destroyed, but the small shuls were gone. The big one had been used as a stable.

2586-3046 Sarah's family stayed in her cousin's three story house. The Russians occupied the town again. Sarah's mother and aunt bought and sold smallware on the market. The Russians allowed this.

Sarah worked. Her brother could have gone back to school but there were no other Jewish children left. The one boy who had survived had become Polish.

The Ukrainians killed many in the town. One of Sarah's aunts had been pregnant and had been ripped apart by horses. A friend and her mother had been raped on the street with bottles. Most of the Jews in town had dug their own graves and stood naked and were shot. Many were buried alive.

Sarah's paternal grandfather was taken to Treblinka. Not many Jews from their town were taken to camps, because the job was done in town.. Also, there were not many Jews left after the war to say who was good and who was bad.

These Ukrainians that did the Germans' work were dressed like civilians. The Germans told them they could do whatever they wanted.

After the war the Ukrainians underground attacked the Russians and the Jews.

Sarah worked as a bookkeeper in an office. One day she ran home during an attack and couldn't find her mother or brother. She had to hide with an elderly Polish couple.

Because of the killings, and because no one else was returning, Sarah's mother decided they would make their way to Lodz or Warsaw and then Israel. They travelled on open train, and stayed in refugee housing in DP camps.

There were pogroms in Poland. In one town 20 survivors were killed.

Sarah's family was led out of Poland to Rumania. They had no documents. The bribed guards in order to cross borders, or climbed over mountains.

3047-3286 Sarah met her future husband in October in Rumanian, where people from many camps were taken. He was six years older than her. They lived two, three families to a room with bunk beds set up in the corners. Sarah's mother had some money.

Hungary

From Rumania they travelled to Hungary. Sarah's husband accompanied them. He had wanted to return to Poland but he didn't because of the pogroms, and because he was told no one survived anyway.

He was very religious. He was the only survivor from his family. He was very fast. Once they were on the train for 24 hours without food. He left and came back with fat and bread. Sarah's mother would not eat the fat. He use to help everyone.

When they crossed the mountains most would go downhill on their bums. Sarah did it by running from tree to tree. Sarah's husband carried a couple's twins for them on his back. He helped everyone in the group. He got them food and kept them together.

Italy

3287-3675 From Hungary they went to Italy. From there they were supposed to go to Israel.

Sarah's son Morris was born in Italy. They had married in Hungary. He was two when they left for Paris. Sarah was very sick after she gave birth.

The Israelis came and interviewed everyone who wanted to go to Israel. There were several hundred living in an army camp in Italy. There was a Rabbi and food from the Red Cross. Sarah's husband Myer wheeled and dealed, and made some money for extra food. Their son would only eat oranges and bananas.

Sarah's mother had a brother living in Canada. She located him through the Red Cross. Sarah's husband wanted to go to Israel. She did not want to leave her mother and brother.

They signed up for the Exodus, and then were turned away because it was full. They returned to the camp, and then received papers for Canada which they had to pick up from the Canadian Consulate in Paris.

Paris

3485-3905 Myer had money to get them to Paris on their own. They were not sent by a Jewish organization.

Myer worked as a presser in Paris. They lived there two years. A Canadian doctor said Myer had TB and Sarah's mother had glaucoma so they were not allowed to leave for Canada.

Myer found someone from his hometown who helped him bribe his way out of Paris. Everyone did that.

Sarah's mother came a year later. Sarah's daughter Ruthie was born in Winnipeg.

Sarah's mother's brother, Fred Rosenberg, lived in Winnipeg. He was allowed to bring over his sister, but had to get Mr. Filkow to sponsor Sarah and Myer as farm laborers.

Sarah and Myer were married under a chupa in the Rabbi's small room at the DP camp. Sarah wore a blouse and skirt, and they had a few guests.

Her son was born in Cremona, Italy, near Milan. A Jewish doctor from the camp helped her deliver. She had a long labor and was induced. The next day Sarah got pneumonia, and spent three months in hospital. She still breast fed, and the baby broke out all over.

The doctor said Sarah needed penicillin. Myer heard the Red Cross in the camp had penicillin, but he had to threaten the man in charge of it in order to get some for Sarah. By then Sarah was critical.

Their son was circumcised in the hospital.

3906-4172 In the hospital the nurses were all nuns. Some were nice, but one was very anti-semitic and wouldn't give Sarah blankets or water. Myer gave her gifts from the

black market but this did not make a difference. She treated all Jews badly. The other townfolk were friendly and nice.

Canada

In Canada Myer worked on Filkow's farm. He had survived the camps by saying he was whatever trade or profession was asked for. On the farm he milked 60 cows. Sarah took care of their son. She had no running water and had to walk a block and a half to get water. Often it would freeze before she got it home. She did laundry on a scrub board with melted snow. Mrs. Filkow was very nice to her.

Myer learned to drive, and then drove the milk into town. They lived there six months, even though it was supposed to be for a year.

There was a family from Holland on the farm. One day the father of this family called Myer "a filthy Jew." Myer lifted a forklift to him, and was stopped because someone else walked in. Myer told Mr. Filkow what happened, but because the Dutch man was permanent on the farm and Myer's contract was just for a year, he let Myer go.

4173-4528 Sarah and Myer took a boat from Paris to Halifax, and then a train to Winnipeg. They arrived at the end of summer in 1950.

Winnipeg

When they left the farm, Sarah and Myer rented an apartment and Myer got a job as a presser for Mr. Harry Silverberg. Ruthie was born in 1950. Myer did piece works and was very fast. After a few years Mr. Silverberg suggested Myer go into the restaurant business and signed a loan for him. Myer opened a factory restaurant. Morris went to school, and Sarah's mother looked after Ruthie. Sarah worked in the restaurant.

Sarah's mother had arrived with her son Abe and her new husband.

They then lived in an apartment on Redwood. Sarah had some Gentile friends from the block.

Soon they moved into the upstairs of a house on Redwood. One day the French woman living downstairs yelled at Ruthie. Sarah got very upset and decided it was time they bought their own home. They borrowed money from Mr. Pitch, bought a house and rented out the upstairs to a Ukrainian priest.

4529-4792 Sarah worked with her husband as cook, waitress and cashier. After a few years they sold the business and bought a restaurant on Main Street. It was open until three a.m., but they couldn't make a go of it.

The children were very good and helped out a lot at home.

Myer sold this business and bought another restaurant in a factory. Then he went into auction sales and built up a business.

Sarah did not keep kosher. Her family had been very religious.

Once Sarah's mother had been caught stealing carrots from the NKVD restaurant. She explained her situation, and was given flour bread and butter.

4793-end

Sarah believed in G-d, but figured it was not necessary to keep kosher because kashrut was related to health issues in olden times.

Morris had a Bar Mitzvah at the Ashkenazie Shul. Sarah did all the cooking for it, but at night they had a catered affair with an orchestra. They wanted a real simcha.

Sarah attends synagogue and lights Shabbat candles.

Sarah's message to others is to be strong and to be educated. Some of her mother's Gentile friends ended up killing Jews. There is anti-semitism in Gentiles.

When Sarah returned home from Russia the Polish and Ukrainian kids looked away from her.

Sarah has five grandchildren, three boys and two girls ranging in age from 17 to 12.

Sarah and Myer have a good marriage because they went through things together.

Remembering

For Myer's 65th birthday Sarah had a plaque made up with the names of his relatives who died in the Holocaust.

Sarah has no desire to go back to her hometown. Morris went to his father's town, and found that talking about it and seeing it were two different things. Sarah talked about her experiences a little, but Myer did not at all.

Sarah prays to G-d everyday that the Holocaust will not happen again.

People did not believe it could happen, and that is why they died. A lot of them could have run away.