

DONOR: CLARA LESZCZ  
INTERVIEWER: AMITAI AZUELOS

Tape Footage: approx. 54 minutes

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1-841 Clara was a Hebrew teacher.  
She is a past president of 'Sherut HaKlita', and a member of Hadassa.

Background

Clara was born in Rovno, Poland on April 24, 1920.  
She was the youngest of seven children.  
She attended a Polish school where she also learned Jewish and Hebrew.

Later on she attended a Hebrew gymnasium where she studied to be a teacher.  
Her studies ended in September, 1939 when the Red Army occupied Rovno.

WWII - Russian Occupation

Clara left Rovno to go to Lvov, which was also occupied by the Russians.  
In Lvov she studied to be a grain tester at a school that did not require tuition.

Clara studied in Lvov until the Germans began bombing the city on June 22, 1941.  
Clara panicked. She wanted to go home to Rovno, but there was no means of communication and no transportation.

Altogether there were 19 students from Clara's district. They began walking home.  
They walked only at night. During the day the Germans attacked, and the Ukrainians beat and killed Jews.

Clara did not know what the situation was in Rovno. She wanted to see her family and be with them.

Clara did not look or sound Jewish, so the group sent her to farms to get food and water. The farmers always asked Clara if there were Jews in her group. That is how Clara knew things were bad for Jews.

After travelling four days they came to Chancelokoff. There a bomb fell near Clara, covering her with soil. She could not believe she was not hurt.

The group continued walking. Seventeen kilometers from Rovno, they found out that the Germans were quickly taking Poland part by part, and were already in Rovno. The atrocities against the Jews there had already begun.

Clara did not know what to do. People they met told them Rovno was too dangerous, and they should head towards Russia. Clara did not want to.

She met neighbors of her family, who told her not to go home. They invited her to come with them to Russia where she would be safe. She did.

Clara cried. She did not think she would see her family again.

842-1245

Clara and this family travelled by horse and buggy. They needed her more than she needed them. The father was a white collar man who did not know how to handle the horses. Clara knew because she had spent a lot of time in the country as a girl. She took over the driving and the horses' care.

The family shared their food with Clara. It was gone by the time they arrived at Nyetapetrovsk in Russia.

### Russia

The Germans were beginning to conquer Russia, and were chasing after the evacuees.

Clara took care of this family. She found grass for the horses, and food for the family.

Russian farmers were evacuating their cattle. Clara would stop them and asked permission to milk some cows. Sometimes she went into Ukrainian houses and asked for food. Other times Russian soldiers gave her food.

The Russians were good to the people coming to their country. They helped them.

Clara asked for food at a Red Army station and offered to do chores.

She travelled with this family until they arrived in the big city of Harkos in November. They could not go any further. The Germans were too close.

1246-1772

Clara parted from the family. Because she was a student and had papers she got into places that helped her. She was given warm clothes and ration cards.

The situation was still crucial. People were leaving this city too.

Clara decided to travel to Uzbekistan where it was warmer. She got a ride on a transport train.

The train travel was very hard and long. Clara went three days with no food at all. Then she met a Russian family and befriended a girl, Yira, who gave her food. It took two to three weeks to arrive in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

### Uzbekistan

When Clara arrived she was a mess. She had not washed for days, but she did not lose her energy or spirit.

Clara did not know if anyone was left from her family. But she thought she might find a relative in Uzbekistan because that was where the Germans had taken the young Polish men they recruited for the army.

Clara had no money. She had a watch from her father. She pawned it, bought new

clothes and washed in the river.

She found Yira and her family. Yira convinced her to continue her schooling with her.

The two girls decided to go to Samerkant. While waiting for the bus Clara suddenly heard her brother's voice. She didn't want to turn around because she thought it was a dream. When she did turn around she saw it really was him. He lifted her up. Clara could not speak for 20 minutes.

Her brother told her what was happening in Rovno. There was no telling who would survive. He insisted Clara stay with him, so they could be together. Naturally she did.

There were about 200 people waiting for the bus, watching the reunion between Clara and her brother. It caused quite a sensation.

1773-2197 Clara went with her brother to Namagard. He didn't have much, and what he had went quickly.

Clara looked for a job.

The situation in town was bad because so many had been driven there. There was no work, and food was hard to get. People were starving and swollen. There were dead people everywhere.

Clara had to fight for her existence.

She found a job as a cleaning woman in the children's department of a hospital. It was all she could do, even though she knew Russian, Ukrainian and Polish.

While Clara was washing the floor one day, Dr. Wolfson, who was the director of the department, noticed her and asked her why she was doing that kind of work. Clara told her her story. The Russian doctor told Clara she was too intelligent and delicate to do such work, and would help her.

She gave Clara a job taking care of the children who were getting better. Clara was very happy. She ate with the children, earned money, and helped her brother.

Dr. Wolfson took a liking to Clara. She suggested Clara begin nursing school, so she could then work with her.

Clara did so, attending school by day and working at night. She went to school for a year.

In 1942 Clara was very sick with typhus. She recovered and returned to work.

Clara would work for 48 hours straight, and then be home for 12 hours. She had found a room with a woman.

2198-2560 No one knew what was happening in the war. More and more people were coming

to the city and more and more were dying from sickness and hunger.

In 1943 Clara was still working at her job. She had received her nursing diploma.

Clara accompanied the doctor when she saw patients, and took care of children. There was no medicine and less and less food each day. The job was stressful. Clara felt badly for the children. The doctor told her to give them distilled water and pretend it was medicine. Clara was not proud to do this.

Clara had found another brother. She lived with both brothers. They could not find work.

Clara also worked in a knitting factory during her spare time, in order to help out her brothers.

Suddenly in 1944 Clara received a letter at the hospital from her sister in Rovno. She was alive, but no one else was left. Clara went wild when she received this news, knocking her head against the wall.

Clara had to survive. She worked hard.

Rumors circulated about fierce fights between the Russians and Germans, and that the Russians would stop the Germans by Leningrad.

When Germany was defeated in the spring of 1945 Clara was delighted.

#### After the War

In May, only Clara and her younger brother were allowed to return to Rovno. It took them a month to arrive there. They found their sister.

2563-3128 Clara could not recognize Rovno or where she had lived. There were only a few Jews left.

Clara was married by this time. Her husband was not allowed to travel with her. There was a lot of red tape and too many people to repatriate. He met her in Rovno later.

Life in Rovno was not easy. They did not have anything and there was nothing to do. Everyone wanted to leave.

The DP camps were the only choice. They had no home, no jobs and no money. Clara and her husband decided to go to a DP camp from where they could travel out of Europe.

Clara wanted to go to Israel. They had to cross Russian back into Germany where there was a transit camp from where refugees could go anywhere.

While at the DP camp in Munich Clara had the most terrible shock of her life. Her husband was accidently killed. He was run over when he fell climbing into a truck.

Clara was all alone. She suffered much hardships, but she learned to survive. She knew if she worked hard she would get by.

In the camp Clara worked as a Hebrew teacher and in the clinic. She wanted to keep busy and not have to think.

Clara was well liked and respected.

She was still young. She had the chance to marry again but wanted to wait a year.

Clara met a man who had a son. His wife had died in a Russian camp. He proposed to Clara. He wanted to go to Israel, but his son had relatives in Quito, Ecuador.

#### Ecuador - Canada

Clara told him to go to Ecuador with his son, and then send for her if he still wanted her to come. He did.

They were separated one year, and then Clara joined him in Ecuador. They were very poor there. They had a daughter. They lived there a few years.

Clara wanted to see her relatives. Her sister was in Canada. In 1950 Clara came with her daughter to visit her. Her husband and son came a year later, because Clara did not want to leave Canada. They had another son in Winnipeg.

Clara has a nice family. She is happy that everything is behind her. She still has nightmares.

As long as the Jews have Israel the Holocaust will not happen again. The Jews will not allow it.

No matter what a situation is for a person, he must fight to survive. Fight for whatever you want and you will get it.