

Interviewee: FISHMAN, Bernice Gaudens
Interviewer: Natalie Packel
No. of audio tapes: 2 English

Date: May 29, 1991
No restrictions
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SUMMARY

Bernice Fishman (birth name Bronia Gaudens) was born in Vronki, Poland in 1934. Her father owned a clothing store. Bernice and her mother fled to her mother's parents in Staszow in 1939. The Staszow Ghetto was established in 1940. Jewish children were educated clandestinely. Bernice and her brother were sent to live with a Polish farmer before the ghetto was evacuated. Her grandmother joined them later. Her grandfather and her father were sent to the Skarzysko concentration camp and her mother was hidden by a neighbor. Bernice, her brother, and her grandmother left the Polish family to go to a town that was supposed to be a sanctuary for Jews but were caught by the Polish police, imprisoned for a week, and told daily they would be shot. Her parents bribed somebody to get them out of prison.

Bernice describes how she, her brother, and her aunt and uncle were hidden by a succession of Poles in Ogrodzenie, posing as Catholics. She was always hungry, in fear of being discovered, and pretty much on her own. Her four year old brother died because they were afraid to take him to a doctor. Bernice got sick and walked to a Catholic hospital where she received care.

In 1945 Bernice was reunited with her parents who rented an apartment in Kielce that they shared with four other Jewish families. Her mother gave birth to a girl. Bernice describes how her family managed to survive despite constant fear of Polish antisemitism. She relates how Poles threw ten Jews from a moving train her father was supposed to be on. While she was hiding with the Kuchatays, Bernice had to pose as a Catholic, go to Confession and receive Communion, but never forgot she was Jewish. After the war, Mrs. Kuchatay found the family and threatened to sue unless Bernice converted legally. To avoid going to court, the family fled to Bytom with the help of Bernice's uncle who was in the Russian army. A few days later all the Jews in their former apartment were killed during the Kielce pogrom.

After several months in Bytom, they were smuggled into Czechoslovakia. From there they went to a Displaced Persons camp near Stuttgart, Germany. Bernice attended a school for Jewish children where classes were conducted in Hebrew. Her father obtained an apartment in a house owned by a former member of the Nazi party. Bernice briefly reflects on the different behavior of Poles, Russians, Czechs, and Germans toward Jews. The family emigrated to the United States in 1950, sponsored by Bernice's cousin who was an American citizen.

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SUBJECT HEADINGS

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945) - Personal narratives
World War, 1939-1945 - Personal narratives, Jewish
World War, 1939-1945 - Refugees
Holocaust survivors
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945) - Poland - Kielce
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1935) - Poland - Bytom
Jewish ghettos - Poland - Staszów
Survival skills
Jewish children in the Holocaust - Poland
Aid by non-Jews
Displaced Persons Camp - Germany