

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

**Name of interviewee:** Birman, Klara

**Date of interview:** 12/9/1998

**Summary:** Klara Birman was born in 1925 in Novo Uman in the Ukraine. Her father, formerly a factory worker, organized a Jewish collective farm in the village. When Klara was five years old, the government sent Klara's father, Isaak, to organize a collective farm in the village of Moskovoya Adn so the family moved there in 1931. Klara had two sisters (Faina and Maria) and one much younger brother, Leonid. Her mother, Sophia, was a housewife. Klara attended a Ukrainian school and received straight "A's"; she planned on going to medical school.

Klara remembers growing up in a fairly Jewish household. Although her father worked for the government, he was not a Party member and the family attended holiday services at the local synagogue. Klara said that all of the Jewish people in the town would come to her house for Seders and that the village women would illegally bake matzos with Klara's mother in their kitchen.

On June 22, 1941, the war began -- the very same day that Klara was supposed to go on her senior class trip. After the German invasion, Klara stopped going to school. Her father was drafted into the army and left in early July. Towards the end of July, the Germans began to bomb Klara's village and Klara's mother decided that the family should leave. They began traveling (on foot) to the Dnieper River, however, when the family reached the river, the Germans would not allow them to cross. At the river, the Germans shot all of the Jewish men, then all of the communists and then the officers. The Germans then ordered the women and children to go home. Klara's family started walking back toward Novo Uman, but could not stay there because it was too dangerous. The family hid in a ravine for a couple of weeks before a few Ukrainian boys found them and turned them in to the village authorities. Because the village leader knew Isaak well, he tried to help the family by letting them live with another Jewish family in an old building. Eventually, both families were escorted to Bogdanovka, a Jewish ghetto.

For the first part of their stay at Bogdanovka, Klara worked alongside other Jews and Ukrainians, building a highway, while her mother and baby brother stayed back in the ghetto. Her mother and brother were greatly helped by a neighboring Ukrainian woman. Once the highway was completed, Klara returned to the ghetto, where she and her family lived for approximately 2 1/2 years. While in Bogdanovka, the Jews were under the guard of the Ukrainian police, who were under the command of the Romanians.

After the Battle of Stalingrad, the authorities became even more hostile towards

## **Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project**

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

the Jews in the ghetto. The prisoners were forced to wear yellow stars and were not fed anything. Many people got sick with typhus. Once the Germans began to retreat, the authorities started treating Klara and the rest of the Jews a little better.

Klara and her family were liberated on March 23, 1944 and they returned to Moskovoya immediately. There, they found out that Isaak had been killed on the front lines. Klara eventually went to medical school in Odessa, graduated in 1949 and married a military man. For a long time after the war, she could not talk about her ghetto experiences because it was seen as "complying with the enemy."

Six years after her husband died in 1985, Klara immigrated to the United States with her daughter, son-in-law and grandson.