

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Ginzbursky, Sofia

Date of interview: 7/28/1992

Summary: Sofia Ginzbursky's mother died at the age of 27, not too long after she gave birth. After her death, she and her siblings went to live with their grandfather. He observed Jewish traditions and gave her the feeling of being Jewish. Ginzbursky studied at a technical school in Gomel, Belarus. She also lived in Leningrad working as a nanny and secretary. After she met her husband there, they got married and moved to Gomel. Later they moved to Belostock, Poland so her husband could be a schoolteacher there. When the war started, he got called into the army, and she was left alone with two children. They started their evacuation from Belostock by train, which was constantly bombed by the advancing German army. Using several modes of transportation (army truck, train) with the help of Soviet as well as German soldiers (she spoke German which helped her a lot) she was transferred to Zlobin, Poland and then to Baranovichi, Ukraine. There she tore and threw away all her documents so no one could prove she was Jewish through her last name and written nationality in the passport. In the Ukraine Sofia first saw anti-Semitism where locals helped the Nazis in finding Jews. The Nazis said: "Kill all Jews, Ukrainians will live better without Jews." Again, speaking German helped Sofia to find a job at a food exchange center where she received food to feed her children. That also helped her obtain false papers with a new last name that showed she was Russian and not Jewish. When she transferred to Gomel to look for remaining family, she was captured by the Nazis and was humiliated by Politsai for several days. She had to take out buckets of sand from a big hole in the ground and pour those buckets out somewhere else. When Politsai was drunk, he had a change of heart and let her leave and go to the relatives of her husband.

There were no relatives of her husband that she could live with, so she lived with a woman named Nadia Lisitskaya (Lutman?). Gentiles on the street were jealous of Sophia and her children's clothing: "How can she, a Jew, have good clothes when we don't have anything." Everywhere she passed herself as a gentile refugee from Poland. She washed clothes for the German army in exchange for soap and kerosene. Finding food was extremely hard. When an SS officer came to arrest Sofia, another woman named Sonia was taken instead. Later she was released and they became friends. Sofia saw how hundreds of Jews from the Gomel ghetto were taken on a truck for execution. Later, both Sofia and Sonia, with their children were able to get on a German army train towards Ori'ol, Russia – the war frontline at the time. Once they stepped off at Ori'ol, they spent the night at a senior couple's house. Every night was a battle for survival, finding a new place of stay so no one would suspect them of being Jewish. Later she, her friend Sonia and their children lived at the house of a Latvian lady for 2 years. When SS came into Ori'ol, they ordered the Jews to mark themselves with yellow Stars of David. Sofia decided she was not going to do that and would keep her

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

disguised identity, even though she considered herself Jewish at heart. She bought Christian crosses for her and the children to wear in order to show that they were Russian Orthodox. She had a Russian lady teach her son how to pray to an icon when bombing happened. She went through many small jobs during the period in Ori'ol, all helping Germans for small amounts of food. One of her sons was almost killed by an air bomb. Finally when Sofia was liberated by the Soviet army, she moved to Leningrad. When she was getting a new passport and was asked "You are a heroine, what nationality shall I put on your passport?" she replied: "Only Jewish!" Later on she was reunited with her husband in Chkalov with the help of her sister. After the war, she and her children experienced even more anti-Semitism while trying to get a job or applying to graduate schools. After the war, she was confident that she survived with G-d's help. That is why she became more observant, started fasting and keeping Shabbat.