

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Evan, Desi

**Date of interview:** 5/28/1996

**Summary:** This interview with Desi Rina Evan chronicles the struggles of middle-class Jews in Bulgaria during World War 2. She was born on 8/29/1933 (birth name: Desi Mnavorch) in Sofia, Bulgaria. When the war broke out she remembered that her family had to use ration cards (later on in the war her family had three ration cards for four people). The Germans confiscated radios and other valuables from the Jews. All the Jews were forced to bring their jewelry to the bank, and if they were suspected of holding out they were beaten. She talked about being forced to move from her home in Sofia and moved to Shumen. She recalls old friends of hers calling her Jerfut (a derogatory Turkish word for Jews). She speaks Bulgarian, French, Russian and Ladino. Her family was forced to move into a ghetto with no concrete fences, barbed wire or soldiers guarding the boundary (but she knew "Which streets not to go on").

Her mother was pregnant when the Germans came, but one of her uncles performed an abortion. She referred to her uncle being forced to 'work in the mountains' throughout the tape, (I was not sure if this was a euphemism for being forced to work and/or fight in the war). Her father was given the opportunity to convert to Christianity but refused. When Jews were not allowed to own businesses or practice their profession she and her sisters would go to her uncle's house and have their teeth worked on in secret. Her father, an accountant, committed suicide in 1942 because of the constant stress and pressure of German occupation. She talked about how her mom and sisters walked into the dining room and her father was hanging from the chandelier. Her mother told her sister to go get a knife and then her mom cut her father down. She remembers he could not have a traditional funeral; it was very basic because of German intimidation. She recalls having nightmares for several years after her father's suicide.

She was forced to live in a one room apartment in Shumen with her two sisters and her mother. Her mother did not get a job, so to make ends meet she sold her jewelry. Her mother got typhus while in the ghetto. She recalls being hungry often and that the Armenians would call her "Dirty Jew;" she was beaten when she went to the stores. She saw Nazi parades during school and was envious of the Hitler Youth and the status that came with it. On September 9, 1944 the Russians liberated the town and she recalled how the first thing the Russians asked was, "Do you have anything [alcoholic] to drink?" Then all the factories gave the Russians free beer until the Russian soldiers began chasing the women around town. She talked at great length about the injustice and corruption under the communist regime. When her family went back to Sofia, their apartment had been taken over by another family and could not reclaim it. When they went to

<http://collections.ushmm.org>

Contact [Reference@ushmm.org](mailto:Reference@ushmm.org) for further information about this collection

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

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

the police they were directed to the courthouse and when they went to the courthouse they were directed to the police. There was so much corruption and intimidation that the people said if you want to be around intelligent people go to jail. She then talked at great length about her family's move to Palestine and life in the kibbutz. She moved to Denver in the 1960's and visited Bulgaria in the 1970's. She has a daughter Clara and her husband's name is Derschund.