

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Benharbone, Tatiana

Date of interview: 8/27/1991

Summary: Tatiana Benharbone was born in Warsaw, Poland on November 30, 1937. Her earliest memories come from when she was two or three years old, which was the last time she was with her family. She remembers being asleep and awakened by her neighbors yelling, "The Germans are coming, the Germans are coming." Tatiana's father had left to the war and her mother had left home to go look for him. Since Tatiana stayed with her grandparents, she became really close to her grandmother. The night when the Germans came, her grandmother took her to a Catholic family. The Kukolos was the family that Tatiana stayed with until the war was over. Her new name was Ursula and the first thing she did with her new family was decorating a Christmas tree. Tatiana described this as a fairy tale because decorating the tree distracted her from what was going on during those horrible times. When the war was over Tatiana was told that she was Jewish and that it was time for her to leave just in case she might have had any surviving family. This was an absolute shock for an eight-year-old girl.

Next Tatiana went to Lena Kehler's orphanage. Lena Kehler was a woman who had lost her family in the war and had survived because she denied being Jewish. To make up for her lie she wanted to help children, so she had an orphanage with 100 children. Lena Kehler later wrote a book called *My One Hundred Children* in which she talked about Tatiana and the rest of the children at the orphanage. At the orphanage, the children went to school where non-Jewish children harassed them by calling them dirty Jews and telling them that because of them war started. Because of the discrimination in Poland, Lena decided to take her children to Israel; to do so she got 50 passports to leave. Their first stop was at a hotel in Berlin. Here they got plenty of food, which made everyone excited because they usually did not have enough to eat. After stopping in Czechoslovakia, they went to France for two years where the children learned Hebrew and French, so they could live in Israel.

Tatiana remembers being eleven when Lena and all the kids, except herself and another boy, moved to Israel. Tatiana and the other boy were the two children that were adopted. Tatiana went with an American family who believed they could not have kids. She went to Kentucky where it was difficult because she was not accepted into other groups or by her new family.

She went back to the Jewish orphanage in the US because her new family had a child and they could not take care of her. A psychologist named Beatriz Carter took her and two other traumatized Jewish children to her home. Where she found comfort and understanding. After four years of living with Mrs. Carter, she went back to live with her adoptive family and started to live a more normal life by

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going to school. At age 18 Tatiana ran away from home to go live with her boyfriend whom she later married and with whom she had two kids. Years later, when Tatiana and her family moved to Israel she reunited with Lena Kehler and other orphans she grew up with in Lena's orphanage.

A coincidence Tatiana experienced was meeting her great uncle's son, Andre, whom she met in one of her Flamenco performances. Tatiana saw her parents for the first time in a picture that Andre showed to her. Andre talked to Tatiana about her parents and told her what their names were. Tatiana explained that by imagining what her parents had suffered caused her to feel the pain of being an unwanted Jewish person in Germany. Even though Tatiana did not physically suffer much discrimination as a child, she believes the Holocaust did affect her future and her family.