

## **HVT-150& HVT-151**

H., Hania 1918-

Hania H. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-150 & HVT-151) interviewed by Gerry Singer and Steven Cohen, January 4, 1996 and January 16, 1996.

6 copies: 1 SVHS first camera, part one; 1 SVHS first camera, part two; 1 SVHS second camera, part one; 1 SVHS second camera, part two; 1 VHS copy, part one; 1 VHS copy, part two.

**Summary:** Hania was born on April 20, 1918 in Chelm, Poland. Her parents raised six children in an ultra-orthodox Jewish home. The family spoke Yiddish at home. Hania's father worked as a flour distributor and later as a bookkeeper, while her mother worked at home. Hania attended both a public school and cheder. She was an active Zionist with Shomer Halomi. Antisemitism was virulent in Chelm. Hania remembers Polish children running away from Jews because they feared "Jewish blood rituals". Her best friend, however, was a Polish Christian. After finishing school, Hania decided to become a nurse. She trained for three years, and in 1937 Hania started to work with newborn babies and infants as a nurse in a general hospital. She also distributed milk to poor families and provided medical examinations for poor children departing for summer camp.

In 1939, fearing the prospect of war, Hania, against her parents wishes, decided to leave Poland. With her neighbour and his son, Hania went to a border town in the territory that was annexed by the Soviet Union. The living conditions for the refugees were very poor. Hanna met her future husband in this border town and they married in 1940. Eventually, the Soviets gave them the option of entering Russia, where they would be protected and could work. They were transferred to Kockvietsa, a labour camp in the Komi ASSR. The inmates had to chop trees under very harsh conditions. They had little food and lived in fear of the NKVD. Hania worked at a small clinic in town. After a year-and-a-half, they were allowed to acquire passports. By then she had received some letters with news from Poland. Hania asked her husband, who had already received his travel documents, to go to Dnepropetrovsk and send parcels to her family in Poland.

In mid-1941 Hania decided to join her husband. She gave birth to her first child on August 15, 1941, shortly after her arrival in Dnepropetrovsk. Hania saw her husband once while in Dnepropetrovsk before he left with the retreating Red Army. Persecution of Jews began immediately after the German Army occupied the city. For a few days, Hania was hidden by a Ukrainian woman until the population was ordered to report all Jews. When another order came for the Jews to congregate in a warehouse, Hania, carrying her baby fled with a friend. They discarded their yellow stars and burned all their documents. They went from house to house telling people that Hania was a widow, her friend was her sister-in-law, and they were looking for family in a nearby village. Some women allowed them to stay in their homes overnight so that Hania could take care of her baby. Members of the German Army gave them some money and provided transportation to Znamenka. In Znamenka, they stayed with an older woman. Hania assumed the name of Sophia P., her best friend in Chelm, who was Christian. Hania befriended Jakob, a German who was in charge of allocating jobs. Although Jakob strongly believed that she was Jewish he found her a job as a housekeeper for a German doctor. Hania kept her job for eight months until the doctor propositioned her. On the same day, a German soldier attacked her in a stairwell. Hania then worked in a post office as a supervisor and translator for the Ukrainian postal workers where she was treated very well. She received food for herself and her daughter. The Ukrainians provided her with

news updates, but she never heard about the gas chambers. As in Dnepropetrovsk, she witnessed the deaths of many Jews.

When the German Army retreated, Hania was ordered to go with them. The old Polish woman Hania was living with managed to hide her until the Red Army arrived. Hania then worked for a Russian mobile hospital until she collapsed from pneumonia. In 1945, her husband returned and found them. When the old woman met Hania's husband, she realized they were Jewish. They left the Ukraine and gave the old woman all their money and food. Once in Poland, they moved to Stettin where her only surviving sister resided.

Together, both sisters journeyed with their families to Berlin. They lived in a UNRRA DP camp. Hania wrote to Jakob and asked him to visit her in Berlin. Jakob visited Hania again when she and her sister were transferred to Landsberg Camp. On July 3, 1949, Hania and her family arrived in Montreal. In 1950, their second daughter was born. Hania worked as a nurse in a doctor's office for a while, and is now a private nurse. Today, Hania's family includes two daughters and three grandchildren.