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Summary

Mary Kress was born in Czestochowa, Poland on May 15, 1925. She was an only child with a very close-knit family. Father was a tailor and they were a well to do family. Mary describes life before the war as calm and relaxing. In September 1939, the war broke out. On Monday, September 4th, 1939 or (bloody Monday) the Germans walked right into their city and they placed machine guns in the middle of the street. Many people were shot and she even saw the murder of her neighbor. All the Jews in the city were ordered to wear armbands with the Star of David. They confined them and forced them to share their place with other families. They were given meager food rations, were ordered to clean the streets, and shovel snow. Most of the authority in the town were Germans and Ukrainians. After a couple weeks or so, they moved them into the Lodz ghetto. Life in the Lodz ghetto was fairly normal where they could see their family members regularly. In 1942, the authorities started liquidating the ghetto and were sending groups of Jews on train wagons heading further east. Some people tried to escape and were later captured, and sent back to the ghetto. News spread quickly that "East" meant the Treblinka extermination camp. After hearing this, Mary's mother decided to hide. They hid in a coal factory for 3 weeks, and then they heard voices in the distance. One of the voices was her uncle's. Her uncle said that they took his wife and children out of hiding and sent them to the camp as well. Later that week, Mary and her mother were caught, but were able to avoid going to Treblinka. They returned to the ghetto, where her father spoke to one of his old employees who helped them sneak into a hiding place he prepared. The day of the escape, her father was arrested, but the next day her mother and her broke away from the group and went to the hiding place. The hiding place looked like a carpenter shop, with a cellar and two small rooms. Mary and her mother paid the man who hid them money every month, where he and his wife brought them food and necessities. They stayed in that hiding place for about 16 months, in 1944 until the Gestapo found them and ordered them to get out. They loaded them on wagons took them into the jail and labeled them as political prisoners. A couple days later they took them out of the cells, and lead them to a train station to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Because they were considered as political prisoners, they were spared of the selection process. They took them to Block 25 where they were quarantined for 3 weeks. They were aware of the fate of the thousands of transports from France and from other countries who were sent directly to the gas chambers. Mary described her time at the camp as appalling. The Nazi guards would beat them mercilessly, starved them, and dehumanized them. On January 18, 1945, they started taking them on death marches in groups of 5,000. They walked night and day for about two weeks, walking over corpses, and sick people all in complete fear. As the Russians were approaching, the German guards ordered trains for the couple hundred Jews who survived. They took the Jews to Grossrosseln, but it was so filled up to capacity that they brought them Berlin. Suddenly as night came, the allies started bombing the city and they decided to bring them to the Malahoff camp where they stayed there for a month. The German soldiers tried to force them on another death march, but Mary and her mother decided to hide

until the group left. They walked towards a village they saw in the distance and ended up at a farmer's house. They met some girls who worked there and they let them sleep in the barn and gave them some food. May 5th, 1945, the Russians came in followed by the Red Cross, they ordered everyone inside the barn into the courtyard. They gave them food, showers, and brought the ladies there back to health. After a couple days of regaining their strength, they were able to sneak back into Poland. To their dismay, Poland hadn't changed much, Mary found out that her father passed away on one of the death marches, and most of their family had passed away. At that point, Mary and her mother decided there was nothing left in Poland and they made their final trip back to Germany in hopes of landing in the American Zone. She was able to cross the border through Prague where she met her husband. Later that year, Mary then moved to New York where she practiced as a nurse and her husband as a sales representative. They have a son Phillip and a daughter Helena and six grandchildren.