

Esther Eisen Oral History

There was a great danger for men, but women were safe. Nothing will be done to women and of course not to girls.

And then they decided to cut braids and to my cousin as well, but I feel until today and remember the touch of the scissors on my neck. They cut the hair and the hair fell and lots of other things fell that were part of my childhood.

All of the sudden there was banging on the door and it was clear that these were Germans because they banged with the butt the gun and they almost broke the door. All of the sudden all the men became very scared that they came to take them and what will they do? Where will they hide? And it was just me at home and them, and they decided to flee, to escape. There was a small door in the corridor...they escaped through the backdoor and me. They left me to open the door for the Germans.

But the punishment wasn't late to come. It didn't take long maybe a week or two. They came with guns. They told us, "Raus, get out of the apartment." They confiscated our apartment. They gave us ten minutes to take what we could and leave the house.

Then suddenly there was a need, bread we had to eat every day, men could not go, to stand in line. Mother couldn't do it either. So they said, "Tusia you go stand in line, bring bread."

My brother started to suffer terrible hunger and our situation began to be very bad. Father didn't have a job... and again it was up to me. I was sent to get him a job. There was one man. His name was Ser, his daughter was my schoolmate. He could move things in the ghetto and for some reason he didn't want to and they sent me. My father asked him and he said that is Mr. Ser. If you want to work as a mover, go ahead. But of course my father couldn't do it. So what could be done? "Tusia go to Mr. Ser. Talk to his heart. Maybe when you ask him he will soften up and will help." I was terribly ashamed. I was so ashamed to go...but I did go. I didn't talk to him, but his mother was there. As he wasn't a good man, she was like an angel. If not this woman, I don't think I would have survived the war. She always invited me and gave me something to eat.

In the evening she would send some food for the cousin and for the aunt...everything surrounded the food. My father didn't work and all of the sudden they sudden had more food. More than that, my aunt had a job....Suddenly their food supply began to increase. They could survive and we being in the same room we had to languish in hunger and terrible poverty

Now I will tell about the miracle of Hanukkah. During this awful time of despair, it was probably in 1940...on the bookcase somebody wanted to take down a book and found a small container with cookies. These were old, dry cookies that my mother baked at the very beginning of the ghetto. They didn't rise or something and she put them aside and all the sudden it became a treasure. There was something to eat, something sweet. We started to eat it and we almost broke our teeth. This was the first miracle. The second miracle was one day a letter came

addressed to Tusia Cygielberg. Come to the ghetto post office. We went to the post office and there was a package from a girlfriend from a school from before the war. They were Russian citizens so they didn't have to go into the ghetto. We opened the package, the paper and we saw there bacon and chocolate. There were other things...and my aunt and this maid they watched...and my mother understood that she needs to give to them as well. It simply will not be possible that we shall eat without making them participate. There wasn't a lot to divide. It was all divided in millimeters.

An agreement was reached that they would share their soup with us and they gave the soup to mom, my brother, and me. Only my father said, "no, I will not participate in this shamefulnes" and they left.

The beginning of the summer mother was ordered to come to a medical commission. How will she go there? She doesn't have balance and again the same thing, you will go. I will go. How will I go? I will take you and I will hold you. She didn't leave the house before. It was three floors, in her condition to get down. It was difficult. We waited for this day. I came down with mother three floors. We left the house early. I took her and kept my eyes at the sidewalk so she will not fall on the way. We came to the address. They opened the door and I am saying this was an entrance to hell. That's how I imagine this place. It doesn't matter that it was in Lodz...they opened the door. There were three of them in uniforms with swastikas with hats. Not grey, but black. They took a piece of paper or maybe she gave them a piece of paper and they called her name. Yes it's me, yes this is you. She took off her coat. It was a little warm. "No, no take off all your clothes." Here she understood and started to open all the buttons and to take off her clothes. It was difficult for me that my mother should undress in front of everybody and what will happen here? And then he told her to enter the room and to walk there, to make three rounds and for me first of all to see my mother undressing and to see her naked body. She was undressed totally until she was naked. During these years she had long hair. She undid her hair to cover herself a little. They watched her. She was a young woman. She was 39 years old. They told her, "walk, make three rounds." Her nakedness, "How will she walk?" I know that she is unable to walk. So I prayed, "Mother please walk, Mother if you will just walk and it will end and we will leave." I watched and I saw that there were other women. She wasn't there alone. There was a bunch of papers of other women and these women did the same rounds, round one, two, three. I prayed for her that she won't fall and that she will come back. She finished all the rounds and she did not fall. Her will was stronger than her physical state and he called her to come to the table. "Yes, you are fine." He took a rubber stamp, put it in inkpad and stamped her on her breast and in German it said "geprüft."

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It started with the typhus epidemic...my aunt was the first to get sick. That was my aunt Rela. She got sick and she recovered. Right after her, her daughter Ninia got sick. This was my cousin. They had a pull and she was admitted to a hospital...she started to get better, they shaved her head, but she was very beautiful. Even in sickness she was beautiful. We were very happy, but what happened that after two days the Germans came and put all the patients from the hospital and took them. They took her. It was a great tragedy. Suddenly our Ninia was gone.

The first time all of us came down because they said whoever will stay in the apartment, they will find him with dogs and will be killed... As if nothing is supposed to happen to people, but on the other hand they threaten with death so what is the meaning. We didn't think too much. They ordered us to come down so we came down. Just in case they really mean to kill. Nobody could imagine that. The truth be told, I was small and thin. They could take me as well, but it was my mother who was really sick. But she came down and we supported her. She stood in the yard and my father...and I was so, I looked the Germans in the eye as if I was challenging them... And what happened that at certain point I saw that they are dragging her, somebody is dragging her. What is happening here? I didn't understand what is happening. Actually as if she was turning to me and wants to say something and she was already gone. We were still standing there and they took other people and we stood there because they came up to search. On one hand we said, "okay so they are searching, so what? We are not afraid, we are fine. But Mamma is gone." Until you comprehend this thing, it doesn't go in immediately and then they left, which meant that we could go back home, but how do we go up without Mom? And we went up. Dad supported me and it was so strange. You don't absorb it immediately. It was a terrible shock. Everybody was in shock. All these that their people were taken. All these that remained. I felt that I came back with Mom to the apartment, the three floors and I lied in her in bed and I cried and I yelled and I said I want to run after her and bring her back. And then father said, "you will not go."