

INTERVIEW WITH SARAH KLEIN
MEMORIAL FOR THE CHILDREN PROJECT
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Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
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INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Sarah Klein. It's January 18, 1995, and this is the Memorial for the Children Project. Mrs. Klein, I wanted to ask you about your sister. Could you please tell me her name, her full Hebrew name?

SARAH KLEIN: Mala Ita Griner.

INT: Could you spell that, please?

SARAH: M-a-l-a, that's the first, that's one name. Ita is I-t-a. And then Griner. G-r-i-n-e-r.

INT: Okay. And do you know when she was born?

SARAH: She was born in 1920.

INT: Do you know what month, or...

SARAH: I don't...

INT: The Hebrew date or anything?

SARAH: I don't remember this.

INT: Okay.

SARAH: It's written in that certificate I think, I gave you.

INT: Okay. And could you tell me a little bit about her? She was two years older than you?

SARAH: She was two years older than me.

INT: What town was she born in?

SARAH: She was born in, we come from Poland. And the city is Tomaszew Lubelski. We lived there till the war.

INT: In Poland.

SARAH: In Poland. She was born there. We lived there till 1939.

INT: Okay. Before we get to the war, could we talk a little bit about what she was like, and your family. How many children were in your family?

SARAH: We were thirteen, but nine was alive till the war. And after the war we are left seven.

INT: Could you just go down the names from the oldest, of the surviving children, of the nine children who survived childhood before the war...

SARAH: The nine children is Tema, is the oldest one. Ettel, second. Mala is the third. Sarah, it's me. And Chajka. Mottel is a brother. And Herschel is a brother. Genia is another sister. And Devorah was born in 1940. After the bombing the city.

INT: Could you tell me a little bit about what your sister Mala was like? What her personality was like as a child.

SARAH: Well, she was a very pleasant little child. Everybody liked her, and she was nice in the house, and she was nice outside with friends, and the people. And she was very smart. She went to school, she was very good in school, very bright. And she really, when she was like thirteen years old, my parents had a business, a delicatessen grocery store, so my father saw she's so smart, so she took her into the business, after school, right after school, she came to the store right away, because she was a big help. She understood business, and she was a big help and my parents were very proud of her. She was unusual smart.

So...she was a very pleasant person. She tried to help her friends. She was a young girl. When she grew up she was so smart that she was very helpful to everyone. And I really liked her so much. We got very good along. I was also, I was younger two years than her. And we got so attached, both of us. I had more sisters. I liked them all. And brothers. But with her, she was special.

INT: How was she special, would you say?

SARAH: She was special. She had patience to talk, to listen, and to give advice, like an advice between girlfriends, in the younger age, you know, you have good girlfriends, bad girlfriends, so she always knew how to handle them. And she told me how to handle my friends, too, because she was very smart. She always told me, "This girlfriend is not for you, or the other one is for you," and she was very picky with friends. Because she always liked friends who she can, you know, enjoy herself.

INT: So she could see a person's character very easily.

SARAH: She can say, yes. She always could tell you. She was very smart. She knew how to, as a young child, she was like an adult. Like a teenager. She was only thirteen years old. Like when she was thirteen years old, she was smart like an eighteen year old girl. And people was admiring her, like in the business, she was standing with the business people and talked to them, prices about merchandise stuff my father used to buy. In wholesale places. She used to go with him. And she was the one that told him, "This is tomorrow, it's got this price, it's going to be dropped down, and this price is going to go up." She knew everything. She was very unusual. Very smart.

INT: Very smart.

SARAH: Very smart.

INT: Did she do well in school?

SARAH: She did very well in school. We all did good in school, but she really was like a genius. She was a **very** smart, and I miss her so much it's unbelievable. She's now dead, she got killed by the Germans.

INT: Could you tell me what happened to her?

SARAH: When we went, and they took us to Russia during the war, in 1940, at that time, before they took us away, she went back to our city. She was with us together in Rava Russka, as I mentioned before. When the Germans came in, so we had to run away from them. And she went back to Poland to our city with another cousin, her cousin, her name is Rivka. My mother's sister's daughter. They both went back to Poland, because we still have a store there, left. So people was talking, maybe she can, she was so smart that my father told her, maybe she can go back and sell the store, so he'll have money to have a little money during the war. So she went back for this. And she couldn't come back to us, because right away they closed the, you know, the border. They closed the border, she couldn't go back. She had to stay already with the Germans.

So we have an uncle, he was a shochet, he stayed with them. As a matter of fact, this shochet was killed also.

INT: And what happened with the cousin?

SARAH: Everybody got killed. She was also, I mean, she would be alive. She was lucky, because one of our customers from my parents' business, they were very good customers, and they owed us a lot of money, because they were poor. Sometimes they couldn't pay, when they shop in the store. So my parents always said, "If you don't have money, you'll pay me whenever you have." This was before the war. But when the war was, so they remembered this, that, how good my parents was to them, a non-Jewish family. And they knew that my sister is...is there, and that the Germans are killing people, so they took her in. And they said, "Look. We're going to save your life. Because I remember your parents were so good to us, and we're going to try to save your life. You don't have no parents here, because you were away." So they said, "Don't worry. We'll take care of you."

So they had a farm with cows. So they gave her, they put her on a very wide skirt, they shouldn't recognize she's Jewish. And a scarf on her head, and a stick, like a cane, to chase around the cows, to help take care of the cows outside.

INT: What town was this? Was this back in Tomaszew Lubelski?

SARAH: This was not in Tomaszów. This was a little suburb near Tomaszów, not Tomaszów. She was running to them, because she knew, she was in the business, so she knew who was, who to go to, so she went, and they took her in. And they were holding her till two weeks before the war. They were taking care of her.

INT: Two weeks before the war was over.

SARAH: Before the war is over, that's right. Yeah. And another young man in her age was also, they had a yard good store, also our neighbors. And it was, was saved by also a non-Jewish family next door to the family who my sister took care of. And he's alive. So she was there, so my sister was helping out with this stuff, that she couldn't be put in a corner and keep hiding, because she had to breathe, she had to eat. So they made her look like a non-Jewish girl, and they saved her. They helped her a lot.

But a week before the war, the Germans put out signs outside in the whole city, "Whoever knows where a Jew is, they're going to pay with very big nice award." If anybody finds somebody Jewish. So then we pay you very good for this. So one boy knew that she's Jewish, from the neighborhood. A non-Jewish little boy. He knew that she is Jewish. But he didn't say anything the whole time, because they never mentioned about awards. But a week before the war, they start to pay awards for anybody who's Jewish. They should come and tell. So he came, he told the Germans that he knows where a Jewish girl is. He went to that place outside where my sister was, outside with the cows. With a German, and the Germans shot her on the place, where she was standing. And she dropped dead. And this young man knew about it.

INT: Because he was next door hiding in the other house.

SARAH: Right. He was next door. And he saw the whole thing. He felt so bad, he was very upset about it, but he couldn't, he had to be saved himself, he couldn't say anything at that time. After the war, when we came back from Russia, the whole family, my mother was very sick. She probably was not alive at that time, because she died very shortly after ...

INT: So do you mean, she never found out what happened to Mala.

SARAH: She never found out, but my father knew, so he told my father. He knew my father, the young man, and he said, "Look, I'll tell you exactly when she was dead, when she dropped dead, was killed by a German, so you'll know to keep the Yahrzeit."

INT: What is her Yahrzeit, do you know?

SARAH: The Yahrzeit was Chamesh Aser b'Shvat, this week. I kept her Yahrzeit. I light a candle, and I said, you know, Kaddish for her. Because this was Chamesh Aser b'Shvat. I have it written down in the book. My father, let him rest in peace, gave me the exact date, and every year I keep her Yahrzeit. So...

INT: How old was she when she was killed?

SARAH: When she was killed, she must have been like eighteen or nineteen years. So we knew that that's how she was killed. And we are very upset about it, and we felt so upset that she could live, I mean, another week, she would find us, and we would find her, and we would be together. And here we found out that she's dead.

And my father, after the war, he tried to go to our city. He wanted to find out more about her, because since he found out this. But he...the man who took care of her, died. The man who took care.

INT: He wasn't killed by the Germans for hiding her?

SARAH: No, he just died. He was sick, and he died. He couldn't ask anybody. And his widow moved away to her children, and he doesn't know where she went, because she had children. So she went to live with her children, and he couldn't find more information about her. That's the information he had from the young man.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to add about Mala?

SARAH: Well, I always think about her, because especial, me and her, we were so close. And as long as I'm going to live, it's unforgettable something like this. Because she was so special, and she was so smart, she was so devoted to the family, and her sisters, and to people, and to friends. I mean, she was such a good person. I don't see many like her. I mean, it's unusual the way she was. Such an important person. And I miss her a lot, and I really, when I talk about her, I'm so upset all the time.

INT: And her Yahrzeit was just this week, so this was...

SARAH: And the Yahrzeit was just this Tuesday. I mean Monday night and Tuesday. Chamesh Aser b'Shvat.

INT: So I guess it's appropriate that we're doing this...now.

Well, thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)