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## **Oral history interview with Eugenia Unger**

**RG-50.874\*0001**

### **Summary**

Eugenia Unger (nee Genia Rotstein) was born on March 30, 1926. She was born in Warsaw and had 2 brothers: Ignatz and David and a sister, Renia. Genia was the youngest. About the children. There were, altogether, 70 or 80 family members, and they were very close to each other. Every summer they took a 3-month vacation together. The males in the family would join the rest in the weekend. Father always brought with him sweets from the Kapulsky bakery. Father had 2 brothers: Leon and Simon. Genia's parents were Nathan and Rukla. Rukla's sisters were Eva and Ruzha. The children of uncle Leon, were Solek, Munik, Genia and Yazha. The children of Simon were: Arieh and Yazha.

Father had 8 or 10 siblings. He played the flute. He was the director of the slaughter house, where 2,000 were employed . His partner was Mr. Gardetzky.

Parental grandparents were Gitele and Berek, they were observant Jews and so was Genia's father for a few years. Grandparents taught Genia some Judaism, as otherwise the family was not observant. Grandparents lived in Pelsovisna (?) (40km from Warsaw) crossing the Vistula.

They spoke Polish at home, not Yiddish.

She remembers that before war, for the grandfather's funeral the neighbors closed all the stores out of respect

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(December 16, 2012. Second meeting)

Just moments before the war, the family did not think Germany will invade because of the pact between Mussolini, Hitler and Poland. Genia and a cousin were on vacation in Yuzefov(?) The 2 girls returned immediately by train. Genia was 12 then. Listening to the president announcing the Germans had invaded, and exhorting the people to donate sheets, towels and drugs to help the many injured lying in the streets. Description of the first month of the war. Thirst and hunger. Father was injured by some artillery, but they did not want to cause panic among the other children. Fire bombs. The city was in flames. They decided to go to Vistula. One of the maids took some valuables to hide, and the other furs. Mother took her jewelry but father said to abandon everything and things were strewn on the road. In the Vistula the air was a little better as it was clear from smoke.

Father organized the community to take turns to provide to everyone, until there was not more food at all. Rationing coupons. Wearing the star of David. Dogs had to be given away.

The establishment of the ghetto. The German factories Többens and Schultz allowed Jews to work with work permits. Ghetto encompassed 200 streets, and then it was reduced to 80 streets; then to 50. Preparing bunkers for hiding. Contraband with the Poles to obtain foods. Genia's brothers were caught and taken to the police station for 5 days. They were taken to Paviak . Genia took food to them. She was 12 or 13. Selections for the death squads. Piles of bodies. Common graves.

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The brothers were going to be deported. Genia took to them boots, pillows, food, clothes and ran towards Paviak. The plan was to take all prisoners to the station and then to a concentration camp. The fate of Genia's brothers and father.

Witnessing a horrible event: two of Genia's cousins were lying in their beds next to each other. One was 7 and the other was 5. One showed Genia his half-eaten hand, eaten by the other boy because he was hungry. Genia asked the latter not to continue eating the brother's hand because she was going to bring food the next day. When she arrived the next day, they were both dead.

Poles raped the women hiding in the bunker. Running away from the Poles afterwards. The Nazis caught the cousin who had jewels in a jacket hidden by his mother. He was let go in exchange of the address of the new bunker where the family was hiding. His father jumped from the second floor in despair, and went crazy. They went then to Mila 18 and hid there.

At the age of 14, while in hiding a half a block from the plaza where the transports were concentrated, Eugenia witnessed a procession of little children following a man holding a baby in his arms. Later on she found out that it had been Janus Korczak, walking to his death at the head of the children and the staff.

Witnessing executions from there.

Tepperman, a young Jew, returned to the bunker and invited them to fight with Mordechai Anilewitz.

10 days later, the Nazis showed up. The family hugged each other, and went to the central place where they were told to gather. It seems that

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was retaliation for the Nazis defeat during the ghetto uprising. For 5 weeks the brave Jews fought the Polish army, with all its sophisticated equipment.

(Third conversation: December 22, 2012)

Genia's brothers attempted to leave the ghetto to go to Russia, but they could not stand the cold, and returned. Genia worked in the brush factory in the ghetto. She also tried to obtain foodstuff outside the ghetto walls. Eugenia's brothers were caught in the Aryan section while trying to obtain some food stuffs.

Genia's opinion of the Judenrat and the Jewish Police. She does not want to judge...

The heroic uprising of the Warsaw ghetto.

Education in the ghetto. The suicide of the young women taken in as prostitutes for the Nazis.

The end of the ghetto. Leaving the hideout in the bakery. Going to the place of concentration for transport. The Ukrainians helped put the Jews on the train by urging them with pointed lashes. The train nightmare.

Finding out the end of the transports was the extermination camps.

Arrival with her mother, and processing into Lublin/Majdanek. Work carrying huge stones and sod. Staying 2-3 months there.

Auschwitz Birkenau. Arriving there with her mother. Finding the help of one Villy Goldstein, who had been at Birkenau already for 2 years. Villy was from Czechoslovakia, and although killed there soon after, he

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recommended Eugenia to his sisters. The number tattoo. The barrack. Working in a grenade factory. Eugenia was there for a year and a half. She was in the famous "commando 10". Getting rid of lice in bathtubs by bathing with icy water in the winter. Sleeping with dead bodies. Punishments. Surviving typhoid fever. Mother worked in the shoes workshop. Eugenia volunteered to work as a mechanic, with no training whatsoever.

A day in Auschwitz. Abuse at Auschwitz/Birkenau. Being ordered to wash the barracks on the Day of Atonement.

The liquidation of the intelligentsia of the ghetto.

Recollection of the ghetto, when both Eugenia and her mother had the hair cut off.

When she was slated to the "heaven commando", to death, she told Eichmann she was only 14 years old, she wanted to live...and he spared her.

The Sonderkommando.

Heroism of the children, giving up their space in the "sick barrack" for the benefit of another one.

Eugenia fought to stay alive and to keep her mother alive.

A female guard befriended Eugenia, and suggested she escape but Eugenia refused because she needed to protect her mother.

Punishment in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Kneeling for hours over stones.

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The “Canada” section. Finding a coin resulted in the death of someone Eugenia gave the coin to. She had suffocated her son while in hiding, to prevent the baby from crying.

The rumor was that the women did not get their period during imprisonment in the camp because of use of some powder in the food.

Mengele’s experiments on children and women. (Barrack number 10)

Volunteering as a mechanic but not having any idea on how to do the job. The teacher Klein, for whom she worked, defended her for being a good worker. She worked with the machine that manufactured the head of the grenades. The machines were made from milking machines parts. Making defective pieces on purpose.

Arrival of the Russians, who warned them of the imminent dynamiting of the camp. Those who refused to evacuate the camp survived. Eugenia left, but her reward was the Death March!

Telling the Russians: “I did not survive to become a prostitute”. They said: We liberated you: we have a claim upon you”.

A few months after the war, Zionist youth recruited a group of survivors to go to Israel. Trucks took them to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Austria and to the Italian mountains. She met her future husband there. Husband had had a wife and child before, but he did not want to discuss his suffering during the war.

Groups of people going to Israel were sent to different places in Italy before embarking, but Eugenia and her husband were no longer eligible to go because only single people were taken. Eugenia was already 4 months pregnant. Arrival in Bolzano, in the border with Germany.

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Cyprus. Arrival in Modena. (Torture chambers there.) Then to Santa Marina de Leuca. Her son contracted TB. She was denied the newly discovered penicillin, given only to soldiers. Son survived.

While a refugee in Italy, they heard Israel's Declaration of Independence.

UNWRA supported them. Paris. Le Havre. She had papers to go to the USA, but Eisenhower would not allow them in until their number arrived, based on the existing quota. After 3 or 3-1/2 years in Italy, Eugenia's husband remembered he had a cousin in Argentina. Waiting 6 months to go to Argentina.

Last voyage of the ship. Other passengers on the ship were the Spaniards escaping Franco. Eugenia's son was almost a year old. They traveled for a month and a half to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Hotel. To Asuncion, Paraguay. Peron did not allow Jews in, directly. Eugenia tried to go back to Poland. It was finally time to mourn the dead relatives. Dr. Aquino saved Eugenia from all her illnesses. Learning Spanish was easy for them because they knew Italian after the 3 years of sojourn there. A man showed up offering to cross illegally for \$100, but they had no money. Crossing the border to Argentina on the ship named Asuncion. Arrival in Rosario, Argentina.

The change of Eugenia's religious beliefs before, during and after the war. Her credo. She is sorry she did not fight with the Partisans.

Eugenia's mother returned to Poland 4 years later, looking for relatives

Her cousin Monik.

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When Pilsutsky died, Eugenia's father was called to play the trumpet at his funeral.

Eugenia suffers from survivor's guilt.

Upon her arrival in Argentina with her son, without the language, and (at 4 a.m.) a cousin of Eugenia's husband showed up and invited them to move to her apartment. Husband arrived on July 9.

Eugenia found a position as a maid in exchange of a little milk for her son. She had properties left in Poland but Eugenia was afraid to claim them. She slept 4 months in the street when she had 4-5 houses to her name!

Eugenia's reflections on her life in Argentina. After the war, she returned to her Judaism. Her children did not. Her oldest son absorbed the mother's drama through her milk, but her second son did not suffer.

She would never go back to Poland as the land is steeped on the ashes and the blood of the Jews.

Her reaction to Landsman's movie "Shoah"." Where were the Righteous?"

Eugenia has survivors' guilt. She asks herself why she survived and her older brothers did not. The brothers fought and tried; she was young and spent the time hiding.

She thanks this beautiful land (Argentina) that helped her to recover.

In praise of Argentina. (They thought she was Italian.)



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Eugenia was very active in diverse areas in Argentina. One of her efforts was to bring the Anna Frank exhibit to Argentina, and tour with it. She was also active in and a donor of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation, which was 19 years old at the time of the interview. (She was named by the government “an illustrious citizen of Argentina”.)

Before she dies, Eugenia would like to have a monument built to the memory of the Shoah in Buenos Aires.

She is very generous and her motto is: “the more you give the more you receive”.

She laments the lack of unity in the Jewish community. For example, Jewish stores are open on Memorial Day.

Eugenia is still afraid for the security of Israel because thanks to that country, the Jews feel more secure in the world. She enumerates the various events Jews survived throughout history.

Eugenia says that president Macri gave them the land for the Shoah monument in the Paseo de la Infanta site.

She asks herself why she survived and her older brothers did not. The brothers fought and tried, whereas she was young and spent the time hiding.

Eugenia believes that anti-Semitism’s expressions in the world now are similar to the manifestations before WWII. She mentions Chavez, the labor leader, saying that hatred of Jews doesn’t abate over the world.

She also mentions Jedbavne, and cannot fathom the perpetrators’ motivation.

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Obtaining a community meeting house for the survivors. Graciela Hinis. Regina Steiner. Fundacion Memoria del Holocausto. Lichtig.

She missed by chance the AMIA bombing. That was the day of the week she was accustomed to visit the offices, but that day she had another appointment! She participated for 3 and half years in the demonstrations for Living Memory in front of the Supreme Court after the AMIA bombing.

Trying to obtain artifacts for the Holocaust Museum in Buenos Aires.