

## RG-50.944.0050

### Interview with Mirjam Pollin

#### Summary

Mirjam Pollin was born in 1926 in Breslau but grew up in Hamburg where her family settled after her father had tried to arrange for them, unsuccessfully, to immigrate to America. Her father and mother divorced when she was very young, she had one older sister and one older brother. After the Nazi's rise to power, her sister was sent to America and her brother to Palestine, her father and his new wife managed to go to England, but Mirjam's mother perished in the Holocaust. Mirjam was sent to Sweden in January 1939, where she stayed for eight years, before leaving for Israel, where she still lives.

#### Details

- Mirjam remembers when Hitler came to power in 1933, they watched the Nazis' march and heard when they sang: "when the Jewish blood drops from our knives our lives will be twice as good", all this made Mirjam terrified. She says that her whole childhood was characterized by fear.
- Mirjam's father was arrested already in April 1933 after a boycott against Jewish shops (her father ran a small shop selling tobacco and newspapers) since he held communist sympathies. He was released after his friends from the First World War wrote and testified to his courage but was arrested soon again. When he came home he said that the children needed to be saved.
- In 1936 Mirjam and her brother and sister started going to Eva Warburg, who ran a Jewish daycare center, after school, "she was a wonderful woman, she made all children feel that they were loved by her", Mirjam says. It was through Eva Warburg that Mirjam managed to come to Sweden.
- After her brother and sister was sent abroad, Mirjam lived with her mother who was a hat maker. They struggled to survive, "we had no money" says Mirjam. They were given food packages from the Jewish community.
- On Kristallnacht, Mirjam and her mother saw how a teacher and his students threw rocks through the windows at the synagogue, they spent the night at a friend's house, through the window they could see how Gestapo searched with flashlights for Jewish names at the doors of apartment buildings. "I cannot explain this situation, to not know what will happen, to not have any protection", says Mirjam.
- In early 1939 Mirjam was given permission to go to Sweden. Mirjam went to get her passport herself, the official who received her suddenly said that she would not get the it. "I felt like all the blood vanished from my body. The man saw my fear and laughed and then he gave me the passport", says Mirjam.
- When Mirjam boarded the train for Sweden, she did not have the feeling of saying good bye to her mother, it felt like an adventure, an excursion, and she was with Eva and other children that she knew.
- Mirjam knew nothing about Sweden, when they arrived she saw the sign "förbjudet" (forbidden/verboten) on a few doors and it was completely clear to her that there were special laws for Jews also in this country.
- Mirjam came to live with a very secular Jewish couple in a suburb to Stockholm and after three weeks she started a regular Swedish school.
- Mirjam quickly learned that it was positive to come from Germany, but to be a refugee and a Jew was negative. Later when she learned Swedish she sometimes said that she came from the very northern part of Sweden. She always felt different and that she didn't belong.

- She went to school for one and a half years, and to a special “household school for girls” for one year. When she was 15, she started working as a maid.
- Mirjam tried desperately but in vain, to raise money on her own in order to make her mother come to Sweden. She knocked on the doors of wealthy Jewish persons.
- She remembers the last letter from her mother when her mother knew that she would be deported. Mirjam didn’t want to live anymore, she had such bad conscience that she couldn’t help her. She still suffers from feelings of guilt. Mirjam never learned exactly what happened to her mother.
- In Stockholm Mirjam encountered a group of other Jewish refugee teenagers who ran a kibbutz outside of the town of Falun in the county of Dalarna with the ambition to go to Palestine. She immediately wanted to join their group since she felt that she could not stay permanently in Sweden. Also in this situation, it was Eva Warburg who helped her. “Joining this group saved my life”, says Mirjam.
- The kibbutz ran a small toy factory, they produced wooden figures of traditional Swedish characters that became very popular.
- In 1943 a young Jewish refugee from Germany, that had fled from Denmark, came to the kibbutz. “I had just finished with the dishes in the kitchen, then he came and I put out some food for him. I realized directly that this was the man of my life, and after three weeks I had him in my hands”, says Mirjam. His name was Oshi and they married and lived together until he passed away a few years ago.
- After the war was over, Oshi and Mirjam prepared to go to Palestine. They boarded a ship in southern Sweden with hundreds of passengers. In Cyprus the ship was stopped and they were detained in a camp. They escaped by digging a 55-meter-long tunnel. When they finally arrived in Palestine Mirjam got the best hard-boiled egg and tea that she had ever tasted. She felt at home from the beginning. Everyone was happy that they had come, “you are needed” they said.
- Mirjam still has nightmares where she is chased by Germans in uniforms and hats. However, she says that she feels very rich, she has everything she needs and she has lived a happy life.