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Summary

Genia Litwin, born 1925 in Warsaw, Poland, discusses her father Haskel (Henryk) Penk and mother Sofia, née Kartoffel; her father being a tailor; living on a Jewish street, Mila; her older brother Salek (Josef Israel) (born two years before her); her younger brother Mendel; her parents speaking Yiddish but never learning it herself; every Saturday going to visit her mother's brother and his four daughters; her mother always buying a live carp for Shabbat; not being Orthodox; being a musical family; her brother playing the mandolin; her mother going to the opera every week, getting the cheapest seat; her father being an anxious man; being strong academically and getting free tuition to a prestigious private gymnasium, but her parents not having money for the books and not going; always wanting to work with children; in September 1939, when Germans invaded, seeing German soldiers pull and tear off the beards and peyes of Orthodox Jewish men; her mother saying she had to escape to the Soviet Union; her older brother going ahead with his friends; in September 1939, her mother believing the war would be over in two months; leaving by foot with her uncle and his daughters who were 10 and 8 years older than her; bringing 500 zloty, a gray coat and elegant shoes; walking and waiting in the forest, in the snow, on the Ukrainian border for three weeks with a group; the Soviet border patrols not wanting to let them in; the group sending her, the youngest, to try to convince the soldiers, but in vain; at night, for 10-12 hours walking across the border in the forest, crossing rivers, with a smuggler; ending up in Bialystok in early October; being allowed to sleep at the synagogue; begging for food in the countryside; going to Rivne where they stayed in an attic; her uncle and cousins being sent to work in the Ural; being placed in a Polish boarding school (the name at 38 min 45 sec); being transferred by bus to an orphanage in Sarny; learning Russian in six months; in 1941, the front approaching and the Russian staff leaving; a Jewish nurse telling her they had to leave; going to the train station, but the last train, with her teacher, having left; the station manager getting her on a freight train with NKVD papers to Olevsk; the train with her teacher having been bombed; hearing her brother was in Voroshilovgrad and trying to get there; getting to Kiev, seeing children from the orphanage behaving crazy; the station manager in Kiev getting her on a train to Voroshilovgrad; not having any food; the trip taking three weeks; a family next to her never giving her any of all the food they had; but the family taking her out to the station when she fell unconscious; getting food from a kolkhoz (a collective farm in the Soviet Union); continuing on the train; arriving to the address where her brother was supposed to be, but the family not being able to take her in; having to go to the orphanage in Voroshilovgrad; hearing her brother's wife's family was in Saratov and going there; hearing all Jews were interned; applying to the university, studying Slavic languages; wanting to be useful, going to a kolkhoz; herding pigs at a farm for the Soviet army during the extremely cold winter of 1942; being told she had been sentenced to death for forgetting a few pigs outside that froze to death, but being forgiven after three weeks because of her young age; getting a new job shoveling snow from tractors; not understanding how she survived since she only had her thin gray coat and elegant shoes and was covered in ice every evening; getting 400 grams bread per day and a bowl of soup; being obsessed with killing Hitler; when turning 18, in 1943, joining a female Polish battalion of the Soviet army; the train to the enrollment office in Seltse? being full; sitting between the train cars, being assaulted by a

Russian soldier; enrolling and volunteering to bring a message to the next town; walking alone for 12 hours in the snow, while airplanes dropped flares; being promoted to officer as a reward; being technical secretary to the operating officer Bukovnik; a bridge of dead bodies being created over a river, letting the Soviet troops cross; in 1944, staying with the Berlin army in Praga outside Warsaw; in early 1945, not believing her boss, coronel Petraschitsky, when he told her about the Holocaust; walking across the frozen river Wisla (Vistula) looking for her family in Warsaw; falling into despair finding the ghetto destroyed; believing her parents and younger brother ended up in Treblinka; suppressing her memories by working hard; becoming a pediatrician.