

GOLDA SCHARFF'S HOLOCAUST SURVIVAL EXPERIENCE

I. Introduction by Sharon Scharff Greenwald.

My mother, Golda Solitar Scharff, passed away at the early age of 68 in 1990. She was a vibrant, brilliant and spiritual woman. She rarely discussed her experience of the war with her children because it just was too painful for her. Also, she accounts in her video testimony, that she wanted only positive influences for her children. After her death, I found an appeals letter she had written to the Claims Conference Hardship Fund in Germany to Chancellor Helmut Kohl to justify her receiving German slave labor reparations. Sadly, she lost that appeal. Fortunately, she wrote the letter to Chancellor Kohl in which she shared her experience of survival. In addition, my mother was interviewed twice by video by Mr. Paul Mohl and Ms. Tina Rauch on behalf of the Yale University/Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies/ Yale University Library on February 2, 1987 and October 26, 1987. The below true account, is my mother's survival experience that I transcribed from the above-referenced letter and video testimonies. It should not substitute watching the videos because some aspects of her survival experience and feelings regarding her survival experience were not included in this below testimony.

II. Background and Sokal

I, Golda Scharff, maiden name Golda Solitar, was born in Sokal, Poland on July 18, 1922. I was from a very wealthy family in Sokal. We owned a textile and tailoring shop; and our business designed scarves, clothing and woven materials for the people of Sokal and surrounding communities. I was the middle sister of two older sisters, Leah and Adela and two younger sisters, Pesia and Zelda. My three brothers were named Jekatuel, my oldest brother, my fraternal twin, Herschel and Joseph (Yosela), the youngest brother. My family was settled in Sokal and the surrounding area for many generations. The town of Sokal and adjacent communities had approximately 16,000 Jews, it had about 8,000 of Polish descent, and it had about 11,000 of Ukrainian descent. The area I am from is called Galicia, and this territory had a history of boundary disputes among Ukraine, Russia and Poland. I loved Sokal. I felt the entire city was dedicated to strong community beliefs and behavior.

My childhood was a lovely childhood. Our home life was exceptionally beautiful. It was ideal. I was raised in an ultra-orthodox Jewish home. My father, Moshe Solitar, was a great businessman, an exceptionally good father, good citizen and a learned man; and my mother was a smart and kind woman and a wonderful business lady. My oldest brother, Jekatuel, was a respected business man and was also regarded as a Talmudic scholar. Even though my family had a successful business, the true value they encouraged was the endeavor to study and learn. My parents encouraged to study first, above all. As for the depth of Jewish life, I cannot forget it. It was beautiful. Every holiday meal was a feast, and celebrations were elaborate, with so much spirit and joy. As I think now, it is so hard to replace what I had in the experience of my home. I wish I could have given my children that environment. I recall that in the evening, after business was completed, my father would sit before his large Talmudic books. He read and prayed, and you saw joy sparkling from him. He never tired. Friday evening was Shabbas (the Sabbath), and to our dinner table, all guests we invited, no matter who they were and what they had in terms of material possessions or what they did in profession. All people were invited. We learned not to show off our wealth. We wanted everyone to know in the community, that no one went without a Shabbas meal. And after Shabbas dinner, my father's tradition would be to ask each of my sisters, my brothers and myself, what we learned that week for discussion. The boys had to discuss their Jewish

studies first, and then the girls, because in my family, the boys had a bigger duty to learn Torah than the girls. We were an orthodox Jewish family with a wonderful life.

My parents taught me : Torah, knowledge and good deeds were important. So I committed to learn a trade. I wanted to be dignified, receive respect and be able to give back to the community. I went to Lvov to learn how to sew at 15 about 83 kilometers from Sokal. There, I studied and learned how to weave sweaters and garments at 15. I came back to Sokal at 16 with this knowledge and trade. My oldest brother, Jekatuel, was so proud of me, he bought me a sewing machine. I felt I was an independent girl knowing how to sew and making sweaters and dresses.

I would say my most cherish memory of childhood is the joy and dedication people in Sokal had to one another and their concern for each others' well being. My family always seemed to help the poor and those in need. We believed in sharing our good fortune. We were taught that a person was not less a person because he had less. We were taught to respect each other as equal humans. I must say it is so different in America. Also, I remember the respect children gave to parents. This respect was the only way. Also, I remember my father wanted his children to keep up with modern aspects of life as we read many nonreligious books, too. I remember reading Robinson Crusoe. He would always ask, what did you read and what did you learn? We read by candle light.

Our family had a lot of contact with the gentile community. I went to school with my gentile friends. Sokal was a community that everyone lived like one big family. We had a large store and customers would come into the store to purchase our merchandise. It was a paradise. Everyone knew each other. Customers felt comfortable to discuss issues with my mother about their children and their life. The farmers that came to the store knew us well, so well, that often they would bring fresh harvested poppy seeds for our hamantaschen (a tri-corner pastry) for Purim and before Sukkot, they knew to bring the greenery for us to make our lulavs for traditions during Sukkot. They contributed their products to our Jewish holidays without our even asking for them.

III. The Invasion By Both the Germans and the Russians into Sokal.

It was the year 1939, and a great destruction occurred when Poland was invaded into by Germany. In 1939, I was seventeen and still attending school. We noticed a change in society much earlier. In 1936, there was a wave of antisemitism through Poland. The Polish people came out with communications that they did not want to mix Jews and Gentiles in higher education. Then, Ukranian people started creating more exclusive cooperatives and businesses to keep Jews out. Then Poland started having legal restrictions against Jews. With the invasion of the Germans in 1939, I witnessed horror, destruction, and bestiality against humanity.

The first invasion I remember was by the Russians against the Germans. Our town was close to the Russian border divided by the Bug River. In 1941, the Germans came from the west with their soldiers and they fought the Russians from the east. Our city was under siege. The Germans first went door to door trying to find communist party loyalists and killed them right on the spot. I remember one day my mother went to the outskirts of Sokal to pick up milk and she said to me upon her return that it seems to her no one will survive. She said this conclusion to me because she could not believe the amount of corpses that she saw laying by the roads. I told her that she was right. That evening there was a knock on our door. The Germans were looking for communist loyalists. I told my mother we need to protect

ourselves. I told her maybe we should dress and look like the Ukrainian people since the Germans liked them. The blood shed was terrible.

The night when the Germans finally invaded Sokal in full force and took over our city, the German soldiers brought with them Jews from the western side of Europe. Also, many Jews came to Sokal fleeing the assault in the west of Poland. These German soldiers marched these Jews they caught into the flat fields of Sokal because it was easier to corral them. All of these Jews that they gathered on the plains of Sokal were next to the Bug river. The Bug River had a bridge from our town across to the Russian border. These Jewish people were stripped of their belongings and were all naked. And then suddenly, the Germans made them move to the bridge and across the bridge to the Russian side. But the Russian soldiers said "Go back, Go back", because they were afraid there were German spies within this crowd of Jews coming over the bridge. And they ran the naked Jewish people back across the bridge to the German's side who then shot them as they crossed back. We heard horrible screams and shots fired that evening. That night, my father went door to door to neighbors to get food and to bring the food to these Jews at the plains that survived. Our house was converted into a hospital. We started cleaning the wounds of the injured people who still had a hope of survival. We prepared food. We took everything out of our cellar to share our food with these people.

IV. Ghetto Life

Hell on earth happened. They put all of the Jewish people in a Ghetto in Sokal and all Jews from the surrounding areas close to Sokal were also brought into the Sokal Ghetto because our city was a larger area from the other villages. They took my parent's business away and they took all Jews' businesses away. They appointed a group called the Judenrat, a Jewish council to oversee Jews in the ghetto to ensure that they behaved and gave their valuables to the Germans; and this Judenrat had its own Jewish police force. They made us wear yellow stars on our clothes. Then, they told us when we could leave and not leave our home. A curfew was established. The ghetto was filled with thousands and thousands of Jewish people. It was crowded and unsanitary. And then typhus and disease broke out. Every morning I awoke with death around me. You can't forget. You can't forget.

While in the Ghetto, we were forced to work at jobs for the Gestapo. I was forced to work at the Gestapo headquarters which was located at a Catholic convent adjacent to a monastery. Everyday I would leave my family and I never knew if I would return home. I worked for civilian administrators at that Gestapo headquarters that were in charge of shipping agriculture products to Germany. This convent was close to the railroad station so the location served well for the purpose of transport of the agricultural supplies.

It was winter of 1942 and one day I told my mom I cannot go back to work today. I had a feeling that something bad would happen to me. I told my mom I was afraid. It was odd when I went to work there, because the commander in charge never really made me work as hard as the other boys and girls who worked there. I did not understand why he treated me better. But, that day, I had a very bad feeling and I had an intuition that I should not go to work. So my mom said I did not have to go.

When I did not go into work that day, the commander in charge who treated me well went to the Jewish police in the Ghetto and complained that I did not show up for work. He told the Jewish police to get my father, Moshe Solitar. The commander told my father to immediately fetch me and make me go to work or they would kill him. My older sister said she would go in my place and I should not go to work,

but I told her I would go. So I went back to work. When I came back, the commander said today is my birthday and we need to prepare for a celebration. The boys and girls that worked with me, cooked, set a table and served the food. Then the commander said we had to all sit down. He said someone stole food from the kitchen. Then he took a gun out. And then he aimed it at me. But the bullet struck a boy next to me from Belzec. All of the Jewish workers at the convent were required to bury the boy by the south fence of the monastery to bear witness to what would happen if any of us were disobedient. I went to work everyday after that incident.

During the time in the Ghetto, there were frequent beatings and German rulings or "Aktions" that applied to Ghetto life. After each such "Aktion", I always lost a sister or brother. The Germans started coming to clean out the Ghetto of Jews, the Juden Frei process, between 1943-1944. There were Germans in SS uniforms who would come into the Ghetto with black dressed Ukrainian soldiers who aided them. These Aktions were aided also by the Judenrat and their Jewish police force. At one of these first "Aktions", they caught my little brother Joseph (Yosela) and took him away in a truck, but they only took him for labor and he returned. I did not know this capture of my little brother was for this purpose and I thought they took him away for good. I ran out of the house to look for him and chased the truck all the way to the gate by the Ghetto. At the gate, a soldier held me back, and I started screaming, "Let me go, I am not Jewish, I am not Jewish". I told the soldier I just came to take some things from the Jews since they sell so cheap. This soldier did not believe me and pushed me into columns of Jews by the market being marched to the train station to be taken by cattle car to Belzec concentration camp. At the train station there were Germans who would write down how many Jews were captured and going into these cattle cars. Already piles of dead bodies were at the market place that one needed to walk through to get to the train station. I tried to hide behind a vegetable stand in the market. A German soldier with a black moustache stared at me. Then, I ran away into a Ukrainian cooperative store and I tried to hide in it. But a Ukrainian boy pointed me out in the store and he said "Vas hast du gemacht?" (translation "What have you done?"). He told the storekeeper I was Jewish. I said I was not Jewish. And the boy said, "Yes, she is Jewish, I know because I went to school with her." That same black mustached soldier came and got me and then put me back in the column to go to the train station and cattle car. I ran away again and went back to my home in the Ghetto.

My father gave us all gold coins and told us if a German snatches you, give him some gold coins to let you go free. He gave my little sister gold coins. Her name was Zelda. Germans came knocking on our door for an Aktion one day. Zelda was hiding in the attic. A soldier found her. Zelda offered him a gold coin. The soldier shot her dead on the spot.

At another Aktion, I was marched to the marketplace again. We had to stay there all day until nightfall. I again ran away from the marketplace. I really don't know where I got my desire to survive, but I kept running away. I just did not want to die. I laid myself in a yard of a house by the market. And then a Polish lady who saw me, started screaming: "a Jew hides in the yard, a Jew hides in the yard". This time, I was not able to run away. A soldier grabbed me and he dragged me through the market to the railroad station. My sister, Adela and her 3 month old baby were in line at the railroad station and she would not let me go at this point because she saw what happened to Zelda. She begged me not to run away. Adela was married to a prestigious rabbi from a rabbinical family from Lemberg, but her husband was taken by the Russians for war.

I need to mention, I was a biological twin. It was very hard to be apart from my fraternal brother, Herschel. Apart from the truth that every Jew was me and I was every Jew, Herschel was of a special

bond to me. A Commander Epler came to the Sokal Judenrat to find Jewish boys on behalf of a business owner, Gregori Jakchinski . This business owner wanted 400 Jewish boys for slave labor. When you asked for boys for slave labor, the parents were willing to give money not to give up their boys. Like a ransom. The Judenrat and Commander Epler got paid off and only gave this man 200 boys. Unfortunately, they did take my brother Herschel away for slave labor. I ran after the truck he was on. I pulled my hair out, I could not sleep, I could not eat. My father hid a Torah in his house. From the day my brother Herschel left, everyday I would put a little prayer note in that Torah praying to God that God gives to my brother half the days of my life.

As I said, it was 1942, and they took my twin brother, Herschel, to a slave labor camp . I wanted to go visit him. A woman heard I was going to travel to the camp and she had only one son. She was from a village next to Sokal. She contacted me and asked if I could find her son, Josack Wilder. I will look for him, I told her, and my brother. I snuck out of the Ghetto and I went 120 kilometers from Sokal to this slave labor camp by Lemberg, next to Lvov. On the way, I saw Polish men and Jewish men were working on the road. Jews had yellow stripes on their uniforms and the Polish men had pink stripes on their uniforms. I carried a huge amount of bread with me. When I went to the gate of the camp, all these prisoners, said “Pani Pani (translation lady, lady)” please give us bread. I gave them the bread. I figured God would provide more for my brother. It was a Sunday, and I saw that Ukrainian police were staring at me because I probably looked so suspicious at the gate so I went directly up to them and asked where the church was and that I wanted to go to mass. There were so many times I had to figure it out on the spot. Clearly, necessity is definitely the mother of invention. I must say now that whenever we approach things bigger than ourselves, we are often able to succeed. The Commander Epler of this labor camp was just plain evil. He was said to take his German Shepard dogs to the camp and hang boys every night. But before he would hang them, he made them sing. And the whole village was expected to sing. Everybody in that village kept singing the same melody. (In the video, she sings the melody). My brother, who I saw at the gate, had become somewhat blind maybe because of lack of nutrition. He heard me yelling for him. He cried when he heard me, but he could not see me. Then, at the gate peering through, I saw a friend from Sokal. He said “Golda, tell my father that all the afflictions of Egypt are not as bad as here”. The next morning he was dead. A German lady was the camp administrator. She was blond and beautiful. I believe she was either the wife or girlfriend of Commander Epler. She said I could go see Commander Epler, but I could not cry in front of him. He hated crying. So I was allowed to see Lager Fuhrer Epler regarding my brother. He said to me, I want you to laugh, but I started crying. And Commander Epler told the Capo, a Jewish capo in charge of my brother, to release him and that other boy I was suppose to help. I helped Mr. Wilder and my brother leave the camp. But, my brother was killed in another Aktion later. Mr. Wilder settled in the US and his family forever thanked me for his survival.

V. Train Escape

Back to the cattle car. In the cattle car, I was with Adela, my oldest sister and her three month old baby and we were being transported to Treblinka. Each cattle car was filled like sardines with over 400 people in one cattle car. It is unbelievable to describe how human beings were treated. People were screaming and moaning. Meanwhile, these cattle car wagons stuffed with people did not move from early morning to 12 o'clock at night. Can you imagine what was going on in those cattle cars with all of these people? One boy named Efraim Doner, was in the same car as me. He was a distant cousin. He asked me, “Golda, you will be dead, too”? I told him, “if they don't get me today, they will get me tomorrow, and

that it is, what it is". He said he was going to help me escape. He used to work as a window glazer for the Nazis. And he still had a tiny hammer from that work. And when the train started moving he started hammering out the little window at the side in the cattle car with that hammer. Two little girls I used to baby sit were standing by a man in the train, playing. I used to teach them. I stared at them. Then I stared at a man who was saying the evening prayers. I was looking at him amazed that he was still praying in all of this mayhem. I want to interject here, that it really takes faith to give life again to Jewish children after what I endured. Anyway, the boy continued hammering. The German soldiers watching our cattle car that evening threw only one loaf of bread for everyone. I gave my sister a piece of bread I retrieved for me because she was still nursing the baby. I held the baby the entire time. All at once, the window was finally knocked out. I handed back the baby. I pushed away everybody from the window. And my distant cousin picked me up and pushed me out of that tiny window and I fell onto the railroad tracks. On and close by to the tracks, people lay dead like herrings. The SS with machine guns would shoot those trying to escape the cattle cars by jumping out and they would lie dead by these tracks. I heard the noise of the machine guns trying to shoot: "rat tat tat, rat tat tat". So many dead. I could not pick myself up after the jump. I severely hurt my legs and knees. I was bleeding. I still suffer pain to my knees and legs from this jump. It was a full moon night. For many years, I could not look at a full moon at night, hear a train go on a railroad track or listen to a train whistle without again feeling the suffering. I started limping, looking for someone I might know around me that is alive, maybe a brother or a sister. I saw someone, who looked at me and said, "Wait a minute, your Moshe Solitar's daughter".

This man helped me walk and found a stick that he made into a crutch with handkerchief padding. He said, he had an idea. He said your dad helped sell this lady a farm down the street and maybe we can stay at it. It was owned by a lady named Orlie Nechova. We walked to the farm and I saw a farmer sleeping in a chair through the window of her house. And I thought to myself, why should he be sleeping and why should we not be the ones sleeping so comfortable. Why did this happen to us? The lady opened the door for us. She said she was very sorry, but we could not stay there because if she helped us, she could be killed. But we slept close by, outside, over night. In the morning, we started walking back to the Ghetto. And I lost the man I was with walking with at the Bug River because of the high grass. I was tired, so I decided to stay by the Bug River and I laid there by the banks for I would say 3 nights and 3 days. I did not want to go into the Ghetto because I heard so much shooting from there.

When I decided to leave the banks of the Bug River, I was so hungry. I decided to go to the monastery next to the convent where I used to work. I saw and recognized the woman who worked there tending to the pigs in the back. This monastery had chickens, pigs, and cows for the people's nourishment there. When she left the area, I hopped over the fence and ate the peels of vegetables that were meant to feed the pigs that day. And then I climbed in this area above that had a hay stack by the pig stalls and began to fall asleep in the hay. I was awoken by two Polish boys working in the below area. I overheard them say, "Did you take the gold from that Jew"? I was trembling. One of the boys spotted me and said, "We have here a Jew and you better come down or I will kill you." I was so frightened, I climbed down and accidentally left one of my shoes in the haystack. And the boys brought me to the administrator (priest) of the monastery. The administrator said to me I can hide you and we can get you identity papers, but we need to be paid.

I went back to the Ghetto, walking little by little. The streets were dead with the breath of the dead. I knocked on the door and my father, mother and sister, Leah, were still alive. My father just started crying like a baby when he saw me. "Goldila, do anything you can. From 8 children I want someone to

remember my name". I said, "Daddy, that priest, the administrator of the monastery said he can hide me for money". My father called Dr. Kindler to treat my leg at the Ghetto and the doctor said he would get shot if the Judenrat or Germans found out, but decided to come and he did treat me. I packed all of the things I needed including jewelry and gold my dad and mom gave me to pay the administrator and keep for later and I went back to the monastery. I want to add that my younger brother, Yosela came back from work labor and he, also, would drop off money to this administrator from time to time. He also found and brought back bundles and bundles of cash that were cut up dollar bills into little pieces showing my father how Jews would destroy their money rather than it being confiscated by the Gestapo or Judenrat.

VI. Hiding in the Monastery

I stayed hidden in the monastery for many months. The administrator from the monastery seemed like a nice person. I would pray at the alter of the monastery and truly believed my God was listening to me at the Catholic alter. The administrator called me Sophie and that was the name I would keep until the end of the war. I was now named Sophie. One day the administrator said to me "Sophie, you don't need to die, I can get you papers, but the only thing, can you take Christ in your heart and redeem yourself?" I told him no, I cannot do that. He saw how upset I was that he asked that question. He said, "God bless you, you are so proud". I was hidden in the main area of the monastery until Christmas in a cell. I was so lonely I would take a bird in and play with it. But after awhile, I felt sorry for the bird and would release it. There were books; and I read them over and over.

One night, I heard the administrator walking to my cell. He was mumbling. He sounded drunk. Before he entered my room, I quickly hid under the bed and took all these bags that were filled with sand and pushed them under the bed by me for him not to see me. He entered the room calling my name, but he was too drunk to function. He left.

Around Christmas, 1942, the administrator came to my cell and said I could not be hidden in the main part of the monastery anymore. He said that someone accused the monastery and priests of keeping ammunition to revolt against the Germans. He said he needed to hide me in an area of the monastery where no one could find me. He took me all the way up to the tower of the monastery. And I hid there. I was even more lonely and in a dark cold place. During the war, I fasted Monday and Thursday. Why? In one way, I didn't want to be alive anymore and figured it was a way to die. On a Monday, after I was in the tower for awhile now, the administrator came up to give me the standard piece of bread and metal cup of warm milk for the day. He told me to drink the warm milk because it is so cold. But it was Monday and I fasted on Monday. So I waited and in the evening, I started drinking the milk, and the milk burned the skin off my lips. It was poison. I remember thinking about what my father said to me about staying alive no matter what. I remember thinking: Father, if you know what I am going through to stay alive!! It is so hard.

In the morning, I heard the administrator open the door to find me. I yelled at him, "What did you try to kill me"? He said: "Shhhh, quiet". Then I thought to myself, what am I doing accusing him? He can strangle me. I was shocked at myself. I then changed my approach and I said to him how stupid of me to suspect poison, apparently the kitchen made a mistake. The kitchen server accidentally gave me the white lime chalk for cleaning instead of the milk. He agreed with this explanation.

That day he said I should leave the monastery. He said, you know, you should go and that day I walked out. I did not know that they had killed my father already. When I left, I saw a couple in love strolling by the river. I watched them intently. You know, I was young too.

I thought where should I go? So I went to a gentile friend who lived with her mother. I went to the house of Mrs. Hass and Renke Hass, my childhood friend. I had a dress that I had made awhile back with the sewing machine. I gave it to Renke and asked that she go check the Ghetto and see if my family is there. She said she would. Mrs. Hass meanwhile said to me we all knew you were at the monastery hiding. We could see you sometimes, but no one said anything. We were praying for you. God looked after you. She said the administrator was known to have killed a baby in a field and he strangled another man because he lost at cards. So she said I was very lucky. I gave my girlfriend a note I had written to take to my father. It said: **If I go in the shadow of death, I am not afraid. God is with me.**

My girlfriend cried when she came back. Nobody was at my home anymore except my mother and Leah, a sister. My father was killed by the Gestapo chief, Oswald Kaduk. I did not want to go home anymore after I heard my father was killed. Maybe I was coward. I decided I wanted to live. As it turns out, my mother, Sheindala Katz Solitar was later killed with my sister, Leah, during the Juden Frei (Free from Jews) assault by the Gestapo directly after my friend visited and I had left for Krakow.

VIII. Krakow and My Life as Sophie, a Catholic and My New Father

That night I went to the railroad station. I did not know where to go. At every train station there was a Gestapo office. So I had to be careful. I had no identity papers. I bought a ticket to Tarnoff because the administrator from the monastery said he had a girlfriend in Tarnoff. I knew her name and she would never suspect me of being Jewish if I referred to the administrator. I tried to determine how to sit at the railroad station as not to look suspicious. I did have a bundle with me of my possessions. I sat next to a bellman for the train. I told him that I want to go to Rava Ruska on the way to Tarnoff and that I am a Polish patriot that really does not want to help the Germans. He agreed with me. When the train arrived at Rava Ruska there was a sign posted: **Juden FREI- clear of Jews.** My father was from the city of Rava Ruska. What I saw was hard to believe. There were naked bodies piled in chlorine tank railroad cars. Some of the bodies were still moving and were jumping off these railroad cars. So Gestapo were all over the place trying to find the Jews at Rava Ruska trying to escape. I was so scared they would think I look suspicious. When that bellman went through the private back door for railroad workers, I just followed him, instead of a public door. At that point, I ended up in the middle of the train station with Gestapo all over the place. I needed some money. So I tried to sell my shawl to a woman and a man watching said, "Aw, what a pity, such a young Jewish girl and you need to die, too?" I was so shocked. And there were so many Gestapo around me. So I immediately denied I was Jewish to this man. I instead, I accused him of being a Jew. And then he called me a Jew back. Meanwhile, a train pulled up and he pushed me in the train and said, "God be with you, God bless you, where ever you go". And now I am in the train, and I go farther. And in the back of me in the train, I hear the train passengers making jokes about the Jews and laughing, that they found jewelry on dead Jewish babies.

A lady next to me starts a conversation with me on the train. I tell her the same story about being a Polish patriot and I am trying to find work. She said come work for me in Krakow as a maid. She cleans

houses. I said ok and I would look her up in Krakow. I then traveled by train to Krakow. I looked suspicious. In Krakow, I did not have identification card. I covered and hid myself in porticos and covered building spaces in the city. One day, in Krakow, a policeman picked me up in a coffee shop because I looked suspicious and I had no identity papers to give him. I told him I was Catholic. He put me in a Polish labor camp called Plaszow. I was there for 4 weeks. Girls were taken from there to clean offices. Plaszow had no soap, no water, and small rations of bread and soup for the prisoners. One day when they took us out, I escaped that camp during a march to a work site. I hid again and then I looked up the lady I met on the train. Her name was Marta. When I came to her house, I could not believe my eyes. There was so much Judaica silver in her house. I saw many silver menorahs, wine cups and other Judaica. All of this silver was stolen from the Jews. It was not easy to be there. She said she knew other people who needed a maid and she put me with this family to be their maid who also thought I was Catholic.

Marta's boyfriend was named Ludwig Eineder. He was a police commander from Germany stationed to work at the Montelupi prison in Krakow. When he came to Marta's house one day, he asked who I was. She explained to him I was Sophie and I helped with the cleaning jobs. She explained I was Catholic. Time went on. I cleaned for this cleaning lady's clients. I really did not know how to clean, but I did the best I could. I had hidden jewelry in the bundle my parents gave me when I left for the monastery. One day, Marta started looking through my things and she saw all my jewelry and she told her boyfriend, Mr. Eineder. At that point, she suspected I was not a Polish Catholic after all. He said to Marta, I need to take Sophie to the police station. He took me from Marta's place, but instead of taking me to the police station, he took me to his own police barrack apartment that was located across from the University of Krakow. It used to be a Jewish doctor's home. The bottom floor was filled with German police and the upstairs had residences for the policeman stationed there from Germany. He did not ask me any questions yet, but he knew from Marta I had rings, gold, pearls and other jewelry. He sat me in his place and said "See this corner in the closet, you need to live in this corner until I tell you that you can leave". He was a big man that wore a brown uniform with a sword. I was so scared. A third day past as I sat in that closet and he came to me and said, "Who are you?" I could not take it anymore. I could not take it. I did feel he was a nice person. I did not want to jeopardize his life. I told him to please let me go that I am Jewish. He turned red like a crab. He realized he was in big jeopardy himself. And he said cuss words in German, "Crucifex.... Crucifex". At that time I was around 18 and he was already an older man. He said, "If the Germans need to kill people like you, what has the world come to?" I sat in that closet hidden for almost three months. It was lonely. I could not take it anymore so I would sneak away to a faucet to clean myself and things like that. Another policeman living there saw me one day and complained that there was a woman in the German police house. One night I had a terrible nightmare and started screaming. Mr. Eineder woke me and I begged him to please let me go, something bad is going to happen to us. I remembered what Mr. Eineder told me that if anything got bad or I got caught, just say I am his daughter and he is my father. The next day, Mr. Eineder had left for the Montelopi prison early in the morning and around 10 a.m., there was a loud knocking on the door. "OPEN THE DOOR. CITY POLICE"!!! I had my mother's picture with me. I tore it up. I was so scared. I took the key out of the key hole. I opened door. I started crying to the police officers that my father said this... And my father said that... I was worried about him and that I had gotten him into severe trouble. I really did not care about me anymore. I was very tired of living. I just did not want to get my new father who had helped me, in trouble.

In one way I was motivated and needed courage. I would not have gone through this constant survival without motivation of what could be. Imagine, I had to call a German officer, my father. I had to ask

myself, was it worthwhile living to have to do this? God proved it to me though. I had a purpose to be alive. My faith, my religion, and this purpose to be alive made me keep going. My motivation was not a selfish purpose. This motivation is a nucleus of calling yourself human. I would be bankrupt if I quit believing in God. My God gave me the love and courage to live. We need to honor one human being equally like the other and other philosophies mean nothing. It is a simple thing, you cannot build without a moral foundation. I was taught, no one has the right to take my life simply because I am a Jew.

IX. Munich.

Mr. Eineder did not get in trouble. He corroborated that I was his daughter to the police. He obtained a document from the Catholic Church that verified that I was Catholic and I was his illegitimate daughter and he sent me to Munich, Germany to his parents and wife in 1944. He traveled there with me. When I arrived in Munich, his wife, Helen, picked us up. She took me to work in the countryside of Burghausen with a German farm family to be a nanny to their three children. All the while, she suspected that I was not her husband's daughter. After Mr. Eineder left to go back to Poland, Helen, asked for me to meet her close to Simbach. There is a famous church thereof the Black Madonna. I went to a church there and prayed at the alter while I was waiting. I figured my God would be there too. When I met Helen, she accused me of not being her daughter and seriously beat me up. I went to the police and told them the story. I did not want to tell on her and get her in trouble, but I did not want to be killed by her either. The police said I needed go to doctor, see how bad the wounds are and have a medical report written. He said bring back the medical report. I did not get the medical report, and meanwhile, I went back working with the German family as their nanny/ governess. I loved those children and they loved me. One morning, police came and arrested me at the family house. The children cried and told the police officer how wonderful I was, so they let me stay the night and picked me up the next morning. I had a piece of my mother's jewelry I always wore hidden on my body and left it with the children and I kept a Star of David patch in my underwear, so if I was killed, people would know I was a Jew. The police brought me to Simbach near Braunau, where Hitler lived. At the police station there were big German Shepard dogs and multiple black Volkswagens for the police. They started interrogating me. Apparently, Helen filed a report that I was not the daughter of her husband and they needed to find out who I was. Part of the process in this jail was a gynecological medical examination. I remember I was in this room with this huge picture of Hitler and I had to sit and get examined in a way I had never experienced. "If my father would know what I need to go through to just survive, he would have taken my life", I thought, as I was examined. Meanwhile, my German father had been in Munich right before I was arrested, and I thought he had left back to Poland, but he had heard that I had been arrested and I am in jail. He traveled to this police station. He again saved me. Always, he looked out for me. They let me see him. He said, "Sophie, don't cry. I created a mess". He told me that Helen, who also had American citizenship, was not technically his wife because Germans could not marry Americans. And he told me he had another wife with a three year old. And he said to me that I should not worry and that I would be released. He said, I am not in trouble, but please pick up my three year old daughter who needs to be taken care of and bring her back to the place you nanny when you leave from jail. I thought I was the only Jewish woman who survived Hitler when I left that jail. I picked up the 3 year old baby and went back to house that I was a nanny at.

When I came back, I saw many many injured Germans everyplace. It was March, 1945. Everyone was injured. Asking for water. I felt bad for them. I brought them water. I just felt for them.

The next month, in April, 1945, the American troops liberated Burghausen, but they did not believe that I was Jewish when I told them. Again, I thought that I was the only Jew alive in the world. I was taken to an old age home where there were Jews who were placed there and I had to read Hebrew prayers to them so they could verify to the soldiers that I was Jewish.

If I would try to describe my agony, suffering and assault, what I did endure to be able to stay alive, I know this would be accounted to be one of the greatest miracles of divine providence. I will carry the greatest and deepest wounds with me to my grave.

Afterword

After the war, my mother and father, David Scharff, met in a detention camp in Munich for displaced persons. It was called the Freiman Camp. They lived there for two years and then in an apartment in Munich for a year. They had their first child in August, 1949 in Munich, Germany. In October, 1949, they were given permission to immigrate to the United States under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, passed during the Truman administration. They were given the choice to go to either Israel or go to San Antonio, Texas. My mother wanted to go to a place of peace. With the aid of HIAS, a resettlement agency and the San Antonio Jewish Federation they left to San Antonio, Texas and built a life in San Antonio, Texas.

Some quotes from Golda Scharff in her Yale Testimony:

“My God is not a stronger God than someone else’s God. But my God, did make it possible and gave me the courage, endurance and love, not just for my family, but for the combined humanity, what every name they call themselves or whatever emblem they identify under, to exercise the truth and honor of each human being having the right to live”.

“I don’t think many like me any better as Jew today, as they did as a Jew then”.

“We are granted life from the God almighty”.

“No human has right to determine the value of another human’s life”.

“I feel my life and my survival was given from the grace of heavens”.

“Success does not come with materialism, it comes from within one’s own worth”.

“Even at the worse of time, I sang praises to God”.

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