

KDRG YVA-038

**Testimony of Fania Marbak, Born in Wisniowiec, Poland, 1922,
Regarding Her Experiences in the Krzemieniec Ghetto, Using a False
Identity, in Lwow and Rozwadow**

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Translated from Hebrew by Dr. Batya (Betty) Cohen
Edited by Ellen Garshick, March 2023

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Witness: Fania Marbak
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Date, place, and country of birth: September 24, 1922, Wisniowiec, Poland

Contents of her testimony:

About her family before the Germans' arrival:

- 1941: Entrance of the Germans; her brothers fleeing to the forests; the abuse of her father
- 1942: Concentration of Jews from the area and incarceration in the ghetto in Kremenets. With the help of a Ukrainian acquaintance—obtaining forged licenses for her and her sister in exchange for property and gold; catching her father, who hid in the cemetery
- 1943: Fleeing to the distant forest so as not to be identified; from there to Lvov and afterwards to Rozvadov (Rozwadow)
- 1944: Her sister worked for a Polish doctor, and she, for a farmer, until the Russians arrived
She did not return home because her life was in danger.

Time of recording: 1988

Number of pages: 7

Place: Beersheba

Name of interviewer: Anna Bilgorey

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I had two brothers and three sisters, a father and mother. Two sisters were married. In 1939 the war began and the Russians entered. The war lasted only two weeks, the Russians arrived, and it was all right, until 1941. Until 1941 we somehow got along with the Russians.

In May 1941, before the Germans arrived, my mother died. We stayed in the house without her. When the Germans arrived, they began to search for men—women not as much. They always took us to an “action” and took the men to work. The first week, they took about 100 men. They took them and said it was for work. They did not return, and they were not seen again. They took my sister’s husband, and she was left alone with the children. My two unmarried sisters were in the forests; they did not sleep at home. My father was elderly and religious and didn’t want to eat nonkosher food. He didn’t want to make it difficult for us. And we ate everything.

The Germans came into our house. My father had a beard, so he took a handkerchief and covered his face as if he had a toothache so they wouldn’t see that he had a beard. The German removed the handkerchief and grabbed my father by his beard and threw him against the wall on his head, and said, “You’re a Jew, you’re dirty.”

Only my sister and I were at home. They took him away. I was 16-1/2 or 17.

In the town in which I lived, Vishnevets (Wisniowiec), there was a place called the New City. We lived in the Old City.¹ My sister, who had a little girl, when she was married, she lived in the New City. We had a Christian Ukrainian friend. Where I was born, there were Ukrainians. He was a good friend of my brother. He saw an “action” in which they killed many Jews. They killed them; they didn’t take them away. There were children, women. It was in the New City, and he saw how they killed my sister and her daughter, who was eight months old. Two days later he came to our house and told my brother. He kissed my brother and told him, “I love you so much, but apparently it is written in the Torah that you must leave here, you are Jews. I would be able to help you, but you Jews have a sign of circumcision. You could travel somewhere.” And to me he said my brother couldn’t travel because he had a sign, and to me he added, “You are stupid for sitting there. I saw how they killed your sister. I saw how they killed your sister, with her daughter in her arms, and it was in the snow.” It was December.

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I was born in the city of Vishnevets (Wisniowiec) in Poland. And there they enclosed the Jews in a ghetto. They destroyed many Jews in the New City, and we stayed in the Old City. And they sent us to Kremenets (Krzemieniec). That means we had to travel by ourselves or somehow to walk and to the bigger city. And there it was worse. We didn’t have a house of our own, and there wasn’t any place to live. A few families lived together. The entire winter we somehow managed, but in April the Germans began to arrive and take men to work. Not one of the men returned. They said they took them to Russia, but they didn’t return. Around July they took my father away. He was sick. They took him away, and he never came back. My brothers never slept at home. They went to Christians who lived around us outside the town and asked to work at any job. So, it continued.

¹ The Horyn River split Vishnevets into the Old City and the New City. See [Sefer Vishnivits: Sefer zikaron likedoshei Vishnivits shenispu besho’at hanatsim](#), Tel Aviv: Organization of Vishnevets Immigrants, 1970, page 35.

The Ukrainian friend came to the New City and looked for us, and asked us to do something and not continue in this way. We had a little money that our parents left us. We had money and gold. My brother always gave money or clothes or something to the Ukrainian friend. He told us we had to go away and, if not, the Germans would kill us. He took us to the train and gave us the idea to buy work permits. The German women whose men went to war used to receive permits so they would be able to travel to Germany to work there. He said he would obtain such permits for us. He did get them from Ukrainian women who didn't wish to leave their homes; who would want to leave their house during a war? He brought me and my sister these permits, and even embroidered shirts. Of course, all this was for payment.

I had a brother who worked for a German who worked for the German police. He would stand guard in the city. He had horses and a kind of buggy, and this German would go everywhere. There was a countess who had fields, and the German lived where the countess was, and all the horses were at his disposal. She ran away to Warsaw when the war broke out and didn't return. The Germans took the estate and took men to work there. My brother worked there and traveled with the German. The German had a disabled leg from the war, and my brother had it good with him. The Ukrainian friend arranged this work for him. My second brother worked hard in the labor camp, and we would hardly see him. Sometimes he would return wounded and bloody, because sometimes the German would get drunk and beat him.

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One day he received blows to the head, and when he returned from work, he fled to the forest. They looked for him at home; he lived in the forest and said he wouldn't go back anymore to work for this German.

The German for whom my older brother worked on a ranch would get bribes from us. It was Russian money. He was called Nikolay, and it was gold. It was money my parents kept. They both received money as bribes, the Ukrainian and the German who kept my brother.

My brother was his servant. He would polish his shoes, clean the horses. My little brother would sleep in the forest and the cemetery, and sometimes I would sleep with him there. The Germans would say that in the evening there would be an "action." For example, they would demand 100 Germans for work, but they did not need them. They took the men in order to kill them. In the beginning they would say that the Germans were in Kiev or here and there. Everything was a lie. They took them to some town 50 or 100 kilometers away from our town and killed them. My brother's Ukrainian friend told us about it and asked us why we were sitting and waiting until they also killed us like goats.

He arranged a birth certificate for us and a card for work in Germany, for me and for my sister. On this certificate they called me Mikhelina Popovits, and it said that I had to travel to Germany to work. It was for payment. He also arranged this for my sister, and she was called Stefania Romaynchuk. He came with horses and a buggy and took us to the train.

An elderly neighbor couple who didn't have children said one evening that that night there would be an "action." They got dressed and walked slowly, and I walked after them. They went to the cemetery. There were graves, and they opened a grave and slept there the entire night. I covered them as if no one were there. This lasted two months, and every morning I would have to return and uncover the grave and tell them the town was quiet and they could return. This continued for about two months. It was before the snow. When there was snow, it wouldn't be possible.

The Ukrainian friend sent us on the train, and he told me that if someone said I was a Jew, I should flee and deny it. We agreed with our brothers that we would find out what kind of work we could do, and we would send money. We reached the train station, the Ukrainian bought tickets for us with our money, and we left.

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We traveled to the city of Chodorov (Chodorow), and from there to Lvov. This was a big city. The street was empty of Jews, and there were big, empty houses. Polish women were living alone in apartments of four or five rooms. We wandered around, and one woman gladly took us in because she was afraid to live alone. We had money, and we had black bread; this kind of bread had not been seen in Lvov for a long time. We looked for work. The woman was a widow and lonely, and was living in a big apartment that had belonged to Jews. In the apartment were phylacteries and prayer shawls in the closet. I looked at these as if I didn't know what they were. She told us that a few weeks before, they had annihilated the Jews who lived there. And she came to live there. She used to live upstairs in a one-room apartment. She was afraid to sleep there, and therefore she took us in, my sister and myself.

She demanded that I bring a permit that gave me the right to live in the city of Lvov. I couldn't bring a permit, so I bought a Polish newspaper and read that they were looking for female Polish workers to work in an ammunitions factory and that workers were lacking. We took the money we had and traveled to Rozvadov (Rozwadow). We got off the train and met a woman who had two buckets of water. This was a good sign, and I said to my sister "Stefa will be good." In Ukrainian my sister was called Helcia, but on the permit her name was Stefa. We went a few steps and saw a group of dirty, tired Jews walking to unskilled work in Storovola. This was two kilometers from Rozvadov, and the Jews there worked at unskilled labor. I saw that one of them did not walk well, and the German took his gun and beat him with the butt on the head and hit him until he could hardly walk.

We reached the city of Rozvadov near the port, and I saw a synagogue, phylacteries, and prayer shawls, and children were playing with the phylacteries and prayer shawls like a horseman and horse. In the end I said to my sister, "Let's go into a house," and I knocked at a door and entered. Everywhere in Poland there is a grandmother. I opened the door, and the woman there asked us, "Where are you from?" I then answered that we were supposed to travel to Germany, but we wanted to stay in Poland. She said that she was from Poznan, which had been a German area. All the Poles there had moved to Poland. She lived opposite a synagogue and said that just three days before they had annihilated the Jews and that there were no Jews left in Rozvadov.

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I told her that I had read in the newspaper that two kilometers away they needed workers. Then she told me it was true and that her husband worked there. She gave us permission to sleep there because she was alone and her husband worked at night, and that the Jews might come from the surrounding towns, as there were Jews in the surrounding forests. They had hidden their money and might come at night to look for it. It was good for us. Her husband came and said it was true that they needed workers and women in the factory. It was work for women; they had enough men. In the evening, an elderly friend of the husband explained to us what to bring and what to do in order to be accepted for the job.

We arrived the place and we went up to the window to register, and the woman there said, "You are Jewish. Get out of here, but quickly, before I get upset." Then I said, "What do you mean sending us away, and who knows to where, and you even say I'm a Jew." She said, "Don't talk so much."

We went, and an old man who once lived in the area where we were born heard about it and told my sister that he would look for a new place of work for us. He found us work on the train tracks. It was on November 23. We worked on the wood of the train tracks. There was snow, and who wanted to work in this weather? I told my sister that we shouldn't work there, but my sister said there was no choice, and she went to work there. What was good was that they made soup in a large pot there, and the chef said that in the evening she spilled out a lot of soup. He saw that my sister was miserably hungry, so he asked me to bring a big can, and he let her take soup home every evening. The woman we lived with didn't have anything to eat at home because by the time her husband brought his salary home, everything was gone, and she didn't have anything to eat. When my sister began to bring home the soup, the woman was very happy, and thus every day at three or four my sister would bring soup.

In the end my sister got sick. There was a doctor who was a gynecologist and he treated her. There was a clinic like Kupat Cholim. She cried and told him she did not have any place to go, etc. Then he told her he needed help in the house and suggested that she work for him instead of working in the snow. She immediately agreed. She went to his house, which was opposite the court. It was a big house, a villa with a big garden and flowers. He gave her a permit stating that she was sick and couldn't continue to work on the train. Even when he found out later that she was Jewish, it didn't bother him because he was old.

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He arranged a bed for her, and everything was arranged for her. She used to go to the pharmacy to buy things he asked her for. At the parties he used to make for the Christian holidays, people would talk about how she looked Jewish, and he told the grandmother who used to live in his house to tell my sister to be more careful because people were saying that perhaps she was Jewish and to take care of herself. I have pictures of my sister with a girlfriend whom she met there. She bought a chain with beads she used for Christian prayer for herself. The grandmother there also bought her a chain with a cross and beads.

I would go every Tuesday to the market. I would tell the farmers selling there that I was looking for work, that they wanted to send me to work in Germany, but that I preferred to stay here in the city. One farmer then asked me how much I was asking for, and I said that in the meantime it didn't matter to me how much he would pay. He agreed to accept me to work for him. He was a responsible man in a village. Each evening people would come to him and sit in his house and tell him about politics, about everything that was happening. Everyone told stories of what they saw, and I would listen and not say a word. I only listened.

They didn't have children, and I worked for them. They had a big apartment, and he would rent out rooms. He said that he would make a grave of gold for Hitler and that he would buy the grave every evening because he destroyed the Jews.

We went to church, and I would pray in the Christian prayerbook like the Christians and do what everyone did there as if I were a Christian.

I remember that at the end of the war I met a Ukrainian from our town who told me not to go back to the town to look for our property because the people were afraid that they would have to give back the things they took from us and that they might kill me and that I should continue on my way to wherever I wished to go.

My brothers remained alive. One worked in the Wehrmacht, and the other was in the forest. In the evening, he would return to the city and stay with a woman who lived alone and sleep in her cellar; during the day he was in the forest.

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She would give him food for payment. I had his address, which I received from an acquaintance. I wrote him a letter and sent it to the woman he was staying with. I told him in the letter that he should do what we did even though they were men. The woman told my brother that she couldn't keep him any longer, so he got up in the morning and didn't return.

My second brother worked for the Germans almost until the end of the war. I wrote him a letter, and my conscience bothered me because of it. In the letter I told him to do what we had done, and he went to the Ukrainian woman to have her arrange his papers. The Ukrainian woman did so. My brother arrived at the train, got on the train, and had permits to travel to Germany. He had a fake military card in someone else's name. He arrived in Chodorov in Poland, where he had to change trains. A Ukrainian woman grabbed him, took off his pants, and saw that he was a Jew. They took him to the labor camp. He worked there, and from there he fled to the forests. He fled to a woman who gave him shelter. She kept him for two months and told him she couldn't keep him, and sent him to bring money. He went to people who owed him money from before the war, and he did not return.