

Milia Parnes

Hillsborough Remembers

Milia Parnes survived internment in a concentration camp during World War II. Her moving story is one of loss and sorrow.

WWII

At Home & Abroad

This is an interview with Milia Parnes (**MP**) with Dorothy Jackson (**DJ**) and Chrissy Cresswell (**CC**) on November 22, 1999 at the Jewish Towers, Tampa, Florida.

Dorothy Jackson: Oh, Bernard told us that you're Romanian or . . .

Milia Parnes: I was born in the Serbia Romanian.

DJ: Where?

MP: On a Dinect.

DJ: How do you spell that?

MP: Give me a piece of paper and I write. Dinect.

DJ: Dinect? Is that a G?

MP: It's a D.

DJ: A D oh.

MP: D-I-N-E-C, Dinect, like in maybe English is like a Z.

DJ: Oh, that's in . . . What country is that in?

MP: This was a Romania, Basarobia, Romania.

DJ: Oh okay.

MP: Right near Basarobia.

DJ: Bas . . . B-A, Ba

MP: B-A-S-A-R-O-B-I-A

DJ: Okay, Okay. And when were you born? What year?

MP: In this city I was born, Dinect? In a, I was born in a, in 19, 1919

DJ: 1919? What was the date?

MP: December 15

DJ: December 15, wow.

MP: Huh-uh 1919

DJ/CC: Your birthday is coming up.

MP: Yah.

DJ: Do you have any family in the United States?

MP: I have a cousin but she don't work here. She lives in here but she don't work here in a . . . She works somewhere. She's a teacher.

DJ: In Tampa?

MP: No, she don't work in Tampa. She works in other city, then she comes. I don't see her so often.

DJ: Oh um, Okay I guess I'll start talking, talking about the war years. How . . . Um you were in a concentration camp?

MP: Yes. I'm, one of survivors. They killed my parents and my brother.

DJ: Really?

MP: Yah, I don't know how I survived.

Chrissy Cresswell: How did you get there?

MP: How I get? They took us. They came and it was the time in the war in 1941. And they came to our, where we were living. My father have a store, and ya know, they took us- they didn't let us take nothing. What we were dressed, they took us like that. And we were walking, walking, walking miles of miles. Then come to a city; we went through the city and the Christian

people, they feel sorry for us and they brought, they throw us bread. They threw us bread and you know, and baked potatoes. And then the soldiers when they saw that they didn't let us go. Then they go to the field. Not a eat, not a drink. They didn't let, they didn't let you to drink a water. If you drink water then they cut here, like this. . . (cutting her neck with her hand). Went through and off. And when we were walking, walking, walking, walking, walking. But I was young, not sick like I am now. I'm sick from the concentration camp. And then before we came to a city, Barshik is the name from city in Ukraine.

DJ: Ukraine?

MP: Ukraine, yes. And my mother couldn't walk. She got sick and she couldn't move her feet, and we left her in the field. (crying . . .) We left her there dying there . . . And she cried and asked us why. Why you leave me? My father get beat and my brother, they leave and not let us talk. They knock, they beat us. And they took us with them, then they took away my father and my brother. There was a a route, a route they took them there they killed them there. And I'm left alone. I was in Barshik in 1941 then 1944. I used to work in the field . . . the person in the winter to clean the snow. And then I work there, I didn't get paid, I didn't get nothing. I went through and then the Russian came back. They a, they a freed us, the Russian.

Then as I went home I didn't have nothing. They ruined the house. I didn't have nothing to live, I didn't have none to eat. I went through enough. By this time I'm sick. I have sickness of sickness. I have liver problem, I have bronchitis, asthma, and emphysema. I have neck problems, everything. Arthritis . . . I didn't have what to wear. A Christian

lady made me a sack, from a sack of sugar, she made me a dress. I didn't know why I didn't froze my feet. My nails . . . because I didn't have stockings. I didn't have nothing. The snow was deep like that, and in Ukraine winter is very bad, is very cold. In 1944 when the Russian came they occupied the Russian occupied then they let us, let us go home. Those other people from other cities I don't know them but we walked together, and then we walked home. Came home . . . I didn't have nothing. No house, where to sleep.

Some of the Christian people, because my parent was very good, and my parents was very good to the Christians, they gave people without money everything what they wanted. My parents used to say be good to the people and God will be good to me. There was a Christian there and there was a director in a big cooperation. There they sent me to the school in other city, they let me keep a bookkeeper. I worked a bookkeeper for eighteen years and I couldn't work no more. Because my sickness was very bad and it attacks me and asthma. And I'm terrible, they have to take me to the hospital, next to Germany.

DJ: And you got all of that, the sickness from all your years from the camp?

MP: What?

DJ: You got your sickness, you got your sickness from the camp?

MP: Yah when I was . . . They used to say in the city where I was born, they used to say I was healthy. The land was born under my feet because I was so healthy. I never was sick. I never was like children when they small they have a chicken pox or other. I was healthy. But then it was the snow and

the floor was freezing and cold. And I didn't have stockings, not shoes, nothing. And from this I got my all sickness. And this is not cure what I have. And you see how much medicine I have? I have a full flank of medicine, what I take.

DJ: You were . . . How long were you at the camp?

MP: Through 1941 to 1944.

DJ: The same camp? One camp?

MP: Yah it was one camp; I was there three years.

DJ: Oh my, that's a long time.

CC: What else . . . What else do you remember about it?

MP: Huh?

CC: What else do you remember about it? Did you make any friends at the camp to you know help each other out or anything?

MP: What?

CC: When you had to work?

MP: I couldn't when I came a . . . they couldn't. I used to work like a maid in a hotel. But I used to get attacks, about fifteen dollars a month. Fifty rooms to clean. And then I have attacks from my asthma and they took me all the time to the hospital, and then I wasn't capable to work.

DJ: After, after you came from the camp you went back to your homecity and you worked as a bookkeeper at a library. Is that what you said?

MP: They say me yes. This was a Russia occupy when we came from the concentration camp. The director from

a big corporation in my city, because my parents were very good to his family, he stayed and they were poor in the beginning-before he got the job. Then he came and he put me, then send me to a other city to a school. And I learned there to become a bookkeeper. Then I came and I work and after I got sick I couldn't work no more.

DJ: How'd you, how'd you come to Tampa? How'd you end up in the United States?

MP: In the Tampa? I have my mother's brother, he was a living in a New York. And I youngest brother has a daughter here, and this I came to Tampa. But still I am alone and sick.

DJ: How do you like Tampa? Have you lived, did you live in New York?

MP: No, never, no.

DJ: No never. You only lived in Tampa, you haven't lived anywhere else in the United States?

MP: No I came to New York when I came to the United States. My aunt sent me papers to come here. And I was living in Memphis Tennessee. She was living there but she passed away. All them passed away. Then I came to Tampa. My Uncle, my mother's brother, he brought me here in Tampa because his daughter was living here. Believe me I could write a book of my life, what I went through. Better than when I came here sick and sick and sick.

CC: What else do you remember about the camp?

MP: Huh?

CC: What else do you remember about the camp? What was it like?

MP: What do . . . I, I told you this. I worked in there, in the fields. They didn't pay, they didn't give you nothing. And a lady was a neighbor, and she shared some a, some a, she went and she saw me she brought like a bread and a cucumber. And she put salt and water, and she eat the salt and make. And I break the table and then they saw, they grab from all. And they throw up and they leave me nothing to give me to eat. They want to help me die. But they did nothing. This is my all story.

DJ: Um, during your years at the camp, did you like get close to anyone there?

MP: Huh?

DJ: While you were at the camp did you have any friends . . . or?

MP: Who friends?

DJ: No? You couldn't talk to anybody?

MP: You are crazy to see to go outside.

DJ: Really?

MP: You see outside they kill you.

DJ: You couldn't talk to anyone?

MP: We were a, we were a sixty to eighty people in a room, women and old men. Some of the Christians when they saw they used to bring not a see, to bring some to eat.

CC: Was it all women?

MP: Huh?

CC: Was it all women?

MP: Huh?

CC: In the room?

DJ: Was it women and men in the room? Was it all mixed up while you were in the camp?

MP: I don't understand what you mean.

CC: You said there was sixty to eighty people in the room. Was it all women, or was it women and men?

MP: Yah women, yah women.

CC: All women?

MP: And some of them they used to go at night they used to go in another city and to beg. Some give them bread, potatoes, and in midnight. I don't know how they didn't kill them because they didn't catch them. They were young, and they used to go down and they used to, and they used to, they brought us they used to, to all of us a little, like a bite. This was a light bite.

CC: They didn't give you enough to eat?

MP: No, they didn't give nothing. Was very bad what I tell you. I don't want to live to see what I saw.

DJ: While you were at the camp did you hear like any news about what was happening in the war?

MP: Who could hear anything? Who had a radio?

DJ: I mean no one could tell you back any information or anything?

MP: Who, who could they tell?

DJ: No one?

MP: We were sitting the room, so many people, it was a hot. You know so many people. It was terrible. And you want to go to open up the door to stay a little outside. Then through the window, then we saw soldier, you know. Because they used to a kill you, if you lean against.

DJ: The soldiers that were at the camp, they were German?

MP: Romanian and German.

DJ: Romanian and German?

MP: Not all German.

DJ: So you had no clue what was happening in the war? Who was winning what or anything?

MP: We didn't know nothing what goes on. Then when the Germans went out and the Russian occupied, we still are afraid to go out, to open the door. And then, then a one of the women said "I don't care, I go outside. I want to see what goes on." Then the, somebody told us "don't be afraid, the German is no more here. And you free you can go to where you come." And I walked and walked, walked, walked, walked, walked, walked down. And the soldiers, the Russian soldiers. Then it was a maybe fifty miles to come to my city. Then they took me, and the soldiers they have like a big truck. Then they took me and I come home to nothing. Then the Christian people they find out. They ask of my family, for my parents. Who likes my parents. They told them they left a daughter. Then they came and they took me in, and I was with them. And I was sick. Then when I came a little to my a . . . Then I went to work. But I told the Director what a . . . Then they send me to about sixty-nine miles from my city to a school, to learn to become a Bookkeeper.

DJ: So you were about like twenty twenty-two when you were in camp?

MP: Yah, I was young. My brother was older than me and a . . . Come on I show you my brother. I have only a picture of him and none of my parents. A Christian, she took everything from the house and she took a little picture for me and when they told me and when I said "he wasn't related to you. I don't ask you to give me things what they took away from the our house, but give me the picture." And I made a portrait of it. It was my brother.

CC: He's very handsome.

MP: He was but twenty-four years old.

DJ: That's the only picture you have of your family?

MP: Only that picture. Not of my father or me mother. We have pictures because when we were living in the living room, where my mother and my father was I bed, was where we living was a picture of beneath when my mother was young. They took away. I have did only this of my brother.

DJ: I have no more questions.

MP: Huh?

DJ: I can't think of anymore questions.

MP: I can't help you about that.

DJ: I just couldn't imagine having to go through what you did.

MP: You see some people. Some people they don't believe I about the concentration camp. Of what the people went through. How they took the mother a small children from the breast they were sucking the breast,

they took, they took, they tore them to pieces. I saw it. (Crying)

DJ: I totally believe. I understand, I can imagine. Could imagine.

MP: They burned people. We were, I was my brother, my father, my mother in the beginning. It was a chamber they called it. And they held a () in a house. And they burned them and we too poor and they took or want to take my father and my borther and my mother and they leave me. And my father, my and brother said "No! You want to burn us, burn us all. I won't allow us to leave my sister to leave alone." Then they beat us and said go. Then we went; and that's the time they took away my father and my brother. And my mother we left in the field. And I don't know, the dogs ate her or maybe they Christian they buried her. Who knows? I came home I sent letters everywhere to the Red Cross; they couldn't find nothing. What do you do with this?

DJ: Excuse me?

MP: What do you do in this school? To tell the students to know what was in the type in the war?

DJ: Yes.

MP: Like a history.

DJ: Yes, yes that's what we're doing, a history project. When everything gets done and everything I'll show you. I'll come and show you what we put together from all this . . . I'll come and show you it. It must have been a very . . . Coming after, after the camp and coming to being free again. It must have been really weird, a big difference.

MP: Yah, what you think? Worse was I didn't get nothing. The house was ruined. Everything was was nothing

there, only left was the place. Sure was hard. In the morning nothing to left to eat. But people, the Christian they helped me. Then I worked the Bookkeeper, and every time they see to take me to the hospital. I a lately I couldn't work.

DJ: When did you, when did you come to . . .

MP: To the United States? I came in July the 4,1968.

DJ: '68?

MP: Yah, July the 4.

DJ: And you've been in Tampa since then?

MP: No, no I was in Memphis, Tennessee.

DJ: Memphis, oh yah.

MP: Yah, my mother's sister brought me. Then my mother's brother came, he lived in New York, and he said I couldn't go to school there and learn the language. And he said to, "their sister", she was my mother's sister and his sister, "she's your sister's daughter, she's my sister's daughter too. I'll take her there and she has to come to go to school to learn the language." And then I was staying with them, she passed away, and he passed away, and I'm alone.

DJ: So you learned the language huh? But you said you have, you have a daughter.

MP: I didn't get married cause I was sick in the concentration camp. How could I get married? I never want to get married, I'm single.

DJ: So you have no daughters or anything?

MP: No, no I didn't get married. I didn't want to. I could get married, I didn't want to. I'm sick, what I need a husband? And come to pick me up there.

DJ: Well do you have anything?

CC: No

DJ: That's it. Thank you so much.

MP: You're welcome.