

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Maria Moise
September 9, 1991
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Maria Moise, conducted on September 9, 1991 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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MARIA MOISE

September 9, 1991

Q: Please tell me your name.

A: You mean my name at the present time? Moise, Maria.

Q: When were you born..the date of birth?

A: Twenty-fifth of June.

Q: In what year?

A: Oh, first of June, 1925.

Q: Where were you born?

A: In Iasi.

Q: I'd like to ask you to tell me a few words about your parents and about your family and how was your life as a child in Iasi?

A: My mother was a housewife. She worked a little bit in wineries. She used to pick grapes and when she did, she used to take me and my sister and my older brother and we'd go and work along side and with the money that we got...they also fed us there during the day because you couldn't stay, work without eating...in evening we came home and slept and in the morning at five o'clock we used to get up and go back to work. And we'd work like this maybe for a whole week. On Sunday we'd return home and from Monday to Saturday, we stayed at the winery. We'd come just to sleep at home. My father also. Sometimes he would also sing at a wedding, at a ceremony. We had a pig, a few chickens near the house and that's how we lived. We worked a little bit to find some money for clothing, for food, to buy whatever we couldn't grow near the house. My father was taken to the army.

Q: Well, we'll get there a little later, but tell me in what kind...in what area of Iasi did you live?

A: The area...I forgot the name of the street...let me think...because it was torn down.

Q: In what part of Iasi was it?

A: Near the church, near the beautiful church.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah...I heard about it.

A: On _____ Street we used to live and we had good neighbors. Well, our child...we had our childhood friends, boys, girls. Maybe he was living the second or third house over from me.

Q: Was this a gypsy neighborhood or mixed?

A: No, there were Romanians living there too. And at night when they came to pick us up...

Q: Yeah...but tell me before...when you were married, what year?

A: 1942.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what happened after the war started.

A: Well, the war I think started in '41.

Q: Yes. And you got married in '42?

A: Yes.

Q: And what happened afterwards?

A: Well, what happened afterwards? My father was drafted. We were left with my mother at home and, of course, she cried, we cried when my father left and afterwards in '42 when they came around one or two in the morning to pick us up, my mother, my husband, and my sister were taken away. My sister also. Also they took my brother's little sister. She was young. And when they came they told us to get dressed. The police came in the morning...one or two in the morning when we were asleep they came. They kind of raided the whole neighborhood. We got up. We got dressed. I told them that my mother was drafted. My mother showed them all the papers. No, no. We have to go. And they picked us up, but they also picked up other neighbors. Yes. Yes.

Q: Not just gypsies?

A: No. No. No, no, no. They only took the gypsies. My next door neighbor was Romanian. Yes, he was Romanian. We grew up together, but he...they didn't pick him up. No, no. They didn't pick him up. He was not on a list. So they before came and registered all the people, made a list of people. Yes, yes. Somebody came and took the names down, a policeman, and made up a list. I told him let's not put our names down, because you never know what's going to happen. And that's why I'm always afraid. And he said well, if everybody puts their name on a list, why should I not? I don't want to be left all by myself here so anyway he put his name down on a list too for all of us.

Q: And where did they take you when they picked you up from home?

A: They took us to the police station. They took us there. The first roundup...we were in the first roundup. We were taken to the school. Then another batch of people came and then a third

one and when the second and third round of people were...the third round of people were taken, they started making so much noise that they didn't take them anymore. They broke windows. They really created a stir. Some had children. We also had children, but we were quiet, hoping that they'd let us go. So other people whom they had just taken but started creating a ruckus, they sent them home. Now I'm sorry too. How come we didn't make some noise too? Maybe we could have gotten away from being sent away. So they came. They took us to the school. My mother was coming, crying, to let us go. They didn't. My mother showed all the papers about my father being in the army and they said well, maybe they'll be freed later on. My mother went to the police. Every where she showed the papers...nothing. So we were taken away. We stayed at the school maybe about two days and then they took us to Socora (ph). They...in Socora they put us on a train. It was a long train. It had brought people from all over, not...many cities, not just us. And took all of us who were there in that neighborhood who were on the lists, but not the others. The others were returned from that school back to home. So they loaded us in cars...

Q: Were they freight cars or passenger cars?

A: No, that was for cattle...cattle cars...for for for cattle. So they put us in there. We stayed about a few...a while, just...they closed the doors and they let us out just so we wouldn't...so we'd use a bathroom. We left. We stopped by _____, _____, and we got all the way to _____ in these closed cattle cars. From there when they opened the the doors and they left the doors open, and we kept going. From the train we could see all kinds of things, and we got to a point...I thought they were trees and wineries, but no...they were people who were in this place, had been there for maybe a week. They were just gathered there.

Q: Were they gypsies?

A: Yes, yes. Gypsies from all over. When I saw from the train all these, we started crying. We were really crying, and we saw a long, long ditch. It was long, long, long, like the train. We stayed there until the night fell. We didn't hear anything. Nobody told us anything. We only heard the train whistle and felt it start and the soldiers who were there, remained down. We didn't know what would happen to us or what the soldiers would do or that they would throw us in the trenches. After us maybe something happened and they they threw the people down in the ditches. We got off at that place where there were so many people assembled, and some military soldiers came and they made us walk about two days. We walked about two days. And then we rested.

Q: Tell me a little bit how this march, when you walked down...tell me what happened? Well, you know...just tell me a little bit how the march was?

A: Well, we walked day and night without any food, without water, without anything. If you saw a little bit of water like a puddle and if you wanted to kneel down to drink some, they would shoot you because there were two guards or something like that with weapons, with arms, so if you stopped to drink the water, they would shoot you right there. So we just continued walking.

Q: Did you see people who were shot? Did you hear shooting?

A: No, no, no. Because everybody knew that if it were after...the guards were after us. There were soldiers along side us, so we saw that the old women, children...children say Mom, I can't carry you any more on my back. I'll throw you down. I can't carry you. You are heavy. The mother couldn't walk. Her feet ached. So once this woman just let her mother down from her back and left her there. The...but then she went back and picked up her mother whom she had left on the ground. Afterwards the girl still couldn't walk with her mother on her back. Left her behind and the woman just was left to die on the road. Women with children in her arms couldn't carry them anymore. They were starved. Then we rested by a fountain there and I drank some water and we continued walking until there in that village...what's the name of it...I forgot. Maybe you could remind me.

Q: _____.

A: Yeah. So they took us there so we stayed there about two or three months.

Q: Where did you stay?

A: Outside under the sky, on the fields. There was corn left on the fields. We'd go and pick it up. We'd pick up some grains left on the ground. We would make a fire on a tray and we'd cook these grains and eat it. And then we just had this older man who took us to _____. There there were these homes...I guess Russians. I don't know who they were. There were gypsies there still but they were really housed well. When they took us in _____ they put us, five, six families in one home with the children. Anyway with everything, and it was on the banks of the _____. You could see the water shine at night. And we stayed there until it got cooler outside. Well, what do we do here? No food. What do we do...just sit here to to tear...to wear down these stone walls? We just went back to...from where we left. Afterwards we stayed there for a while. He got sick. Couldn't stay there any longer.

Q: What did he have?

A: Well, you know...hunger. He got weaker. He lost weight. He got brown in his face. You could look at him and see and anyway I said well man, rather than dying right under my eyes, you know, just leave. If God wants you to escape, you will maybe feel sorry for us and you will come and take us out of here. Go home. See maybe my father heard about us and he'll come find us. Well, anyway he escaped and left.

Q: What did you do after he left?

A: He left and I was left alone with my sister and the little girl. Yeah. What shall we do? It was...how do you call these things that you do...I don't know how to call it. You make rope from it and it just used to grow wildly...some kind of tall grasses, and we went with my sister and we picked a lot of these tall grasses and we used to make them...braid them, and made ropes from them. And we used to go to the Russians, to the bazaar and we sold these things. And they'd give us a loaf of bread, some flour, two or three potatoes when it was warm. Then the cold arrived and they didn't have any of this stuff either, so that's how we lived...from one day to another.

Not...and we put aside some things so we could eat it gradually, not just in one sitting. My father heard about us. He came to pick us up. The first time he came...

Q: How did he hear about it?

A: My mother wrote to him in _____ and she told him about it. He came to pick us up. When he came there, he saw us there. He looked us up and when he came he said see, if you didn't listen to me, he says. You didn't listen at home. You didn't listen to me here. He came with some food that he got from his army unit.

Q: Where was his army stationed?

A: At _____. So he came with two knapsacks full of food that they gave him to take us, to us. Here...some cold food and take it to them. He came. When he came, he found us there. He saw my sister. She was already on her death bed almost. She was sick.

Q: What did she have?

A: Typhus. You know, typhus. We, of course, jumped on his...in his arms and kissed him and he said just leave me alone and go and eat. But you know there was almost nothing left to eat because people had stolen everything by then. My father says you are too good. That's why you got all the way here, because even at home when I asked you to eat, you wouldn't eat. Well, there was nothing left. Everything had been stolen. And my father went to the gendarme station post there and to tell them who he was and he needed papers to take us away because he wasn't allowed to come in there otherwise. They did not approve the request to take us away. You go to Bucharest and you bring an order from Bucharest to give you back your family, to take her home. He went to Bucharest and nobody gave him any approval. Meanwhile, until he came back because it took a long time until he came back from Bucharest to there, in the meanwhile...what shall I do with her. I didn't have any medication. She was sleeping on bare ground. We didn't have any sheets, nothing. I would go and collect grass from outside and put it on the ground to sleep on. So she died.

Q: You are talking about your sister?

A: Yes, yes. My sister died. I was left with the little girl. When she died many people died and whoever died, they were thrown out of this barn-like woods, so you are in a stable, yes, without windows, without doors, no roof. And whoever was dying they just put outside, outside the wall. Well, every day two, three people are dying at night again, until there was a big hole dug outside and they put some trees in there. They set fire to these trees with the people and they burnt them up. When he...

Q: Your father?

A: Yes. When my father returned from Bucharest, he went home first. He knew and told my mother I don't know if I'll bring back both daughters. Be happy if I bring you one. When my mother heard this because...if they had taken my mother away and I had left alone, maybe my

sister would have escaped. My mother said here's some clothes. Take it for the girls to wear. My father said don't give clothes for both of them. Just give me clothes for one. My mother realized that she was no longer alive, so my father only took stuff for...clothing for me, shoes and something for the little girl for his sister and he came. He came in here. Get dressed. Where's your sister? She died. He was sorry too. He started crying. He said well, maybe I could have taken her. As ill as she was, I would have managed to save her but they didn't give me the approval. And then we left. We went to the station. There was a train with soldiers who were returning from the front. They put us in a room there where they gave us some tea, bread, but who could eat anything when your heart was so heavy. I was hungry but I just couldn't eat anymore with the little girl after me. The train arrived and we got on this train. There were these returning soldiers in there. They were wounded, and...

Q: You were there with your father?

A: Yes, yes, yes. He was a soldier. He had his weapon with him. He stayed on the stair and we stayed inside near these casualties. And even if anyone were to come to ask us who we were, my father would tell them that nobody could go into the car because it was filled with sick people, so we went back by _____, by _____, until we arrived back at home in a station...what's the name of it...Socora.

Q: But your father did not have the approval to take you?

A: No, no, no. He didn't get it. And we got off at Socora. We arrived there and we got out of the train and then he shot twice in the air. It was just dawn. My mother and my older brother knew that we were coming...the father would come with the sisters. We got into our neighborhood. All the people surrounded us...boys, girls. He he came, my husband. He started crying.

Q: In our house what was there...in our house?

A: There were...let's see...we had two rooms and my mother had two rooms and in the two rooms which were ours, there were these people who were...had been drafted. My mother told them to stay there. They were...sorry, I can't understand what you're...anyway, the neighbors would come. They were helping my mother. They used to give her food because my mother was so restless, was like crazy. She couldn't just live a normal life until I returned home. She was so desperate. Yes. The neighbors came. When they saw me, everyone jumped on me. They washed me. They dressed me. They put shoes on my feet, because I had nothing left in the house. The house was empty. Everything just was gone, and they brought me cushions, covers, a chair...whatever I needed, not that I needed a chair but...and I stayed there. My mother got ill. She also became ill. My father, he was...he returned from the front wounded and he died. She died. And I was left with my husband and with my brothers.

Q: In what year did you come back?

A: At the end of '43. It was by now...I remember really...in New Year's Eve, '43-44.

Q: And what happened with the little girl, the sister of your husband?

A: Well, she was ill. She had been ill. She couldn't recuperate, poor thing. I prepared some ointments. I made teas for her. I made some hot bath, but nothing helped her, poor thing, so she died. She died. The neighbors buried her. How could I do that? I didn't have any money to do that. And they buried her. They made her casket and everything and they buried her. And I was left...we were left with my mother. And after this, the hunger started, the hardships in life. He was drafted in the army in '45, and we went to _____. During the starvation times we stayed there. We stayed a long time there until he was drafted. They drafted him from there. That's where he went into the military. And then we went back home, to our home. Only then we kind of quieted down a little bit. In '45 we calmed down. We looked for some jobs. We painted the house. We just went back to normal life. And my mother calmed down a little bit because she saw me. She became sad...every time I told her however what happened, you know...camp and my brothers...one is still alive. The younger one is still alive. The older one is dead. He died in '40...'44 or '45. Yeah. And about...this is my story.

Q: Thank you. Thank you so much.

A: For nothing. This is the pain that we carry and every time I remember I can't stand this, because I know how much we suffered and I tell my grandchildren and my daughters and my grandchildren are dear to me like the son of my eyes...like the apple of my eyes.

Q: I would like to thank you again very much, Mrs. Moise. We would like to thank you.

A: I think I realize...you know, I'm not a literate person. People didn't go to school at that time. We were so miserable. We were four children in the family, and my mother didn't know how to feed us. She couldn't even think about sending us to school, and now when I think I don't know how many millions of lei(ph) I could be paid just to forget the pain and the wretched life we had. If we tell other people, they don't believe you. Nobody believes you and when I tell my children, they tell me...Grandma, tell us some other stories. I take them near me and I say I'll tell you some stories and the grandchildren will say, ha...Grandma wants to tell us her stories. Yeah, the grandchildren love us, but when I go to their house they don't know what to do for us to keep us there, because they know I raised them up. I helped them a lot, very much.

Q: I would like to thank you again.

A: I think now if my children would see us...they don't know what's happened to us, they would be worried.

Q: OK. I'll call them up.

A: But don't call my son. Call my older daughter. I'll give you her number, because they are worried about us. This is it.