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[Transcriber's note: Due to the nature of this interview, a verbatim transcript was not possible.]

Introduction by Tori Lockler.

GP mentions her uncle, who was also a survivor; he was a prisoner at Auschwitz, like her. He is died in Israel; before he died she wrote his story down. Her name at birth was Garmaine Barukh. Garmaine is a French name. When GP was in the prison camp, she went by the name Maria. She was born May 20, 1926, so she is eighty-four at time of interview. She went to the concentration camp when she was fifteen.

GP was born in Greece. She had 225 relatives and they all lived in the same village. Her relatives all had businesses and were rich. One grandmother was from Spain and lived with them. Her other grandmother was French. Her father's family was French Jews; her mother's family had a Greek name. Her father had a big business, a factory. Her uncles sold clothes, furniture, and other goods. Her grandparents had two grocery stores. GP and her family had a good life. They lived in a beautiful house.

When she was nine, GP and her father went to the beach. She fell in and nearly drowned, but her father dove in and rescued her. GP speaks five languages and started learning them when she was seven. Describes a building in their town with two doors: one was for the Jews and the other for the Christians. There were a lot of poor people in the town. Even though GP's mother was Jewish, she contributed money to build a church. Her mother's picture was in the church.

When GP started school, she went to a Jewish school. The government sent a Greek Christian teacher twice a week. She went there through fifth grade, when she decided to go to a French school. The French school was only Christians. GP spoke French and

dressed like a French girl. She spoke to the professor, but he refused to let her attend the school because she was Jewish.

Next door to her family lived a Greek lady who was a close friend of GP's mother. The priest used to come too, and her mother would give him coffee. "My mother was so good to everybody." GP had a friend, a Christian boy named Ianni. When GP was twelve, she asked Ianni where he went every Sunday; he replied that they went to church. GP wanted to see what the church was like. Ianni told her to wear a cross and say her name was Maria, and she went with his family. GP had a lot of jewelry: a Jewish star, a cross, and a crucifix. She always took the cross off when she came home.

There were Catholic gypsies living in the mountains nearby. GP wanted to see what their lives were like: "I want to see what is going on in this life. I want to find—I know plenty when I was little girl. I want to find out to help people. I was only twelve years old." The gypsies gave her a gold Madonna. GP always had to hide her jewels when she saw her Jewish relatives. "My grandmas were very strict. My mother wasn't so strict; she respect all the religion."

Discussion of friend Ianni and his grandfather, a priest.

GP's family was rich: "We got in basement a full sack [of] gold coin." Repeats the story about her mother contributing money for building a church.

Meets an old lady who was born in Greece and married a German soldier. Her son is now forty-nine and is an officer himself. The old lady offers to teach GP German. Old lady: "But you have to start on the name for Hitler. When my son is come, you are to speak—you speak Greek, but you talk about Hitler. But he's a good man, he like the Jews. When he come," the lady said, "you have to teach 'Heil Hitler.' You have to know the name. Heil Hitler, Hitler *mein Führer*. Never say you are Jew, never!" GP asks the lady what will happen; she has heard about Jews being killed in Poland. The lady says that according to her son, the Germans will kill the Jews and the Gypsies. GP tells her mother, but no one believes her. GP says to her mother, "I'll hang a cross, because I have to. I'm gonna save all your people. Mother, I'll wear the cross. I went to the church, I went this and this. I know everything." Her mother still insists that there will not be a war. In 1941 the Germans invade Greece. Churches and synagogues start to be blown up.

Discussion of her two aunts and the languages they speak. Her mother sends her to live with them for a while.

GP has meeting in a park with a German Nazi. She wears a big cross and tells him that her name is Maria and she is a Catholic. The lady has taught her how to salute and say "Heil Hitler." GP and the German meet for six months. He acted as if she was his daughter. A picture was taken of them and he told them GP was his daughter. He wishes she would call him Father. She says of him, "When he was with me, he was so happy." GP reminds him of his daughter, who was killed. He warns her that the Nazis will kill the Greek Jews. GP says, "I'm not scared, I'm Catholic." He asks what her mother is; she lies

and says that they are Catholic. He says two words to her in German: “Vater kaput.” Her father is dead. The German and GP talk about the coming war. He warns her about Auschwitz. “He told me everything.” Warns her to leave Greece with her family. He says, “Everybody’s gonna be dead.” The German tells her to say she likes Hitler, offers to teach her how to be a Nazi. Suggests she pose as his daughter. “My name is Johan. You be Maria Johan.”

Discussion of costume for posing as German: dress, hat with Hitler on it. Johan says, “You’re gonna survive it, any place you go. I know so many people they kill in the gas chamber.” Says he knows all the prison camps. Johan says, “Someday I’m gonna die. Tell everybody what I was.” Further discussion of plan for GP to pose as German. Johan gives her papers and writes on the back in German that she is his daughter, and asks that she not be harmed. GP asks him what happens if they ask about her mother. Asks him to help her mother and five sisters. Johan will claim them all as his family and prepares false papers for her mother. GP’s mother doesn’t have German papers, only Greek. They will tell the Nazis that she went back to Greece to be with her relatives. GP hides the papers in her boots. Further discussion about the war. Johan tells her she will go to Auschwitz, but assures her she will survive. “Be careful how you talk.” He cautions her to be careful how he acts. Johan bids farewell to GP, asks her to remember him when she tells her story in the future.

When she was asleep she heard noises in the basement. She went to look and found three officers. They were using her aunt’s basement for secret communications. GP was fourteen and supposed to go home. GP asked her aunt why she was working with the Nazis. “We are Jews!” She went to the basement and spoke with the officers in French. They are Jewish. Discussion about the encounter with the officers, working with Nazis, et cetera. GP finds out that they want to send 2,000 people from Holland to Auschwitz. The men have boats and are trying to help. They want the Jews to gather in the synagogue in the middle of the night. Someone suggests that they dress up as Nazis. One of the men thinks the situation will be very bad, so he will go to England and never return.

GP talks some more with Johan and tells him that she has made the necessary clothes and is ready to go. He warns her to be very careful and never take off her boots. GP goes home and tells her mother what had happened and they discuss their relatives. GP practices her disguise and her German. Her mother catches her. “What do you think you are? Why do you speak that way?” GP says, “Mama, Germans come and they’re gonna kill all the Jew. They’re gonna kill you, they’re gonna kill all this family.” It will happen in another six months and then they will see. Her mother denies it. “No, the German is good.” GP tries to tell her uncle. “You are rabbi, you are to believe me.”

GP continues trying to tell people about the Nazis and their plans. The lady who was married to a German helps. Continues the story about trying to convince her family. GP will masquerade as a German. She tells her cousin, “Everybody, you be dead because you don’t believe in nothing, you do nothing.” GP mentions several people—her mother, the rabbi, and the rabbi’s brother—and describes their reactions. Someone wants to get all of

the relatives crosses. Other family members resist, still thinking that the Germans are good. Encounter with her friend Ianni. GP tells Ianni to warn his family. Discussion of trying to convince her family and making plans for the war. Her mother continues to deny everything.

GP vows that she will survive. GP insists that she will wear a cross and say she is Christian. Her relatives continue to wear the Star of David, saying, "I'm not Christian, I'm a Jew, and I'm gonna die a Jew." Goes to her grandparents' grocery store in her Christian disguise, meets Johan and has a conversation with him. Johan tells her how to act when her relatives are captured: be happy and call them "dirty Jews." Discussion of encounter with Nazis. GP's relatives are captured by the Germans. She tries to tell the officers that she's a Christian, but they don't believe her. GP asks the Germans if she can see her mother. Germans ask if they are Jews; GP lies and says they go to church. Again she tries to convince her mother to pretend to be a Christian, but her mother refuses. GP's mother believes that the Germans will take them to work for a few years and will provide them with houses and other things. She wants her daughter to come so she can marry a Jew. GP wants to live, so won't go with her mother. GP says, "You don't understand. They put you in the train. You're gonna die. First they're gonna put you in the ghetto." The Jews are to be marched to the ghetto.

GP has the same dream for ten nights. In the dream, her relatives are dead, but she is told that although she will go to the camp, she will survive and have four children. Discussion of her dream.

She rejoins her family. They wait for ten days to be taken to Auschwitz. One thousand people are crammed into a tiny place. This is the ghetto. Describes the ghetto and some of the people in it. TL asks which family members were with GP in the ghetto. All 225 members were there, except for her father who was already dead. Her mother still refuses to believe GP. GP tells her about the train. "You're gonna cry. This baby's gonna die on your breast." Her mother is still nursing GP's youngest sister. Discussion of ghetto, mentions events that happened. They get on the train. It has no bathrooms, no water, and people are crammed in so tightly they can't breathe. One lady has a young baby on her breast. There is a small window in the train car. The lady threw her baby out of the train. They are on the train for ten days and then get to Auschwitz. Every day the guards put one bucket of water in the car.

GP still has her boots, her cross, and her Madonna when she exits the train. She sees several doctors. The Germans say, "Choose 200 girls—Jew, Christian, anything—for experiment block." Her mother's baby is taken away and thrown on a truck.

GP says "Heil Hitler" to the doctors. One old doctor comes up to her; he has a grandchild like her, who was sent to the gas chamber. He tells her, "I'm gonna save your life," and warns her about the medical experiments. She is to call him Grandpa and speak only in German. Grandpa tells the Germans that GP is his granddaughter. They don't care. Mengele is there, as is Carl Clauberg. GP is still suspicious of the doctor. He tells her that

he is a Jew. To convince her, he recites a Jewish prayer in Hebrew. Discussion about the doctor.

TL suggests taking a break.

Part 1 ends, part 2 begins

TL introduces tape 2.

GP describes her arrival at Auschwitz. She is separated from her mother. Grandpa tells her, "Don't mention your mother. Try to help yourself." Repeats the story about meeting the doctor, Grandpa. He says he will save her life. They pretend to be Catholics, but are really Jews. GP has a cross and a Madonna and knows how to cross herself, but Grandpa says she does not do it well enough. "You don't make so good, because you are a Jew. Make better." He teaches her how. She hides her Star of David.

Grandpa will teach her the names of the other doctors and help her survive. He is seventy-five years old. He tells her that the 200 girls will be taken to the hospital. The Germans ask Grandpa who GP is. He tells them that she is his granddaughter. Mengele is there. She asks Grandpa what will happen to her. "You don't have to worry. Just take orders from me," he says. They go to the hospital. There are three nurses wearing crosses, and one officer.

Two days after she gets to the hospital, the Nazis arrive to take her to a clinic. She asks him what they will do, but he won't tell her: "He didn't want to scare me." She is selected first and speaks German to the Nazi; he orders her to choose another five girls. They walk one hour to the clinic. GP at fifteen is the oldest girl; the others are thirteen or fourteen. They pass the crematorium and enter the clinic, where there a lot of machines and doctors.

Description of the first experiment. She is stripped and placed on a bed and the doctors administer electric shocks; then they give her a shot. When she wakes up she starts to vomit. The Nazis take her back to the hospital, escorted by female guards with guns. GP feels sick and tells the woman, "I'm sick, I'm no good. I want to sit down for a while." Her face is pale, her body is shaking, and she is vomiting until she cannot stand.

When they get to the hospital she sees Grandpa and shows him what they did to her. He says, "Don't worry, I save your life." If she doesn't cooperate they will put her in the gas chamber. "It's better you live. You are only fifteen." GP goes upstairs. "I was so sick." The nurses put her in a bed and she tells Grandpa that she doesn't feel good. He tells her and the other girls that he will take care of them. They will not eat for two days. On the third day they will be taken to the operating room.

GP starts to scream. "Grandpa, I don't want to go in the operation room." He tells her again that if she doesn't go, the Germans will put her in the gas chamber. "You want to live? You are so beautiful. Do you want to live? Listen to me, get orders from me."

The girls are taken to the operating room. GP is the first in the line. Grandpa bandages the girls. The doctors check to see if they are virgins; all of the girls are. Mengele puts her on the table, and Grandpa tells her what will happen. GP cries when she sees the knives. Mengele orders Grandpa to do GP's operation. Grandpa cuts her open—it takes thirty stitches to close the large wound. She is conscious during the surgery. Grandpa talks to her as he works. "There was pain so much."

As GP is on the operating table, the camp is bombed. Mengele and the other Nazis run away. Grandpa is supposed to finish all of the surgeries, taking out the girls' ovaries. Grandpa says to her, "Don't worry, I'm gonna save your life. And one day they're gonna kill me. Tell my story, my name." He asks her to name her firstborn son after him. Grandpa fakes the surgeries, cutting the girls open but not removing anything. When the Nazis come back, he tells them that the girls have been sterilized. Mengele is happy.

The girls are locked in a room for the night. Grandpa comes in with two of the nurses; although they wear crosses, they are Jewish. Description of recovery process and complications. Grandpa tells the nurses that he only removed one of GP's ovaries, swearing them to secrecy. Grandpa puts some tubes into her wound to drain it. The other five girls are in bad condition and die, but GP lives. The Germans come to take the other girls away. Grandpa tells Mengele that GP will be okay and she is spared. GP recovers and is healthy. The Germans ask Grandpa about her and he lies, saying that she was in France with him and used to help him. One of the Germans questions her in French and assigns her to work in the laboratory.

In the mornings, a woman guard with a gun comes to take her to the basement. GP is at first afraid to go in. When she goes in there are a lot of boxes, filled with "millions and millions of dentures for the killed people, all gold." GP is put to work taking the gold and silver fillings out of the teeth.

Discussion of food. "I'm a thief," GP tells the girls she works with. She steals food from the garbage. She has a conversation with the garbage man, who tells her that he hates Hitler because his two sons were killed. He asks her if he is a criminal; she says no and tells him her story. "You told me the story; I'll tell you the secret. I wear a cross. I'm a young girl. I've been one year here. My grandma was Jew. That's why they put me here." Discussion of relationship with garbage man and stealing gold. The Germans have no food either. This continues for four months.

GP still works at the laboratory, washing tools. She has contact with Clauberg: "big officer, Nazi doctor, kill people." Clauberg wants forty women with newborn babies for his experiments. Clauberg "was very bad man." The babies were taken away from their mothers and sent to the gas chambers. The women are afraid, but GP tells them to listen to Grandpa. Description of procedure done to the forty women.

Discussion of encounter with German guards. The Nazis want to put her in the gas chambers, but she tells them the story she and Johan made up: she is half German, half

Greek, and Catholic. She shows them the papers. They investigated her story and found out that Johan was already killed in the war.

Grandpa tells her that the Nazis are going to kill him. They have closed the operating rooms. “We are happy, Grandpa.” The crematorium is also closed. The war will end in three months. Airplanes arrive at the camp. “I saw Mengele jump into the airplanes.” The Nazis shoot Grandpa in the laboratory, because “he’s gonna tell everything he knows.” Grandpa tells her that the Nazis will march her to Germany—he knows everything—and tells her not to be afraid. He will be her angel.

GP and the other prisoners are taken on a death march. There is nothing to eat and no water. “We eat the snow.” One of the prisoners has just had an operation and is covered in blood. GP tries to help her, but the girl dies in her arms.

The death march takes ten days. Eventually they get to a train and are loaded onto cattle cars. “We’re gonna take you on the train to Ravensbrück,” the Nazis say, and the women wonder what Ravensbrück is. “You’re gonna see what is Ravensbrück.” One Polish woman tries to run away; they shoot her and she dies. “When we come in Ravensbrück, they open the door for the prison. I saw skeletons, ladies, nine years in prison.” They are Polish women. The prisoners tell GP and the other new arrivals that they will be put to hard labor. The women dig holes and do other heavy manual labor. “We were so tired, we can’t stand anymore.” There is nothing they can do, and a lot of people die.

After two months, the Nazis say they are going to Neustadt. There are several Nazi ladies there; “somebody have to clean and do things.” They will be given food. When they get to Neustadt, a hundred girls are put in each room. They are in the camp for one month. A lot of people are killed. The girls cook and clean for the Nazi ladies. Describes her stay at Neustadt. GP and another girl make an arrangement with the people who bring charcoal, who bring them potatoes.

Mauthausen is the last camp GP is sent to. The people there looked like skeletons, but GP is okay. “Me, I was nice—not fat, but I was in good shape, not sick. When you know how to be thief, you save your life.”

When the war ends, GP and her friend initially plan to go to Israel, but she ends up going to Berlin. She joins a group of Sephardi Jews, many of them survivors of the medical experiments. An organization offers to take them to America, but she and the other freed prisoners want to go to Israel; they want to look for their families. GP puts her Star of David back on, asserts her Jewish identity, and asks the organization to send them back to Greece.

On the way back to Greece, GP meets another survivor, a forty-six year old woman, who offers to be her foster mother. The woman says, “I’ll be your mother all your life. I’ll find a husband for you. I’ll find you a nice husband; you’ll be happy.” GP agrees. The woman has a brother, Simon Pitchon, who is nine years older than GP, who is also a concentration camp survivor. She shows GP a picture of him from a newspaper.

Eventually GP and the woman find her brother; the woman suggests that they get married. Initially he says, “She’s so young for me,” being nine years older than GP. They will live together and try. There are several other unmarried Jewish girls in the city and they all find husbands quickly. The rabbi comes and says they should get married quickly. GP protests that there is no money for a dress. This and other difficulties are overcome, thanks to a rich lady. At the wedding, GP is surprised to see her uncle, who survived the Holocaust. After the ceremony, the rabbi asks her to take off her borrowed dress so another woman can wear it; many weddings are performed that day.

Her uncle was in a concentration camp, losing his wife and three children. After he was liberated, he married another survivor and they moved to Israel. He invites her to come and visit soon. The rich lady tells GP that, in addition to lending her a dress, she also has a honeymoon for her: on the third floor of her apartment building. The Jewish organization helping the survivors finds them houses. “Beautiful house, beautiful furniture.”

GP lives in Greece for several years. “All my friends are married, all my friends got baby.” She also has a baby. Everybody is happy. Then she announces that she is leaving. “I’m gonna live in America. I want my children to be doctors, have an education.” She does not have an education.

She goes to the consul’s office and speaks to him in French. She tells him her story and says that she speaks five languages and that she will work, and they give her the necessary papers. At this point she has two children, one eighteen month old and one three year old.

Simon is initially reluctant to leave, but GP convinces him. His sister can come with them, but when GP tells her, she refuses to leave, saying, “Five years I live with you; you give me hard time. I save your life; you give me hard time.” GP refuses to back down.

They take an Italian ship to America. The trip lasts eighteen days. “The rich people was upstairs, dressed up nice, and the poor people was in the basement.” A rich, childless woman kidnaps her baby for ten days, eventually offering GP a million dollars for the child. GP refuses and calls the captain.

Describes their arrival in America. They build a house and are very happy. Her children are successful: “I got good children, make a lot of money.” She washes dogs and babysits to support her children.

TL suggests ending the tape, asks if GP has said everything she wants to say. GP says, “God bless America. America was good to us. The children become good students.”

Part 2 ends; part 3 begins

TL introduces tape 3. Suggests that GP share a particular story from Auschwitz.

When GP was in the experiment block in Auschwitz, there were a lot of girls there. “Some survive, some not.” Twenty of the girls were from Salonica, her hometown. These girls all survived and now live in Israel; they adopted Jewish orphans. GP knows all of them and their children.

One day in the experiment block, the Nazis gave orders for GP and some others to walk in the forest for one hour. They pass the crematorium and see the people there. In the forest there are beautiful trees with red flowers, which they pick and take back in baskets. Grandpa sees the flowers and recognizes them as poisonous. They are to boil the flowers and put them in the soup “to destroy the people.” GP and Grandpa devise a plan: they make periodic trips to a town to get medicines, escorted by the Nazis. On one trip they obtain a different kind of red flower and swap them for the poisonous ones: throwing the poisonous flowers away, they boil the others and put them in the soup instead. “That’s how we save a lot of people.” Describes the rations at Auschwitz: “The soup—it was water—piece of bread, piece of salami. It wasn’t enough for support.”

The Nazis cut off all of GP’s hair. She started to cry. All of the Nazi doctors—Mengele, Clauberg, and the others; she knew all their names—were there. They asked her why she was crying and she said, “Because my hair’s too short.” GP received permission to grow her hair out.

On the experiment block: “It was very, very tough. So many operations.” GP is sure that she will live. The Nazis always take prisoners to the gas chamber at midnight. Discussion of the other staff on the experiment block. One woman is nice and helps GP help the other prisoners. There is one young man who is like an officer, but he is secretly Jewish. He will send her letters. The young man thinks she is very beautiful; he wants to marry her some day. In the letter, he confesses that his family is also Jewish. She writes back and says that she has no food. He has some connections and is able to get her some food. Discussion of this relationship and the arrangement made.

GP has encounter with two French partisans who are posing as Nazis. They give her clothes and food. She asks them to take them with her when they leave the camp, but they cannot since she has a tattooed number.

GP returns to the subject of Grandpa; she was in the room when the Nazis shot him. He was a good man. Twenty-five years after the war she went back to Greece and had a statue built in his memory. Her son is named after him. Later on she receives a phone call from a man who turns out to be Grandpa’s nephew. They offer to help her come to Israel, but she demurs. She never heard any more from them.

TL asks for more information about her operation in Block 10. Her left ovary was removed. She has four sons. Discussion of hospital experience having her twins. She tells the doctor that she doesn’t need medical attention, she is strong; “you know I was in prison camp.” Discussion of recovery and the help she received from a Jewish organization. Discussion of her life in the United States.

Offers some advice: “You can make everybody if you work hard.” GP washed dogs, cooked, and worked hard. Now she has a nice house, money, and all her children have done well. Her husband died when he was almost ninety.

Story about Ravensbrück and looking for water. “I was [in] prison camp three years. Animals, we was.”

GP continues to help people in need. She goes all over the world. When she visited her family in Greece she always took them clothes.

TL concludes the interview.

End of interview