

Name: Shulamit Bastacky

Birthplace: Vilnius, Lithuania

Birthdate: August 25, 1941

Age: 75

Religious Identity: Jewish

*Holocaust Story:*

I was born two months and a few days after the Nazis entered the area they entered the area on July 22<sup>nd</sup> I was born a month and a few days afterwards. I don't know exactly when they began the liquidation of the ghetto, Ponary this is a mass grave site of almost 70,000 Jews. I don't know exactly when I was taken to a basement or a cellar, Polish Catholic nun. In those days they were simply a storage area, milk, eggs, and cheeses, I was locked up there the reason I was like that was that I was born Jewish and was not supposed to be alive. This nun provided very very minimal nourishment to me, there were no parents I did not receive anything for the first few years of my life, total isolation of my life itself. Not experiencing other people, this was not a way for a child. I was very physically malnourished, what happened afterward, I was given away my parents were in a local labor camp, my father was an engineer. This lasted to the end of summer of 1944 when that area was liberated. People were looking for their children; they wanted to claim their children. But apparently she put me on the banks of the river and someone found me and took me to a Catholic orphanage, and gave me a Lithuanian name, which I don't know. I am named after Solomon, so apparently I was not found where I was left; the two were on my side. I was like a hidden child, I don't have his wisdom. When I was in this orphanage I was scared of many things, sunlight, stimulation, sights and sounds. I was sort of like covered up in a way, I remember being scared of things, and how early do I remember. A telephone that would ring and I would overreact I don't particularly like loud noise, there was a little train toy and I didn't like the noise of the toy as well. What happened here by accident my father walked into this orphanage, how do you recognize the child, apparently I didn't respond to my father, so what happened here I had a birthmark and because of this birthmark my father recognized me if it wasn't for that birthmark who knows what would have happened to me. From there when the whole war was over the borders changed, Poland became a communist country on the east and west of Poland were not the same in 1945, that part of western Lithuania. I remember being on a train that took us to new Polish borders and I remember being taken to a recovery place because I was in bad physical and psychological state, this was provided by the funds of Jewish organizations. Sun exposure and I remember when my parents came to visit me we were kind of adjusting to each other they had to learn how to be parents again. It took some time, my mother told me much later that the place where I was had to be protected and that certain wanted to do some harm to us. —in Poland. Later on at a certain point I remember spending summer times and

winters north of Poland on the Baltic sea and fresh food coming back to a basic normal life of a child, south of Poland to the mountains and this is what helped me recover, I think some parts of my health is somehow connected to the early part of my life. Later on a decision was made that the situation towards the Jews in the 1950s was bad and it was decided that I should leave Poland and go to Israel, I was 17 and went by plane from Poland to Israel, had to learn Hebrew and how to be Jewish again, and be comfortable with it. I lived in Israel for about five years, you serve in the Israeli army, and I can still remember my serial number because they drilled it in our heads. My father made a decision to come to the US and two of his uncles and three cousins, they found each other through the newspaper. I made the difficult decision to come here, but my heart is always with Israel. On November 4<sup>th</sup> 1963 he picked me up at the New York harbor, and I've been living here since my discovery of America. Had to finish high school and learn English. I was accepted to University of Pittsburgh it took me 8.5 years to receive my first degree, chose social work for my graduate degree, gerontology because I felt it was the elderly who were the very first in the killing machines during the Nazi era. Worked for 5 years.

I said well we have to educate people, and the results of the Holocaust were so immense because they were Jews there is no other way of describing it, so it is important for me to go to schools. Those few whom we call the righteous among the nations who risked their lives to save others, people are alive today because of one person. My point is speaking against all those things.

If you have saved one life it is as if you saved the world. I'm not a camp survivor I'm a hidden child survivor. I saw that nun when I was 14 she wanted me to stand on a chair to see my height maybe. She's one of the reasons why I speak to honor her for saving my life.

*What was your first job here, what occupation do you identify with?*

Riverview Center for Jewish Seniors, now it is Charles Morris.

*How many/if any children do you have? Do you have any grandchildren?*

I'm single but I do adopt some kids, I have close relations with some people. Very close friendships.

*What is your favorite thing to do now and why?*

It's not so much favorite thing, it's not having fun, it's a mission for me as long as I am able to speak to young people, someone I spoke to I told them I had nothing to play with. One of the children gave me a gift of a teddy bear, 18 teddy bears. I got the idea to give these teddy bears to children who are less fortunate and don't have toys. It's a wonderful project; kids get to hug a teddy bear. Love conquers all. Life is worth living.

*Do you think your experiences during the war held you back or motivated you?*

Well it's motivated me to speak against hate and ignorance and prejudice what was such a horrific end of the Holocaust and there were millions and millions of victims, the most emphasis was that 11 million Jews were sentenced to death, six million perished and the rest survived. I have been speaking for 30 years.

