

## **Interview with Holocaust Survivor Cyla Schall**

**November 23, 2022**

**Prepared by William Paterson University Intern Kristen Prazan and further developed by William Paterson University Intern Phil Bana**



**Cyla Schall with daughter, Janet**

### **Summary**

Cyla Schall was born on November 18, 1928 in Sarny, Poland. Her parents were Yitzhak and Chasia, and she had 4 older siblings. Her two older sisters were significantly older than her (~15-18 years older) and they had moved to Palestine (now Israel) before the war started when Cyla was about 10 years old. She and her parents ran towards Russia to avoid what was happening in Poland. She had lost both parents by the time she was an early teenager, her sisters were in Israel, and she was separated from her brothers. Around the 1950s was when Cyla and her husband moved to the United States and settled in New Jersey.

In this interview, Cyla recalls the life changing experiences she felt when first settling to the U.S. on Ellis Island. Evaluating from this interview with Cyla is her touching storytelling that brings awareness to her traumatic experiences yet has provided positive and heartfelt feedback with her answers considering her love for life, family, friends, and the freedom to live in a country she can enjoy with her family.

## **Interview Transcript**

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Interviewer: Kristen Prazan, Oral History Intern, Mercer County Community College, Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Center, aided by Dr. Barbara Krasner, Director and Lauren Cohen, Advisory Commission Member and Cyla Schall granddaughter

**Dr. Barbara Krasner** [00:00:00] Okay.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:00:02] Okay. So welcome.

**Lauren Cohen** [00:00:04] Also, she doesn't have Wifi, just so you know, so, she's on data. So, if she's, like, choppy, that's why.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:00:10] That's okay. And how do you pronounce her first name? Cyla

**Lauren** [00:00:15] Cyla, yeah.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:00:17] Okay. Well, good evening, Cyla. Welcome.

**Cyla Schall** [00:00:20] Thank you.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:00:22] I'm Barbara Krasner. I'm the director of the Mercer County Holocaust Genocide and Human Rights Education Center. And with us tonight is our student intern from William Paterson University, Kristen Prazan. And we're grateful that you and Lauren are both here tonight to get your postwar story. Lauren was kind enough to write down the narrative of your wartime experiences. So, we have that, which is great. And so, we'll really focus on what happens in your life after the war and coming to America. So, I'm going to turn it over to you.

**Cyla** [00:01:19] Please talk a little bit louder because, you know, the hearing is a little bit old and rusty.

**Kristen Prazan** [00:01:30] Okay. So, I wanted to ask about how what year did you move to New Jersey from Palestine and how did you arrive here? (she was supposed to go to Palestine, but didn't make it there. She was living in a displaced persons camp in Austria before she came to America)

**Cyla** [00:01:52] We arrive on a little army boat for eighteen days on the water from the ocean, from Germany Hafen (port). We arrived here because we were on the DP (Displaced Persons) camp in the American zone in Austria. And we had to wait in the DP camp before we came here. It took us five years.

**Lauren** [00:02:24] What year did you come?

**Cyla** [00:02:26] We came by a little army boat, in November 1950.

**Kristen** [00:02:29] 1950? And did you have any sponsorship? To move.

**Cyla** [00:02:40] We had from an organization. They took us in. The organization HIAS helped bring us here.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:02:55] Through [Hebrew] Immigrant Aid Society.

**Kristen** [00:03:02] And New Jersey was your first place New Jersey.

**Cyla** [00:03:05] New Jersey was because before we came here he was guaranteed a job and we had to go through medicals and doctors for five years, and because my husband was an electrician, he had a job waiting for him. Otherwise, they would not let [us] in if you don't have everything, what they want. Americans, you know, Americans want it done, this that way.

**Lauran** [00:03:36] And do you remember what your first day was like when-

**Cyla** [00:03:42] I remember very well, they came to. They came to the island. On the island. From there they-

**Lauren** [00:03:50] Ellis Island.

**Cyla** [00:03:52] -they took us to our hotel because we were half dead. We were sick in the little boat. That was a boat, the army boat with the soldiers that were fighting. So, the water, that was there with us, They couldn't eat the food. We were sick, and we could go no further. So, they gave us a week at the hotel to stay in, paid for. After a week, they brought us to Trenton to look for [an] apartment. My husband had a job, so we were in a hotel for a week and we find an apartment right across, where we live. And that was the beginning of our life in United States. They rented a room in an apartment for us on the third floor. And the first thing, we think to start to learn English. Of course, they knew a little bit to start to be prepared, but we knew we were coming here. And then I went to night school. First of all, I needed a job. I still understood without knowing, you know, like from school language, and we were working. But both of us have two jobs because we wanted to have a home, we wanted to give our children an education, to be a citizen, to bring good things to the country. This is our first home, really. And they got to school, got citizenship. That allowed the whole thing there. All the government, all the numbers. And we saw them, it's very very hard. It's very hard for us people. You know, you come to different country, and there's different things, but this is the best place in the world for me, which I really find is a home. At least they have, this is the, the best I've ever had.

**Kristen** [00:06:10] Yeah. How is it like adjusting to practicing your religion when you first came here?

**Cyla** [00:06:27] You know, it's very, very hard to explain that. After you been, from where you came and what they done, you know what I mean? The thing, what they done to us, that was like

you're coming from the other world. The freedom, that you don't have to be afraid for what you are. This is- the food they offer! The first time in my life I was a citizen! I was born in a country I couldn't even be a citizen in. At first because we didn't come in like the other refused people came in. We came in from a world --

**Dr. Krasner** [00:07:35] I'm going to ask a question, when you started living in Trenton did you start getting involved in the Jewish community in Trenton?

**Cyla** [00:07:46] Well, yes, of course. Yes. I went to night school, at nighttime, at Trenton High. I worked in the daytime. I came from work in the dark and walked all the way to Trenton High to learn, the High School. to learn... and the main thing was the children to give them a future that should have everything like the other children, you know what I mean?

**Lauren** [00:08:16] She didn't hear the question, but I'll repeat it. What- were you part of the Jewish community when you came here in [the] 1950s.

**Cyla** [00:08:25] Say that again.

**Lauren** [00:08:26] Were you part of the Jewish community?

**Cyla** [00:08:31] They took care of us, they helped us. Because they were part of all the organizations together.

**Lauren** [00:08:40] Did you join a synagogue in? Or not until later?

**Cyla** [00:08:44] Because we didn't need any help, we wanted to work on our own. But we needed the first time to buy dishes, a refrigerator. We didn't have nothing, because you have an apartment and nothing to put [in it].

**Cyla** [00:09:15] I joined the synagogue the day I came in to the country and had clothes to get dressed to go. I needed the clothes. First to get dressed like a person to get to synagogue. But we enjoyed it always, and it was the main thing for me. Thank God that is the world for me. Once a lifetime.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:09:45] And what was the name of the *Shul*?

**Lauren** [00:09:50] Ahavath Israel. They actually moved in 1967, they moved to Ewing so they could walk there.

**Cyla** [00:10:02] They moved from Bellevue Avenue, there they go, on the corner. They had little synagogues where we lived on Broad Street. There were three of them. There where we lived were all Jewish people living there so we had 3. Then they moved from there to Bellevue Avenue

and then they moved here. Then the center street was the other synagogue. Ahavath, they changed it to Ahavath, that is "Love".

**Kristen** [00:10:48]. I wanted to also ask, did you ever come back to visit Poland or Palestine since you moved to New Jersey?

**Cyla** [00:11:10] Never! Never! No, no, no, I cannot go in this place where they killed us. Never. First of all, we have no country. The Russians took my part Poland. I'm not gonna go nowhere that way, cause I'm never able to come back.

**Kristen** [00:11:39] Okay... and did you ever join any organizations like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society?

**Cyla** [00:11:48] Yes. Course. May I say something? I wanted my children to go, every child of mine went there (Poland), and my grandchildren went there (Poland). I have a lot of generations. This is more than one. This is what I want them to go to see what one person can do to the other.

**Lauren** [00:12:08] Where? To Poland?

**Cyla** [00:12:27] Yes, were you there? You brought me the bracelet from there? When you went, to see.

**Lauren**[00:12:31] Oh, yes. I was in Poland. Her one request. She wanted an amber bracelet... when I went there. So that's what I got her.

**Cyla** [00:12:41] You got it when you went. What was his name? Mr. Winkler? From the synagogue, [he] took the students. It was in church. Winkler?

**Lauren** [00:12:56] Oh, she's talking about Paul Winkler.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:12:59] Paul Winkler, yeah. I'm going to ask something in Yiddish.

**Cyla** [00:13:02] I'm 94 years old, I don't care. I'm speaking Yiddish, I'm speaking Hebrew, speaking Polish. I'm speaking Russian, unfortunately.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:13:30] *Zeit ir a Galitsyaner*

**Cyla** [00:13:31] Say that again, please.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:13:36] Are you a Galitzianer?

**Cyla** [00:13:39] My husband was a Galitzianer. I come from the Ukraine, Polish, Ukraine. I was Poland. My husband was from Lwow. This is the main Galitzianer; he was born there. Do you speak any Yiddish?

**Dr. Krasner** [00:14:03] *Abisl.*

**Cyla** [00:14:08] *Abisl?* You say it the Litvish name, you know what I mean? The more closer to Litvish Yiddish. Like *Wilna*... They took that... Russia after the war, grabbed that piece too. This was my best country in the world. What can I say? I worked, struggled, we bought a house, we went to shul (synagogue). The most important thing was everything for my children that I never had. I lost my youth. I lost everybody. Later they find me, two sisters in Israel they find me so the rest you understand. *Kenn nisht reden azoy vu* (can't speak like you). I was ten years old when the war began, and in another few years I had nobody. *Zaydes* (grandfathers) and papas living together. I had family living together, because we all had to live together, you know what I mean. *Gor nisht gelost leben* (nothing to live for). Pogroms, I'm sure you've heard. The Kielce Pogrom was already after the war. 48 survivors on a cattle train, which Russia let us out. They didn't want to let us out after the war. They said we belong to them, because it's Russia now.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:15:59] Let's focus on after the war...

**Cyla** [00:16:00] ...felt *zehr allein* (very alone). Russia didn't want to let the Polish which were there, because I tell you why. In 1939, Hitler was almost in our city. Somehow they made a pact overnight. Germany and Russia made a pact for 20 years. They're all done a year and a half. A year and a half they get up, already shooting, and people screaming. There's already the planes with the soldiers. They broke the pact. They both attack. Where will I go? Where can we go when everything was taken away around us?

**Lauren** [00:16:52] Next question.

**Kristen** [00:16:55] I wanted to ask you a few. What was the most challenging thing about adjusting to life in New Jersey?

**Cyla** [00:17:15] New Jersey is very nice. I like it here. It's thought it's better education for my children. And it's better, the smaller, the better. And here, the less people. It's more like country like. And I didn't have to worry like a big city. That was very important to us.

**Kristen** [00:17:45] Do you remember any kind of historical moments going on while living in New Jersey?

**Cyla** [00:17:53] Oh, I read the papers every day. I know what's going on. I vote. I'm a very good citizen. I worked with the elections, and then I retired. I know a little. A little I forget but most likely I remember pretty good for my age, for my people. You know what I mean. We had meetings, we got together, we had Golden Agers (Senior Citizens Club), I belong to the Women's League (Synagogue Women's group), I belong to Survivors' Club. So we go places, we have peoples talking to us, all kinds. I went to [speak at] schools also. Lauren took me to school and a lot of people were listening to me. Can I tell you one thing? You're very very lucky to live in the best country, whatever politics and all that, it doesn't matter. We live in the best country. You

have all the rights. You're free, you can do anything you want. It's the best country, you want to work, you [work hard] you'll reach what you want. You don't need the government to help you, you can stay on your own, and be the person that you want to make. You go to college, you learn, you have a future and all that. We didn't come here [to America] to take, we came to give all that we can. I have 10 grandchildren, great grandchildren who are all educated and make a nice living, with respect, with everything. You understand what I'm talking? This is the greatest country in the world for many things. Even with the murders and all that's going on. It's different.

**Dr. Krasner** [00:20:40] So I think we're going to wrap it up. I just want to add to the recording that today is Wednesday on November 23rd, 2022. Cyla, thank you so much for the time you spent with us today.

**Cyla** [00:20:57] You're welcome. Anytime. And I wish you a wonderful, wonderful Thanksgiving

**Lauran** [00:21:05] Thank you.

**Cyla** [00:21:08] *Zei gezint, nochas* (Be well, joy) with your families, and thank you so much for educating the people. You're having a hard job to educate them. Thank you!

**Dr. Krasner** [00:22:25] *Zei gezint* (Be well)

**Cyla** [00:21:27] *Zei gezint, a freyliche* Hanukkah (Be well, happy Chanukah)

**Dr. Krasner** [00:22:32] So we're going to wrap it up, again thank you so much.