

Episode 9 — Celia Kassow, Part 2

Episode Notes by Dr. Samuel Kassow

For more on Celia Kassow's story, be sure to listen to Celia Kassow — Part 1 as well as our episode featuring her son, Sam Kassow, who tells a breathtaking story about the Polish farmer who saved his mother's life.

This two-part episode, which features the testimony of Celia Kassow, née Cymer, tells the story of a teenaged girl who grew up in a small town in a remote, underdeveloped area of prewar Poland. The word Holocaust often conjures up images of an impersonal bureaucratic juggernaut, of long trains carrying millions of faceless, anonymous victims to death factories. But, as Celia's testimony shows, there was another Holocaust, where in countless small towns and villages, death was up close and personal—where neighbors betrayed and even murdered old friends for a few trinkets, and where the guards who hurried Jews along to nearby shooting pits were often former classmates or longtime customers. And then there were other neighbors and friends who, at the risk of their own lives, were ready to extend a helping hand.

Celia's testimony also reminds us not to expect survivors always to give a totally accurate, chronologically coherent, and historically "objective" story. Historians who want rock solid evidence of "what actually happened" should use testimonies like this one with caution, not because Celia set out to lie but because she, like so many others, needed to tell a story that would help her come to terms with the past.

Many decades separated Celia's wartime terror and her 1980 recounting of it in a comfortable studio in New Haven, Connecticut. For some survivors, these interviews afforded a second chance to tie up loose ends, confront traumatic memories, and revisit decisions that left deep scars of guilt and shame. They offered the opportunity to refashion a narrative that would tell, if not the exact story, then an account of a journey that began in hell and ended with some semblance of stability and normalcy. Celia's testimony may well be such an example—a story where the victim created a kind of convenient bridge that would link the past and present in a way that was less threatening or painful.

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Celia was born in Szarkowszczyzna, Poland, in 1923. The Jews, who made up 80 percent of the town's 1,000 inhabitants, called it Sharkoystsene, while the Belarusians, who comprised most of the peasant population surrounding the town, called it Sharkaushchina. The town, which today is part of Belarus, is about 70 miles northeast of Vilnius (Wilno in Polish) in a region that the Poles called the Kresy (borderlands). For the Jews, this was Lite (Jewish Lithuania)—an area with hundreds of miles of forests, rivers, and lakes, with Polish manor houses and Jewish shtetls, and in between and all around, hundreds of tiny villages populated by Lithuanian and Belarusian peasants. The Jews of this region formed a special tribe, the Litvaks, who had a Yiddish dialect, cuisine, and religious culture that set them apart from the Jews of Poland and Galicia.

Celia grew up in a warm loving family of seven children, five girls and two boys. Her father, Shmuel, earned the nickname "Sam the American" because as a single young man, he had lived for a time in the United States, but he'd returned before World War I. Unlike the Italians or the Irish, relatively few East European Jews returned home, but Shmuel preferred to marry and raise a family in a place where life was less materialistic and more traditional. Once back home, he married a young woman from nearby Postov, Liba Cepelowicz. Between the wars, Shmuel established a relatively prosperous flax business with a partner, Hersh Berkon, who would head the Judenrat during the occupation.

The family's life was centered in a big house on the market square, where Liba ran a popular restaurant that, on Saturday nights, also showed films. Liba was the emotional center of the family, since Shmuel was away on business much of the time. She was a tall, forceful woman, who was also active in some of the local societies that helped the poor and the sick. Two of the older daughters, Merke and Dina, married.

Dina's son, Raful, was born in 1937. Her husband was drafted into the Polish Army in 1939 and never returned. Merke's daughter, Lea, was born in July 1941, at a time when the Red Army had retreated, the Germans had not yet arrived, and the peasants were coming from far and wide to start a pogrom, beat Jews, and steal their property.

When Poland collapsed in 1939, it was the Soviets rather than the Germans who occupied Sharkoystsene and the surrounding region. While almost all Jews naturally preferred the Red Army to the Nazis, many still suffered a great deal under the Soviet occupation. Since Shmuel was classified as a member of the bourgeoisie, he lost his business and the

Cymer family had to share their large home with unwanted guests, including local Communists. The Soviets deported many members of the middle class. The 300,000 Jews who were deported to the Soviet interior between 1939 and 1941 bitterly regretted what seemed to be a terrible fate. Little did they know that more than half would survive the war, while those Jews who were untouched by the Soviets almost invariably fell victim to the Germans. By rights, Shmuel and his family should have been deported but someone pulled strings and they remained in Sharkoystene. Shmuel and the boys found jobs, while Celia wangled her way into an elite boarding school in nearby Druya.

When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Celia, now 17, was in Druya. In the midst of terrible chaos and confusion, she desperately tried to get home, walking on roads jammed with refugees and fleeing Red Army units. A Polish schoolmate whom she had counted as a friend slammed a door in her face and called her a “dirty Jew.” When she finally got home, a bloody pogrom was raging. By early July, the Germans had arrived and quickly began a reign of terror. Jews were subject to random shootings and beatings. They were constantly required to do forced labor at a moment’s notice. In a few months, the Germans established two adjoining ghettos, one for “productive” and another for “unproductive” elements. Celia’s family was in the former. Since hundreds of Jews were dumped into the ghetto from surrounding villages, the ghetto soon contained 1,500 Jews and overcrowding reached unbearable levels. The Germans surrounded the ghetto with tall wooden fences topped by barbed wire. Since the official bread ration was 100 grams a day, there was a desperate shortage of food, even though the Judenrat did all it could to help the starving Jews. Celia became a waitress for the local German officials, who actually treated her well. Now and then, they even gave her food to take home, but Liba adamantly refused to allow non-kosher food into the house.

The new police chief in the town was Marian Danielecki, a Pole who had probably rebranded himself as an ethnic German. Danielecki had a longstanding grudge against the Cymers from before the war and now he saw his chance to take revenge on the family. One day he propositioned Celia, who slapped him. Danielecki then ordered the police to beat her with rubber hoses all night. The next day, she was dragged, more dead than alive, to the Jewish cemetery, ostensibly to be shot. The route passed by the ghetto, and desperate Jews tossed money and valuables to the police in an effort to ransom Celia. (Her own family saw everything.) Danielecki told his friends that if Celia begged for mercy and agreed to be his lover, he wouldn’t shoot her. When she didn’t, he aimed the

pistol right at her head but at the last minute he shot in the air. (This would cause permanent damage to her hearing.)

Celia returned to her job serving the Germans. The Judenrat asked her to observe everything she saw in the building and to report back anything suspicious. In mid-June 1942 the Judenrat learned that the Germans had massacred a number of nearby ghettos. On June 18, with tensions at the breaking point, Celia suddenly saw trucks full of Lithuanian police and Germans in a new kind of uniform. (These Germans were part of Einsatzkommando 9B, attached to Einsatzgruppe B. It was commanded by Untersturmführer Heinz Tangermann, who received a very light sentence in the mid-1950s.) The Judenrat had an emergency meeting and urged everyone to flee. Some Jews, including Celia's father Shmuel, decided that they would not run but die on the spot. Many of them also began to set fire to all the buildings in the ghetto in order to deny Germans Jewish property and to create a distraction to help other people escape. Celia later learned that a local Belarusian policeman shot Shmuel. He then chopped off his finger to get his ring.

A terrible scene of mass murder and total chaos ensued. The Jews rushed to the ghetto fence and started to run, but they ran right into cordons of heavily armed Germans, Lithuanians, and local Belarusian auxiliaries, who opened heavy fire on the desperate men, women, and children. Panic set in and families lost each other in the confusion. Masses of people fell wounded or dead while others had to run over them to try to reach safety. Celia grabbed her youngest sister Slava and ran right into a local policeman with a gun. The policeman, who had once been her classmate, raised his rifle to shoot her but the gun jammed. Celia held Slava tight and kept running.

By daybreak hundreds of Jews were dead, while many others were wandering helplessly through the nearby swamps and forests. Spurred on by German promises of vodka, salt, and Jewish property, the local peasants hunted down the fleeing Jews like wild animals. Celia and Slava saw their 15-year-old sister Chaya murdered, with her eyes gouged out. A short time later they watched a mother drown her crying baby.

Students of the Holocaust might remember Hannah Arendt's controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in which she criticized the Jewish councils and asserted that had they simply told Jews to run and scatter, instead of allegedly cooperating with the Germans, many more Jews might have survived. In Sharkoystene the Judenrat did exactly that, but in the end it made little difference.

After a few days in the forests and swamps, their numbers quickly dwindling, the surviving Jews heard that the Germans were offering an “amnesty”: all Jews would have a few days to voluntarily enter the nearby Glubok (Glebokie) ghetto, no questions asked. Although the survivors knew full well that they were putting their heads back into the noose, almost all of them, including Celia and Slava, went to Glubok. The only exceptions were a very few young men, including Celia’s two older brothers, Zalman and Hershke, who would later play a major role in Celia’s story.

When Celia and Slava arrived in the Glubok ghetto in late June 1942, they were surprised to see that their mother, Liba, and their two older sisters, along with their children, were also there. Just a short time later, Piotr Bilevich, a young man from a Polish family that had had business dealings with the Cymers before the war, showed up in the ghetto with a horse and cart. He had come to take Celia away and hide her on his farm. (In her testimony, Celia called Piotr a “peasant,” which was not entirely accurate. Peasant families usually did not send their sons to high school, as the Bileviches did.) Celia did not want to leave her mother and sisters, but Liba literally pushed Celia into Piotr’s arms and told her to go. The leave-taking was harsh and traumatic. Celia would never see her mother again.

From the very first day on Piotr’s farm, Celia realized that her new life would require very strong nerves. She divided her time between the farmhouse and a deep hole that Piotr had dug in a barn to hide her in emergencies. By this time, Celia’s two older brothers had joined the first Soviet partisan detachments in the region and visited Piotr’s farm from time to time. On one occasion, they gave Celia a pistol.

Meanwhile, the brothers had also succeeded in moving Liba and the surviving members of the family from Glubok to Postov, where Liba’s family lived. But on November 23 (according to German documents) or December 25 (according to the Glebokie Memorial Book), the Germans suddenly liquidated the Postov ghetto. The execution pit abutted a large lake and there was no place to run. Celia’s mother, her older sisters, and their children were murdered. Her younger sister Slava lay on top of Liba, who, before she died, told her daughter to play dead and then somehow get to Piotr’s farm. Although grazed in the head and the leg by two bullets, Slava played dead, then swam across the half frozen lake, and in an incredible effort of will and endurance crawled the 15 miles to Piotr’s farm. She arrived in terrible condition—severely frostbitten, her wounds infected, more dead than alive. Slava had just turned 12.

Shortly after Celia and Slava were reunited, they went through a new ordeal. German anti-partisan units swooped down unexpectedly on the farm and established a command post in the barn, right above the hole where the two girls were hiding. They spent five days in complete terror, lying in excrement and mud as rats crawled all over them. Assuming that the Germans would eventually find them, they decided to kill themselves first, arguing over who would kill whom. But just when their nerves were about to give out, the Germans left. A short while later, they endured another evening of fear when Germans arrived at the farm with an interpreter whom Celia had known before the war. Luckily, the interpreter did not give them away.

By the second half of 1943, it was becoming too dangerous to stay on the farm, and Celia and Slava, with their brothers' help, joined the Soviet partisans, alongside Piotr. Although Celia fails to talk about this in the interview she spent much of her time in the partisans together with Piotr (a Soviet document from Yad Vashem lists Celia and Piotr in the Rokossovski detachment). They attacked German garrisons, blew up trains, and survived German search-and-destroy operations.

When the liberation came in July 1944, the Red Army drafted Piotr, while Celia, like many other survivors, fell into a deep depression that the struggle for survival had temporarily staved off. Did she want to wait for Piotr and spend the rest of her life in a non-Jewish environment? One will never know exactly what went through her mind but in the end, she did not. After a vain struggle to resume her education, she got together with Kopl Kossovski, a Jewish man she barely knew, and joined other Jewish survivors who repatriated from now Soviet Belarus to postwar Poland. Piotr returned from the war deeply angry and hurt. He even went to Lodz to hunt Celia down. But the two would never meet again.

Celia's marriage to Kopl, who had survived the Holocaust in Russia, was typical of many survivor marriages, where, to repeat a mordant and sardonic saying popular among survivors, the "marriage broker was Hitler" (in Yiddish, "Hitler iz geven mayn shadkhn"). People from different social classes, with totally different interests and personalities, sought to escape the loneliness and depression by finding a partner and starting a family. Kopl was a wonderful man, a caring and loving father, a hard-working bread-winner. But he and Celia did not have a good marriage. On the other hand they never divorced and tried to give their three children as good a home as they could.

Nine months almost to the day after Celia met Kopl, their son Samuel was born in Stuttgart, Germany. Celia was ambivalent, to say the least, about motherhood; when she was four months pregnant, she tried to commit suicide by lying down on trolley tracks in Lodz. Soon after giving birth, Celia became terribly sick with mastitis and the doctors gave her little chance of survival. Their newborn son spent much of his first year in orphanages and in the care of Celia's brother Zalman's young wife, Sonia. It took Celia a very long time to reestablish a bond with the baby.

In 1949, after almost three years in the DP camp of Wasseraufingen, Celia and Kopl emigrated to New Haven, Connecticut, where Kopl became a tailor and Celia worked odd jobs, including waitressing and teaching driving. Their daughters, Linda and Cheryl, were born in 1950 and 1955, respectively. Kopl died in 1987. Celia Kassow died of cancer in February 1994.

Transcript

Eleanor Reissa: You're listening to "Those Who Were There: Voices from the Holocaust," a podcast that draws on recorded interviews from Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. I'm Eleanor Reissa.

In our last episode, you heard part one of Celia Kassow's testimony. She told interviewers Laurel Vlock and Hillel Klein about her life after Nazi Germany occupied her hometown. If you haven't heard part one, please go back and listen.

At the end of part one, Celia was in hiding underneath the floorboards of a barn on a Polish farm. The surviving members of her family were living in a Jewish ghetto where food was scarce. They managed to escape and make their way to a different ghetto nearby.

Celia Kassow: In December of 1942, my family went from the ghetto of Glubok. My mother came originally from another town, from Postov. And she had her whole family there—four brothers, and sisters, and cousins, and uncles. They were about 150, 120 people. So they worked it out. I don't know how they did it, but my mother and the remaining two sisters with their children and my little sister moved to Postov ghetto.

Postov ghetto was situated near a very large lake. When they exterminated this ghetto,

they rounded everyone up towards the lake and everyone was exterminated. Very, very few people remain from Postov. I lost my mother there. I lost the two sisters, their children, and a brother-in-law, plus uncles and aunts and cousins. This is one ghetto that people did not have a chance to escape.

Laurel Vlock: Who told you about that? How did you know about what happened at Postov?

CK: Well, my sister, my little sister swam under... She was a champion swimmer as a child. She swam under the ice in 40 below. She escaped, the only one. Took her three weeks to make the 40 kilometers or 50 kilometers from this ghetto to where I was hiding. She knew where I was. But she would not ask the peasants where Lopuszna is. She was afraid. So she kind of sneaked around—barefoot, naked, hungry, frozen, swollen.

One day the peasant was feeding the cows, and he had huge baskets that they used to have on their shoulders—they were huge, about a yard in diameter—with hay they used to carry to the cows in the fields. He spotted her lying there frozen. He put her in the basket, he brought her in. My sister was swollen, frostbitten, very, very sick with pneumonia. I don't know how she survived. She made it.

And this is when we started joining our hole under the floor together, my sister and I. I went in hiding in June, and my sister came in in December. And this lasted until 1943, in October.

We would be lying, the two of us, and we never talked. We couldn't talk. Our two brothers found out that we're alive, and they got in contact with our peasant. And they said, "The first thing, girls, you need is a gun. Because if you will ever be caught alive—I can describe to you what it will mean to be caught alive, a Jewish girl." They didn't kill you, but they hung you on a butcher hook, and they cut you to pieces.

So he said, "You're never gonna be caught alive." He said, "I give you a gun. In case, you know, the Germans are advancing, one has to shoot the other and then shoot herself. Never, never, never," he said, "under any circumstances allow yourself to be caught alive."

Well, my sister and I were in hiding one day. And the farmer said, "Quick, Germans, be as quiet as you can." We were in this little hole, so much water started coming in. We didn't have any air to breathe. And then we heard footsteps over us. So I said to my sister, "Now, you kill me first and then kill yourself." She said, "No." She said, "You're the older one, you're going to kill me." I say, "No, you're the younger one, you're going to kill me."

And she had her gun poised at me, ready, because we heard German, and we heard a lot

of footsteps. It just so happened they were retreating, leaving the barn. And the farmer gave his three knocks and we knew we were safe.

But we were lying in this filth, rotting. Human corpses, really rotting. Being alive, barely. We were covered with sores. We were frozen, we were cold, we were numb. We could not think at all. But then when the Germans retreated for a couple of days, he took us out. We had a chance to be washed up. They fed us a hot meals—meal. And of course, back in the hole we went.

And then couple days later... The reason the Germans came there, they were surveying the area. They set up headquarters in this farm where we were hiding, my sister and I, to conduct the blockade on the partisans. Headquarters in this farm where we were sitting. Now what do we do?

My sister was smuggled out to the partisans. And the farmer said, “You’re too big, you’re too noticeable, I can’t do it with you. You have to go in the open, you have to come to the house, live with us.” I said, “Live with you? I mean, are you crazy?” He said, “The Germans are all over. You can’t escape, it’s too late.”

I got up my courage, combed my hair, put a smile on my face, put on a dress, and went into the house. Sat down at the table to eat. Who do you think marches in as an interpreter? My best friend, a Polish girl from school. Helena Wonkiewicz was her name, I’ll never forget it.

They were eating at a table, and they had those wooden spoons, and they were shaking. There was a 13-year-old and a 16-year-old, the girls. They were so frightened. I was with them when the Germans came in in the house with this interpreter.

I don’t think she had mercy on me, I doubt it very much. I think what she was concerned with is the farmer. She looked at me, I looked at her, and she did not let on that she knows me at all. They came, they surveyed the area, they took measurements, they set up heavy machinery, and they went. The same night, he said to me, “You have to go,” he said, “because your life is really in danger.”

There were rivers—one large river and one small river meeting at a “T” right on their property. He took and he constructed a raft of three big trees. He put me on the raft, shoved me across the river to the partisan area. Of course, partisans were about 40 kilometers away.

He told me in which general direction I should go. The partisans should be here and here and here. After lying under a floor for almost a year and a half, I didn’t have any muscles. I was soft, I was achy. I didn’t know how to walk anymore.

After wandering about at night in the dark cold, I heard some footsteps, and they... "Halt!" In Russian. "Who are you?" So I said to them, "I'm Jewish." "What's your name?" I told them. "How do we know who you are?" I said, "Well, I have two brothers who are in partisans, their names are such and such." "Okay, we know who they are, come with us." They took me and they led me to the partisan camp.

It was such commotion. It was such chaos. At that time, the Germans made a blockade on the partisans. The partisans were getting ready to evacuate. Evacuate where? Everything was German territory.

The partisans were getting very well-organized by that time, by 1943. They had radio contact with Moscow. They had parachute drops of ammunition. And they had personnel, trained personnel to organize like an army. And the Germans were afraid of them, because the war was not going so well for them. And they knew that eventually, they'll have to retreat. And would be very difficult to retreat with the partisans working in the background, so they decided to exterminate the partisans.

Hillel Klein: What was about you? Could you tell more about—

CK: Well, I was new. I was frightened. I didn't know who is alive and who is dead. I found my two brothers and I found my little sister in the partisans. But in the chaos, we got separated.

What I did find out is my older brother had a knee injury. He was begging to be shot, please don't leave me behind alive. But we had a lot of people that knew him very well, and they pooled their resources. Whoever had one watch left over, or maybe a gold piece or something, and they bribed a pilot who dropped ammunition.

There was no room for him in the plane. They tied him to a wing, I swear. They tied him to a wing with rope and they evacuated my brother. We didn't know whether he made it or not. But, obviously, he did make it. We found out after the war, he came back alive. He's in Israel now.

We got out from the blockade. Of course, we had a lot of ambushes. We lost a lot of partisans, including... They were Jews living in the woods that were supported by the partisans. There were groups of Jews that were non-fighting, that were non-combat. But they were living in the woods and hiding in dugouts. And the partisans used to support them with food. You will ask how did we obtain food. We used to raid villages. Take a cow, or take a pig, or take whatever, and kill it. And this is how we lived off.

Anyway, in this blockade, the Jews were killed off because they had no, no one to direct them where to go and how to go. They were slaughtered. There was no way to go, no place to go, but finally, the Germans retreated. And the territory was ours, the woods.

And we started operations of sabotage.

They wanted me to work in the kitchen, being a Jew and being a girl. They told me to dissect a pig. When I looked at that, and I started doing it, I fainted flat. I couldn't do it. I said, "I'm volunteering for the patrol." They used to call it *razvedka*. They say, "You? A Jewish girl in the patrol?" I say, "Yes." I was given a horse. I was given ammunition. And I was given an assignment.

My first assignment was—I'll never forget it. There was a school that was used for an ammunition dump for the Germans, and we had to go and set it ablaze, this ammunition dump. I've never been on a horse before. I went on the horse with 30 people—two girls, 28, 28 men. And we blew up the school all right. But the horse threw me off. And the Germans had flares all over the place, and I was exposed. My gun, my ammunition went with the horse with the saddle. But some partisan plucked me by the neck, threw me over the saddle, and rescued me.

From then on, I was more careful. I knew already how to work, and they taught us how to set explosives on railway tracks because it was already the end of '43, beginning '44. And the war was turning against the Germans. And we were given orders that, to make the retreat of the Germans as difficult as possible.

When the first German was caught, a 17-year-old with a wounded knee, the commander handed him over to me. He said, "Celia, he's all yours. You could torture him. You could kill him." I couldn't. I bandaged his knee, I fed him, and I turned him over with all the captured. I couldn't do it. I shoot a lot of Germans, a lot of Ukrainians, a lot of Lithuanians in the course of my work, but not point-blank to take the 17-year-old and kill him. I couldn't do it.

But we used to go into villages, where we knew that the people corroborated with the Germans. And we pulled them out one by one and we killed them.

HK: I would like to ask you a personal question.

CK: Yes.

HK: When you killed, did you feel a kind of feeling of revenge?

CK: No. I wouldn't say exactly revenge. I knew either it's them or me. I was in the wolf's mouth. I was on their territory. And we came to inflict damage on them. We had to do it very quickly. There wasn't once that we didn't lose people doing it.

HK: You mentioned before that you went to the villages.

CK: Oh, the civilians. That was revenge. We knew people that did a lot of work for the Germans. And we went into the villages, and we exterminated them. The law actually—there was a law not to do it, but they, they didn't pay attention to it. We just did it.

I played a very active role in the resistance. And I stayed in the partisans until the Russians liberated us in 1944. And then my soldier's life was finished.

I began a civilian life of insanity, I will say. I didn't sleep for six months. There weren't any emotions at all. You couldn't hate. You couldn't feel. I loved my two brothers. I loved my sister. But I didn't show it. I just, I—and they felt the same way. Everyone was so distant.

We tried to resume our life, which was extremely difficult. We had no money. We had no skills. I was never skilled at home to do anything because I was a pampered child from a well-to-do family. I didn't know how to take care of myself.

I was so anxious to go back to school. I tried. I went to Postov and I found a gymnasium there to resume my education. No way. There were no stipendiums. I had no money. So schooling was out. So the only way for me to survive was to get married.

So I started looking for a husband. It's just like you go out and you look for a horse in the market. I was looking for a man, and the first man that wanted me, I got married. And that was the end of my singlehood. I knew him only three weeks. That's all. And because there was no way—everyone was out raping girls. We were helpless little creatures. We couldn't defend ourselves. And we had no way of surviving any other way. You couldn't earn anything.

And my husband was a tailor. And right away, he started working. And he earned bread, and eggs, and milk, and things. I say, "Gee, at least I'll eat." So you didn't look for romance, or compatibility, or anything like that. You just got married.

LV: Are you still married?

CK: Yes, I'm still married, 34 years. It was just a way out. I wanted to leave Poland and from Poland, we went to Czechoslovakia. And we were smuggled out to Germany. And then, we came here.

It was very hard to start a life after the war was over. I was pretty suicidal, I must say that. It was very hard for me to get adjusted. I gave birth to a son. I realize...

HK: He was born in DP camps?

CK: Yes, I was in DP camps in Germany, yes. So when I came to this country, I came

here, he was three years old, and he was enrolled in the kindergarten. I couldn't speak, but I relayed my fears to the family service. I told them, I say, "I think my son and I need help. We're both not normal. We really can't function the way we are now." And of course they assigned us some social workers. And they started working with both of us. But it was a very uphill battle. The boy struggled for years and years and years.

He was an extremely intelligent, sensitive child, and he absorbed every breath I took. Every breath I exhaled, he absorbed. And I didn't hide my suffering. I didn't know how to hide it. I was miserable. So he was miserable. And my son really suffered for it, I could say all my three children suffered for it.

HK: Your husband is also survivor?

CK: Yes, but my husband did not go through what I did. See, he was sent... He was arrested, so he was sent out to jail. So he was in jail, and he was freed. So he was in the back. He didn't even see a German. He suffered, of course. He lost his family and all, but he did not suffer to the extent I did. It was hard for him to understand me. I mean, he hasn't been in the ghetto. He hasn't been in a camp. He hasn't been under German occupation. It is hard for a person who really didn't experience it to really put it into proper perspective. It's hard. My husband couldn't.

I think I am normal right now. I think I'm functioning fine. I had a lot of problems here—health problems, which are hard to take. But, emotionally, I think I'm fine.

ER: Celia Kassow had two more children after she immigrated to the United States. When her children were older, Celia worked as a driving instructor. She also volunteered for many years helping Russian Jewish émigrés.

Celia Kassow died on February 9, 1994. She was survived by her two daughters, Linda and Cheryl; her son, Sam, who was born in the DP camp; and two grandchildren. Her husband Jacob died in 1987.

The next and final episode of this first season of "Those Who Were There" features an interview with Celia's son, Sam Kassow. He tells a breathtaking story about the Polish farmer who saved his mother's life.

If you'd like to learn more about Celia Kassow, please visit thosewhowerethere.org. That's where you'll find background information and links to additional resources.

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“Those Who Were There” is a production of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, which is housed at Yale University Library’s Manuscripts and Archives Department.

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