

## ROSE MARTIN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

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### ABSTRACT

#### *Biography*

Rose Martin was born in Italy in 1946 and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1949. After the Germany invasion of Poland during World War II, her father deserted from the Polish Army to Hungary. Her mother's family was Yugoslavian Jewish and fled to Kosovo on falsified documents in 1941. They were initially imprisoned by Italian forces and were eventually relocated to Albania, where they were cared for by local Muslim families. Her parents met in a prison camp and Rose subsequently grew up in a displaced persons camp, where she learned three different languages. After arriving in Italy at the conclusion of the war, her family then immigrated to New York City.

#### *Summary*

In this oral history, Rose Martin tells the story of her parents, who met in a World War II prison camp and later married. She recounts their experiences during the war and her own memories of growing up as a refugee. Rose further discusses transitioning to life in the Bronx in the 1950s, and her later visits to both Israel and Italy. She also reflects on immigration identities, the Holocaust, and Jewish traditions that were passed down through the generations.

#### *Keywords*

*immigrant, prisoner of war, displaced persons camp, Holocaust, Santa Maria di Leuca, Poland, Italy, Albania, Jewish, New York*

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## **STORY TRANSCRIPTS**

### **Story 1: Father’s Military Experience in Poland**

**[05:17 – 06:20]**

When the Germans invaded Poland, my father had been inducted into the army. And this is a funny story: they tried to draft him a number of times, and every time he would come up before the draft board, he would lose a tremendous amount of weight and they wouldn’t take him because he was underweight. [*laughter*] That was his strategy. But the Poles obviously had a sense of foreboding about what’s gonna happen, and even though he was underweight, they took him into the army.

So, he was posted on the Hungarian border when the war broke out. I’m not sure of the timeline exactly, but once the Germans invaded Poland and he saw that it was a lost cause, he actually deserted the Polish army and went into Hungary.

### **Story 2: Life in an Italian Prison Camp**

**[11:25 – 12:39]**

Luckily for my parents, because the Italians were not very rigorous or severe [*laughs*]—they rounded up families, so they had a number of families in the prison—they didn’t keep it locked during the day. The Jews were free to leave and go about their business. And actually, the aunt who was a pediatrician, she practiced her medicine in the town. So, she was still working and delivering babies.

CSK: *So, the families were kept together?*

The families were kept together, yes. But during the day, they didn’t let the children out. They kept the children in the prison because they knew they wouldn’t be abandoned, so that people would come back. And besides, they really had no place else to go. So, they lived in the prison, but not really as prisoners. You know, it was one of those strange, “You are and you aren’t.”

### **Story 3: The Kindness of Strangers in Albania**

**[15:13 – 16:14]**

They were taken to a small town in Albania, and I have a picture of my mother and her sisters in this village where they were. The Albanians were very religious orthodox Muslims, all of them. And if you’re a Muslim, what you believe is anyone who comes to you comes from Allah, and

whatever you have, you share with them. They are your guest and you treat them with great respect and dignity.

*CSK: These were the Albanians?*

Yes, the Albanian Muslims. And so, the people where my mother and father were staying were incredibly poor—they were peasants, you know. But they were incredibly generous, and it was because of that generosity, really, that my parents survived.

#### **Story 4: Growing Up in a Displaced Persons Camp**

**[22:40 – 24:06]**

When I was born in Italy, we were living in a community of displaced persons. So, the languages I learned and spoke by the time I was three were: Italian, because we were of the place they were living; Serbian, because a lot of the families there were from Yugoslavia; and Yiddish, because there were also a lot of East European families staying there. So, I spoke three languages by the time I was three and a half.

And then, we came to New York, and it was effectively as if I was mute. I was actually—according to my parents—very outgoing, friendly, because I knew all of these languages. And I had talked to everybody that went by, knew everybody’s names, said hello to everybody. And then coming here, I really did become a different person because I couldn’t communicate. What was interesting about going back there in 2005 to where I was born, I really felt kind of reunited with the person I had left behind.

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS**

##### **Current 1 – 2**

Rose Martin sits on her front porch while being interviewed about her memories of World War II (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

##### **Artifact 1**

Rose’s grandfather, father, mother, and two sisters pose with a group of prisoners and guards in Italy (Courtesy of Rose Martin)