

Food

Read the testimonies below. Please note the subjects that come up in the testimonies:

- Obtaining food
- Preparing food under conditions of shortage
- The distribution of food to the family members

My mother managed to save the bread by hiding it from us in her bed. We children knew where the hiding place was but she always watched it. We were afraid to take the bread because she knew that if we ate it, there wouldn't be any food afterwards. [...] Women filled a unique role in the organization and administration of the food. [...] I would say that my poor mother, who was eventually taken to Treblinka, was a genius in the way she managed to do it.

Feygl Peltel (Wladka Miedzyrzecki-Meed), born in Warsaw, Poland, 1921,
Yad Vashem Archives, 3542 0.3

The apartment was big and contained a large number of rooms, large rooms, with at least 20 people living in each room, and eight to five people living in the smaller rooms. [...] On the other side was the kitchen. The kitchen was shared by all the families living in the apartment, and each family had its own corner and cooking time. And so the women would go to the kitchen carrying the food products with them through all the rooms and then return to their rooms, carrying the warm cooked food in the pot.

Shoshana Rabinowitz, *A Mother and Daughter*,
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 2002, p. 42.

[...] Mendel, who, although already fourteen years old, cries like mother's little baby:

– Mommy, I'm hungry...

– Mommy, if you only knew how hungry I am...

Josef Zelkowitz, *In Those Terrible Days*,
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2002, pp. 144-145

My siblings fell ill, one after another. The stove was cold and neglected because there was nothing to heat it up with. Mother, who was herself ill, ran around incessantly in an effort to obtain some food to revive us with. When she entered the room with empty hands, without even a cup of hot water, which she got at a neighbor's, she looked helpless, although she tried to hide her anguish from us.

Sara Selver-Urbach, *Through the Window of my Home*,
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1986, p. 96.

There were all kinds of methods that families used to live with the food rations they received. There were families in which each member guarded his own ration and ate it whenever he felt like it or whenever it was convenient. And there were families that shared, in which the children allotted from their portion for the parents, and that was seemingly more humane. And there were families that didn't distinguish between my portion and yours, but continued to share family life. And our family was among the last type, that lived according to the system in which there was no distinction ➔

⇒ *between what I received and what you received, and if you got more. Everyone brought their ration home, and mother gave each one what she thought needed to be given, and there were no arguments or discussions, so that at that time, I lived at the expense of others in my family.*

Alfreda Aizenman, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/5663

[...] “I don’t understand you,” Avraham said one day to Mother, banging his fist on the table. “Everyone is jealous of me because my mother has been working in the kitchen for two months, and you, you haven’t even stolen one potato.” “That’s true, but I give you my bread ration, because I eat soup twice a day,” Mother replied. “All right, but starting tomorrow, I want you to measure the bread in centimeters. You always give Lucie more!” “No, my son, I always divide it into equal parts, but if you want, I’ll measure the bread in centimeters to be sure both pieces are the same.”

The following day, Mother returned from work as pale as chalk. She was close to fainting. From her sleeve, she slid out two potatoes the size of a nut. When Avraham saw them, he kissed her hands. “Don’t do it anymore, Mother. I don’t want you to get sick. You’ll see, the Russians or someone else will liberate us. Don’t cry, little mother, our Pik-Cytryn princess. You’ll see, everything will be all right, the world won’t let us die. Dearest Mother, don’t cry!”

Avraham Cytryn, *A Youth Writing Between the Walls*,
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 247-248.

Up to David's illness, we never brought meat into our house because the miserly amount that we were allotted was non-kosher, either pork or horsemeat. But when David fell ill, Mother determined that we had reached a crucial stage and should start using non-kosher meat. At first, only David ate this meat, and we kept two separate kitchens, one kosher and one non-kosher. At the end of a year, however, we found it very difficult to observe punctiliously every rule of Kashrut, and as the two other boys started showing symptoms of ill-health, we gave in and ate from the non-kosher meat.

Sara Selver-Urbach, *Through the Window of my Home*,
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1986, p. 85.

Mother, despite her fatigue, peeled some potatoes, and, with a little flour and a lot of water, made soup which we ate for supper. The soup was very watery, but it was still important for us to eat something hot before going to bed. Some of the soup Mother reserved for Talka to have as a meal the next day.

Sara Zyskind, *Struggle*, Lerner Publications,
Minneapolis, 1989, p. 98

Mother decided as always that we would eat the bread we had, but Mother continued to lose weight. Her physical condition kept getting worse. She lost 30 kilos of her weight. We realized at home that Mother wasn't eating, so that she would have more to give the rest of the family. And so we began to argue amongst ourselves and we insisted with Mother that we would divide the bread up, because otherwise she wouldn't eat anything and wouldn't be able to carry on. It got to the point that she could no longer walk and I had to go to work. [...]I think that thanks to that, the family held on for much longer. The emotional support and the fact that each at least ate the portion needed to survive. Mother went above and beyond what was needed to keep the family going. The family atmosphere also continued, the lighting of candles – I have no idea what was used to light them – Shabbat was Shabbat, there were candlesticks, and we made Kiddush.

Dvora Berger, Yad Vashem Archives, 0.3/7033

Babka

A dish made of grated potatoes mixed with a little flour / or grated radish, kohlrabi, etc. / coffee substitute, sweetened with saccharine / with the addition of spices – cooked in boiling water / as a kind of pudding for an hour to an hour and a half. When potatoes were distributed in greater quantities, it served as a pleasant substitute for bread. During periods of famine, this dish would be made of potato peels or a coffee substitute.

Nahman Blumenthal, "Encyclopedia of the Lodz ghetto, Introduction and Part 1", *Ghetto Fighters News* 7, p. 14.