

Mothers' Work

...From what wondrous spring does my mother draw her strength for all this? She is a beautiful and pampered woman who never did a day of physical work in her life.

With what difficulty was Irena's mother forced to contend?

My mother was a very quick and hard-working woman who never complained. They took away her sewing machine and she didn't complain. In the ghetto, people grew and clothing tore. If you look at the pictures, you'll see that people wore rags. Mother would go from door to door and ask for pieces of fabric to sew and fix all kinds of things. She took very little money so that it would be worth the people's while. That's how she found buyers, and people who began to give her clothing to sew. It was difficult to sew without a machine and she had to sew everything by hand with a needle and thread. When winter came, her hands froze because there was nothing with which to warm them. I remember that a tailor lived across from us and he told my mother that while she was sitting and sewing and freezing and didn't feel well, he was no longer able to bear it because it was so difficult. He lay in bed all day in order to keep warm. Afterwards, he starved to death. My mother continued to work for pennies, which were barely enough to buy bread. She sewed as long as she had customers. Afterwards, she found work in a laundry.

Esther Zychlinski, Yad Vashem Archives 03.8362

- What difficulties did Esther's mother have to deal with?
- What characterized the way her mother contended with these difficulties?
- Beyond the physical difficulties, how did the fact that the mothers went out to work affect them?

For instance, I cannot recollect how my mother managed to open a small vegetable store, or where she obtained her wares. Our huge window served as the counter. We placed scales on the windowsill, and some of the passers-by would stop and buy something. We were not particularly enthusiastic about that venture and hampered Mother by acting like stupid snobs. It never occurred to us that Mother was sacrificing her own dignity in an effort to improve her ungrateful children's material circumstances a little.

Sara Selver-Urbach, *Through the Window of my Home*,
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1986, p. 65.

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The young children are a cause of great concern now in the ghetto. All the parents are forced to leave the home for 12 hours and longer. The toddlers remain at home for many hours without any supervision. The mothers are worried: What is to be done with the children for an entire day?

Eliezer Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*,
Mossad Bialik and Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 279.

And I was quite neglected at the beginning because there was no one to watch over me. I was dirty and had lice. I even had ringworm.

Esther Dublin, Yad Vashem Archives 0.3/5492