Selfhelp

Miriam (born Marie-Claire) was born in Brussels in December 1943, three years into the German occupation of Belgium. At just two months old, her birth parents, Ephraim and Blima, who were born in Poland and emigrated to Belgium during the 1930s, made the difficult decision to place Marie-Claire and her older sister, Dora (born in 1939), into hiding. Dora was sent to a Catholic convent school, where she unfortunately contracted typhus, while Miriam was placed in the home of a Belgian pharmacist named Hicket. The Hickets had no children of their own and came to love and care for Miriam as their own daughter. After placing their daughters into hiding, Ephraim and Blima were deported to Auschwitz. Ephraim later perished during a death march shortly before the end of the Holocaust. Blima survived, but after liberation, she was too ill to care for both of her daughters. She asked the Hicket family to continue caring for Miriam for another two years while she recovered. At the end of those two years, Blima sought to regain custody of her daughter. However, the Hickets had formed a deeper bond with Miriam and refused to give her up, setting the stage for a painful struggle over where Miriam belonged and who would raise her. During the years following the war, Blima would visit Miriam, but to Miriam, her mother felt like a complete stranger. The Hickets were the only parents she had ever known, and in Miriam's eyes, they were her family. [1]

Blima then authorized a Jewish organization to kidnap Miriam from the Hickets and bring her to Switzerland. The experience was deeply traumatic for Miriam, as the Hickets were the only family she had ever known. Her reunion with her birth family was difficult. Blima was still too ill to care for her daughters, and Miriam felt that Dora resented her for having spent the war in the home of a loving family while Dora had endured a very different experience. As Blima struggled to regain her health, Miriam and Dora were placed in a series of foster homes. In 1949, the sisters received papers to immigrate to the United States. Blima, however, was unable to accompany them because she had been born in Poland and the Polish immigration quota had already been filled. [2]

Once in America, Miriam and Dora were placed in foster care under the sponsorship of the Orthodox Agudat Israel movement. They first lived with Rabbi Wasserman and Fagie Wasserman in Detroit, where they remained for two years. However, years of separation and their vastly different wartime experiences had created tension and resentment between the sisters, leading to frequent conflict. Eventually, they were moved to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where they once again experienced instability as they were sent from one foster home to another. Amid these constant changes, one of the few sources of stability in their lives was the summer camp they attended each year. Blima finally arrived in the United States and reunited with her daughters in 1953. By then, Miriam was ten years old and was dreading meeting her birth mother. After years of separation, loss, and displacement, rebuilding a relationship with her mother proved difficult. Although the war had ended years earlier, its effects continued to shape Miriam's childhood and her relationships with those closest to her. The emotional

[1] https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1140402
[2] https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1140402

scars left by the war and its aftermath were not easily healed, and at sixteen, Miriam ultimately left her mother's home to live in a group home for girls. [3]

After two years in the group home, Miriam went on to attend college and later lived with friends. For many years, she struggled with feelings of anger and resentment toward the world and the people in it. Much of that pain stemmed from being separated from the Hickets, the only family she had known as a young child, and it also affected her relationships with her mother and sister. It took Miriam many years of reflection and personal growth to work through that anger and reach a place of greater peace and gratitude. Miriam went on to earn an MBA in finance and international business from NYU and, in her sixties, earned a second master's degree. She later worked as a math intervention specialist for the New York City Board of Education, drawing upon a love of mathematics that Rabbi Wasserman, her first foster parent in the United States, had helped foster in her years earlier. Now semi-retired, Miriam continues to embrace the world around her. She works part-time as a bird guide in Central Park and continues to travel. After a childhood marked by war, separation, loss, and uncertainty, Miriam has worked to build a life defined not by those experiences, but by resilience, gratitude, and an appreciation for the present.

Her advice to younger generations reflects the lessons she has carried with her throughout her life: "Try to live in the here and now. Don't discriminate. Don't make war. Love thy neighbor, love thy friends, enjoy life, and look on the bright side of things."

To learn more about Miriam's story, please visit
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aXvXd2upBT824oiYDazhU7cLezXiwFE3/view?usp=sharing

[3] https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1140402