

Miru Alcana



Miru Alcana was born on the island of Rhodes on May 24, 1915. She was the daughter of Yocheved (née Notrica) and Abraham Alcana. Her siblings were Joseph, Nissim, and Miriam.

Miru finished high school at the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*. She worked by selling flowers, perfumes, and cosmetics while attending a hospital school to become a midwife. Due to the Anti-Jewish laws, Miru could not continue her education.

On July 23, 1944, Miru, her family, and the Jewish community of Rhodes were arrested and deported. They were taken onto small boats to Pireus and then to the Haidari camp in Athens. From Athens, they were loaded into the train en route to Poland. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, families were separated. Those who were put to work learned about the horrific death of their loved ones from the smell coming from the crematoriums.

Miru's bravery and generosity helped her group survive the camps. She was liberated in Theresienstadt and moved to Bologna, Italy, in 1945. In 1950, she arrived in the United States. She moved to Seattle and, after 5 years, became a US citizen. She later settled in Los Angeles. Miru passed away in 2004 and interned at the Home of Peace.

May her story of courage and strength be remembered and honored forever.

The transcript of Miru Alcana Interview, March 22, 1998:

AH: I'm in Los Angeles with Miru Alcana. Miru, when were you born?

Miru Alcana: I (was) born in 1915. May 24, 1915.

I went to school. I finished high school in *Alliance française*. But we learned Italian and part *Alliance française*. We also had 4 hours every single day for Hebrew. And after we finished school, I started to work--I was working in a flower shop. So, from flower shop, I changed jobs. I went to work in a nice place to sell *parfums* and cosmetics.

The Germans came to Rhodes--they picked us up. They took (us) to Auschwitz. Three days we stayed in Rhodes in 1 camp. From there, we went to Pireo--5 days by boat. And then to Athens. In Athens we stayed, 3 days. And after 3 days, we went to Auschwitz with the train. From Auschwitz, we stayed there, I remember a month and a half.

And they picked us, they chose us to work in the factory. So, we were working in the factory until April. From April, they put us in 1 bedroom. And they took us Theresienstadt. And from Theresienstadt, we were liberated. Because we didn't know what will be the end of us. We saw so many Jews, with the *yuda, yuda, yuda*. We said, who knows what will be. But anyway, the war was over and we are safe. So, from there and after 5 weeks...

May, we are liberated. But in August or September, we arrived in Italy. From Italy, I stayed until 1950. And from 1950, I came to United States. So here (US), I had a little bit of a problem because I didn't know the language. I was looking for jobs. I had a very hard time. I tried several jobs. But no one was worth for the American because I was not so fast. Here if you don't produce, you are no good and they fire you. So that is the life I had here.

I decided to go back to Italy. And in the meantime, a relative of mine, she wrote me, she called me to "*Come to Seattle. You will find another place. And you will be happy.*" So, I went there. I started to work in an Italian delicatessen until 1956. From 1956, I became an American citizen. And from there I took my passport and I went back to Europe to visit Israel and to stay a little bit in Italy. So that is what I did all my life.

AH: What was your father and mother's name?

Miru Alcana: My father's name is *Abraham Alcana*. My mother *Yocheved Notrica*.

And I had 2 brothers. The older, *Joseph* and the second, *Nissim*. My older sister, *Miriam*. And she had 3 children. One 9, another 7 and the other one 5. So, do I have to tell you about boy and girls?

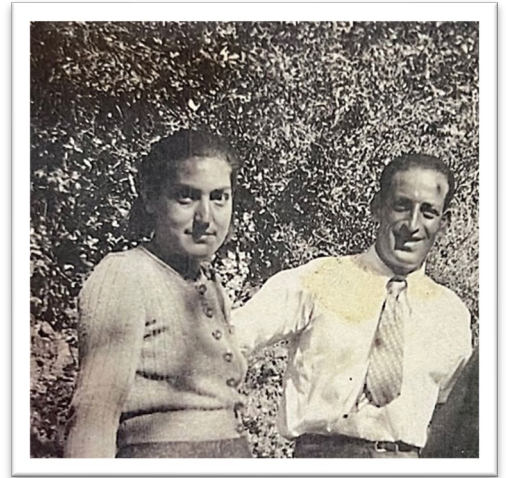
AH: No, no. It's okay.



Abraham Alcana



Joseph Alcana



Miru and Nissim Alcana

AH: And what kind of work did your father do?

Miru Alcana: My father, he used to do--some bottles with the straw. And then after he finished, he gave the color and he sell to the people who sells the wine.

AH: So, it was a straw design around the bottle?

Miru Alcana: Yes.

AH: And how long did he do that?

Miru Alcana: Oh, he did for few years. When my brother started to work, he said (to my father), "*Stop and do nothing. Because we are ready to support you.*"

AH: Your brother?

Miru Alcana: Yeah. My brothers. Because, one was doing shoemaker and the other was, ah, -- constructor.

AH: Constructor?

Miru Alcana: Yeah. So, they were doing very well.

AH: Do you know what kind of work your grandfathers did?

Miru Alcana: *Nathan Alcana*. I think he was working in the boats. You know, when the boat was coming far and they used to go with the boats—small boat to pick up all the merchandise.

To take the merchandise to bring to the port.

- AH: How about your other grandfather on the *Notrica* side?
- Miru Alcana: He died – my mother was orphaned. He died very, very young. I don't know.
- AH: Your parents and your grandparents were all born in Rhodes?
- Miru Alcana: Yes.
- AH: And in Rhodes, do you remember the street name that you lived on?
- Miru Alcana: Yes. First, we used to live-- *Via de la Turkeria*.
And after we were living – the name of the Italian, I forgot.
- AH: That's okay.
- Miru Alcana: *Via Desdemono*.
- AH: And you used to work with flowers?
- Miru Alcana: Yes.
- AH: Where was that? *Mandraki*? *La Juderia* or outside?
- Miru Alcana: You'll never dream! So beautiful store...between the *Via de Cavalleri* y *Municipio de Rodi*-the mayor – how do you?
- AH: The city government.
- Miru Alcana: Beautiful place.
- AH: And what was your job?
- Miru Alcana: (Not) one florist knew the names of the plants. No one. If I'll ask anyone, "What is this plant?" (They say) "*I don't know*". But I know myself, yes.
- AH: Very good. So that was a good job for you.
- Miru Alcana: Yes. I enjoyed very much. Beautiful! Oh, to me it was a dream.
- AH: What year was that? In the 1930s?
- Miru Alcana: '38, '39.

AH: What problems were there—when the Italian government with the fascist against the Jewish people?

Miru Alcana: They started in 1939 with us. But in '36, '37, '38, they have schools. In 1939, they told them to open the store on *Shabbat*. In '40, I'll tell you the truth, in fact, in 1939, so many people—they emigrated. They came to United States. They went to South Africa. But the last transport, the last people who left was in the '40.

AH: In Rhodes, what synagogue did your family go to?

Miru Alcana: I'll tell you. The younger--they didn't go. But I was a member of the *Menorah* group of the school. The students, *Menorahad*, they used to call. We used to go at the school in 1 class on *Shabbat* to have the prayer. And then we used to sing the *perek*. For instance... [*Miru started singing*].

Every *Shabbat*, we used to go there. The director of the school, the rabbi, we used to sing together. And we're still very religious. With only one handkerchief and that is all. We used to go at the temple, the school.

AH: What synagogue did your parents go to? *Tikkun Hazot*?

Miru Alcana: *Midrash*.

My brothers also to *Midrash*. My uncle, *Midrash*. All the cousins in the family, *Midrash*. Because they have so many, I think 7 synagogues they have.

AH: Now, when the people were leaving Rhodes because they saw that there were more problems. They started leaving in 1939 and 1940?

Miru Alcana: 1939...the problem, the trouble, but not so severe. Not like I heard in Italy--they were not allowed to have Jewish names. I heard that.

But in our city, we had *bar mitzvah*. We had wedding. We had everything normal. And, we also had *kosher*. *Kasher*. But the only thing-- we didn't have enough! We have 1, once a week, 2 the most. Because what's imported, they did not have in Rhodes. Rhodes was one island, so.

AH: Then after the concentration camp, you were liberated in May 1945. Who liberated you?

Miru Alcana: Yes, the Russian.

AH: Where did you go after you were liberated?

Miru Alcana: ...Prague, no, Bohemia. After in Prague to Budapest. From Budapest, we were waiting the Italian government—they sent trains. And they picked us up. And we went to Italy. From Italy, we came here.

AH: When did you find out? (the death of parents)

Miru Alcana: When my parents, how? The same day because – the same day when we arrived in Auschwitz. We (were) in line. The SS, they came to count us. The transport arrived and how many there are to write down. So, we're crying. Cry to be alone-- to see our parents in front of us. And my brothers shaved. And we were shaved, you know. And we're crying to see our brothers. My brother-in-law and so many cousins to see nude--to be in front of them, we were crying.

And the other--the *French* people, they say, "*Italian, do you know French?*" We say yes. "*What for-you cry?*" We lost our parents, they separated us. "*Here, you don't have to cry. We are in their hands. They can do whatever they want. Now your parents they (were) killed. Don't you smell the meat?*"

Oh, we say for 3 weeks we didn't have nothing in our stomach. We didn't put one drop of water in our mouth. And so, they eat the steaks, the barbeque? They said "*No. They are your parents that are in the oven.*"

So, same day we find out. Those people--the *French*, they did say (to) us, we didn't know. So that day, the 16th—*August 16*.

AH: The French were French Jewish people?

Miru Alcana: Yes.

AH: And then you came to the United States. After you were liberated, you were in Italy. How long did you stay in Italy?

Miru Alcana: From 1945, '46 to 1950. Five years.

AH: What city did you live in?

Miru Alcana: Bologna. The community is so nice. The Jewish, oh, you have no idea.

The Jewish people-they invite us every day, 3-person, 5-person for lunch. And 5 nighttime for dinner in their house. And they say, "*you need stockings, what you need, you need dress--let's go, to pick up.*" They treat us, you have no idea. In fact, so many Christian, Italian-Christian, so nice. Always, they were nice. I call them and we are in good harmony. And when I go to Italy, I go to their house. Really, nice people.

AH: Do you have any pictures from Italy?

Miru Alcana: Yes.

AH: Yeah? Okay. Let me – I'll turn that off.

This picture (from Rhodes) that you're showing me is a small square picture in black and white. *



Miru Alcana: The little boy.

AH: With a Jewish star on his jacket.

Miru Alcana: Yeah. *Iju de Samuel Angel. La madre, era Rivka, el otro es Galanti.*

AH: And behind is *Galanti*?

Miru Alcana: *Segundu es Galanti. Iju de Yomtov...de Yomtov Galanti.*

El otro, mi hermano, Joseph.

AH: And your brother—Joseph you can't see, you can only see part of his face though.

Miru Alcana: Yeah. *Ke labora, laboraba a papuchi--shoemaker.*

AH: Oh, that's why he has the apron?

Miru Alcana: Yeah.

AH: Now his family--is he still living?

Miru Alcana: No. *[Speaking in Ladino]* [End of Audio]
(Miru's siblings and parents died in the concentration camps)

** A photo of a young Rhodian Jewish boy of the Angel family, wearing the Star of David on the lapel of his coat. The Jews of Rhodes were not required to wear the "Star"; the boy chose to wear the "Star" as an innocent gesture of pride instead of its actual use as a symbol of persecution. Tragically, the boy was among the 1,673 Jews of Rhodes deported to Auschwitz, where he was killed. Only 151 survived.*

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