

Hanna Sukiennik Interview

October 18, 2000

This is the interview of Hanna Sukiennik done on October 18, 2000. Hanna, what was your name at birth? Could you tell me and spell it, please?

Hanna Rydelnik, R-Y-D-E-L-N-I-K.

And when were you born?

September 8, 1923.

Okay, and in what city?

In a little country place. It's called Zagurze.

Can you spell it?

Z-A-G-U-R-Z-E.

Is that in Poland?

This is in Poland.

What do you know about the circumstances of your birth?

It's hard to say. Would have been a pretty big family. We were six people... six children... and it was pretty hard.

Do you know if you were born at home or in a hospital?

Yeah, at home. They didn't have hospitals.

What were your parents' names?

Szyman Rydelnik and Rachel Rydelnik.

Okay. You want to spell the first names?

Szyman, S-Z-Y-M-A-N. And Rachel, R-A-C-H-E-L.

Okay. Describe the role of your mother and your father in your household.

Mother was very, very smart, very lenient. She loved the children and she took care of the children. My father only, he was a provider. That was her who she decide to do something about our schooling or our life.

It was your mother who made those decisions?

Yes. Um hmm.

And your mother, did she have any kind of an occupation at all?

No, she did not. She took care of the household, but also helped my father. We used to have a small factory. They were making, my father was making clothes for the people who work in the mines. And so, she used to come to the city to buy his things what he needed.

I see, okay. She was the buyer of the business, kind of?

Um hmm.

Okay. Can you describe the members of your family and give their names and their ages and their relationship to you?

You mean my sisters and brothers?

Um hmm.

Were three girls and three boys. My oldest sister was born 1908 and her name was Ceiana, C-E-I-A-N-A, Ceiana. The second was my brother and he was born in 1910 and his name was Jolek Rydelnik, J-O-L-E-K. And Rydelnik I think you have already.

Yeah, sure.

The next one was Milton Rydelnik, M-I-L-T-O-N. The next one, nine years later, there was me and I was born 1923. Next to me was my sister who was just a year and a half younger and her name was Genia Rydelnik, and, that was Genia. The last one was my brother and his name was Maury Rydelnik.

Um hmm. What kind of a neighborhood did you live in?

It was a little place, in a country place. We had a very nice neighborhood. We had quite nice furniture and nice accommodation, and rooms for everybody.

You mean they all had, did you all have your own bedroom or did you share?

No, no, no. They'd have to share, of course, but still enough, but not so when we moved to Bedzin. We did move because there was depression time and there was no work in the mines and they pour some water in and so we did have to move.

What year was... do you remember how old you were when you moved?

It was in 1935, I think, '32 or '35.

So would you say you grew up in the second house more than your...?

Yes. Yeah, that's right. The second house, we lived in Będzin. We didn't have very nice apartment. It was very small apartment and it was not clean and people were not very wealthy. We did have to even help sometime when my mother bakes something to send to somebody who lived in this particularly court.

So, you think, so you were better off when you lived in the first town?

Yes.

Times change.

... as far as, yeah. As far as the neighborhood and as far as accommodation to the whole family.

So, did you have any help in the house at all or did you...?

Once in a while, my mother would have help. But she would [unclear] then that I went to Catholic school for seven years in Zagórze but in Będzin, my mother decided I would go to *gymnasium*, which was Jewish, or Hebrew, and I went four years there.

We'll talk about that. I want to ask more about your...

Ok.

... did you have enough to eat?

Yes, we did.

Okay, what kind of foods did you eat?

I think similar than here: milk, bread, rolls, cheese, meat.

What were some of your favorite things to eat?

To eat? Small rolls. I was not a very big eater.

You liked bread.

Ehh, not particularly, but was special ones my mother used to buy because she knew which I like.

What were your family's political affiliations?

They were democrats. Definite, my mother. Very strong opinion.

Now, did they have parties? You know, they had different parties in Poland.

Not that I can recall. Like I know only one party was communistic party.

But her philosophy was more democratic?

Democratic.

Now describe... you said you went to... first, you went to a Catholic school; then, you went to the *gymnasium*?

Gymnasium.

Okay.

And when the war broke out, I was already in first *Lyceum*. And I was supposed to take [unclear] but the war came and I couldn't make it anymore. That was that.

Now, what year were you at that time?

About fourteen and a half.

Fourteen? And what were the teachers like?

Most of them came from southern Poland and they were Jewish. Like Hochhold, like Aniseldova, Anisfeld. What I remember their name. Lieblich, because I think over there, they didn't have the Russian occupation and they could go to *gymnasium* and to universities and they had very excellent teachers.

What were your favorite subjects?

History. Very much so until today.

Really? That's interesting. But you did not graduate from the *gymnasium*?

I did.

Oh, you did?

I did, yes. And I was already in the first *lyceum*.

Oh, okay. So, how old were you when you graduated? You were fourteen and a half when you ...?

About fifteen.

Fifteen when you graduated?

Fifteen, yeah.

What did you do for fun as a youngster?

I want to just make it sure that I don't forget that the fees were very high in the *gymnasium* because it's private built by a Jewish, very wealthy man in Będzin. So, he decides to have the Jewish children there. And there was not enough money, really, to pay every month for tuition, which was 85 *zloty*. So, since my brother-in-law was a professor in school in Będzin, he used to send me children to tutor them.

Oh, I see.

So, I had few dollars to pay or for fun. And you asked about fun? We went, like, wintertime, we went skating or skiing. Summertime, we played ball or went on a meadow sometime, you know, to have fun there. It's was, I think, all about it. And we walked a lot.

And you had a good time.

Yeah, and we walked a lot.

Describe your friends, your hobbies, and organizations that you belonged to.

I didn't belong to any organization except in school. There was a Jewish organization for Israel.

Like Zionist-type...

Zionist-type, right.

... organization?

And my friends were very nice. We were very close and went to school together, so...

So, they were mostly, were Jewish friends?

Jewish, yes. Będzin was very, very Jewish.

Would you spell Będzin?

How I spell it? Yeah. The way in Poland or here?

Well, here.

B-E-N-D-Z-I-N.

Okay. Just so they'll know. Okay, so, you had Jewish friends, mostly?

Um-hmm.

And belonged to a Jewish organization?

Yes, yes. *Hatzohar*. The name of our organization was *Hatzohar*. And so we, we walked a lot, because it was in style to walk. And there were places to walk. So, we got together and we walked.

Now, this was, was this during your teenage years you're talking about?

Yeah.

And did you have any hobbies?

Not particularly.

Did you have friends of the opposite sex as well as girlfriends?

Mostly they were girlfriends. I did have some friends that were not Jewish who were very nice to me because during the war, they send for me packages to the Warsaw Ghetto. But I couldn't, after the war, I couldn't find her anymore. She was not listed the way I remember her name and I didn't know her last name.

What a shame.

Yes.

Made you feel, feel bad... Did you have any kind of job during that time or...?

Yes, I did. I was working as a bookkeeper in a little office. They were selling tiles and asphalt. There was a Jewish man who had the business and I worked in the office.

Was that after you finished school... or during school?

Sometime during school, too. During vacation, my mother was very eager for me to learn more than that. It's not enough *gymnasium*, so during the summertime, she sent me to Katowice to work, to learn how to type. So, I had, this is experience, too.

I see. Okay. How did you get along with your parents?

Very well. My father was wonderful and I told you my mother, I think I was very special to her.

Were you ever... were they... would you say they were more strict or were they permissive?

No, if I had a date... so, if I, mother said to me, "If you want to be out of town, let me know. I don't have to ask you 'what' and 'why'," but she would like to know if we were in town.

And, did, were you ever rebellious?

No. No, she was very kind to me. She was very special.

Were there any issues at all that created tension between you and your parents?

Not with me so much, but I have to just talk about during the war. We used to have smugglers who smuggle, smuggle, I think it's say, on the Russian side in Poland. And she would spend a lot of money. And one of my brothers made the remark that we are still for home. And this is a shame where she puts all the money to one person - but she did anyway.

She did what she knew.

Yes.

What values or standards were most important to your parents? What did they put a high value on? What kind of values... you understand what...?

Yes. Education. There was priority. That was the first priority.

First priority?

Later, she complained that I don't have enough weight so she used to send me to special places to gain weight. So, she was concerned about it. And when I used to come home in a week later, I had tonsillitis, so there was no weight anymore. So, I couldn't have any more weight. But this what she... every year, the same thing.

That was her concern. Were there any other values that you would say were important to your parents?

Yeah. Um-hmm. We traveled from school a lot. And we used to go to Kraków or to Gdynia ports and to Zakopane, mountains, different places. And she used to send me with the school. And that was a special fee again. Once I was supposed to go in 1935 when Piłsudski, the Marshal Piłsudski, Polish president, died, to Gdynia and I didn't tell her that because it was quite a bit of money and I was afraid she wouldn't be able to make it. But, I used to live, when I went to *gymnasium* with my sister who lived in Będzin, we used to live in Zagórze still, but I live in Będzin with my sister. So, my friend tells her, "Well, I don't know if Hanka has gone to Gdynia or not." So, she said to me, "Hanna, who said that?" So, she knew that I didn't say anything about it. And she gave me the money and I went.

Really?

Um-hmm.

Sound like a wonderful, generous person. She wanted you to see the world, didn't she?

Yes, she loved me a lot.

What was religious life like in your general community?

Religious? We were traditional, not orthodox or reform.

The community in general?

Yeah. It was father... when I was ready to go to *shul*, not in a big *shul* because there was a big court where we lived and so they had the little room and people used to come there. So, there was not synagogue actually.

How was Judaism practiced in your home?

It was practiced, like I say, traditional. Kosher, was kosher.

How did you family celebrate *Shabbat* and the holidays?

Saturday we had always had somebody from the family coming and spending afternoon with us, on Saturday. There was a very dear uncle I remember. After Saturday afternoon, he would always come. And holiday, of course, like Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, my mother would go to the, uh, *shul*, too, not synagogue, in the place where we live. The father, of course, went too.

Which holidays were most important?

I think Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Now, also, Passover was very important to them and to us. The dishes were changed. We did not eat bread or anything like it. And she used to cook for us, what she thought we can have it on Passover. And very important, she used to buy me socks, to the knees. And it was always very cold and I couldn't wear them.

So, I remember that she said, “Well, put them on and go for hour outside. If you see it’s so cold, you will come back.” Well, she did little thing for us, too, especially as I told you, to me. Um-hmm.

Did you and your family celebrate any of the secular holidays?

Like what?

Well, like, like national holidays, you know, that they would celebrate in Poland, that the Polish people.

Yeah, the, the third of May. They even have it here, too, Polski Day in Kansas City.

Oh, they do?

The Polish people. From this school, we used to have a parade. And that was the third of May because Poland had a new constitution.

Oh, and that was what it commemorated, was the new constitution?

Yes, so we... it was very cold and a sweater was under the blouse and the blouse would be white and the skirts navy. And from there, sometime we went to a, a church sometime. And later, later years, we went to the synagogue in Będzin.

So, were there any other secular holidays that you celebrated or is that the only one?

Well, naturally, there was in November, you went to the cemetery. But of course, we didn’t go because the cemetery was not in Będzin; it was out of [unclear] quite a bit away. But, that was a Polish, like here, what is here...?

Like a Memorial Day?

Like a Memorial Day. Yes.

Describe your religious education.

I used to go to the *cheder*. Do you know what is a *cheder*?

Um-hmm.

When I was five years old, mother sends me to the *cheder*. There was no other school, a Jewish one, and I learned how to read and write Yiddish. And I knew already, when I came to *gymnasium*, I could already write Hebrew because I was taught in the *cheder*. And, as I told you, she was always very nice and understanding. She did want me to do everything possible to make my life easier.

Okay, so you really started young.

Very young, yes. And I went, also, to pre-school.

Oh, did you really?

Yes, that's right. I did.

What did you do in pre-school?

Well, I did have to take a bus because Zagórze didn't have any other transportation, which we did. We learned how to read for children's book. And I remember that she usually, she used to, one of our woman or somebody, take me to school there, to pre-school. And sometime I went by myself but I was near-sighted and sometime I had a hard time to remember, really, the house. I manage, but later I told her that I'm not able to really find it, but I still went to... So, later, I was ready to go, not to the first grade, but I could go to the second grade because I had all that options.

You were way ahead, weren't you? What impact did the secular culture have on your life?

When you say secular culture... Polish?

Polish, not Jewish, but, I mean, your surrounding neighbors or the culture or the way they did things.

In the school...

Did it have any influence on your life?

Yes, in the school did a lot because they were telling us that Polish, Poland is again lost the war or is occupied. So I used to come and cry. On the other hand, that was, it's I told you, Catholic school and I used to bring flowers to the altar because there was a altar and, and candles. So, everybody was bringing something, so I used to cut some flowers on the meadow and bring it to...

Were your parents more concerned about maintaining your Jewish identity or fitting in to the general culture?

No, I think they were very concerned about, being me with more Jewish friends and to have, know enough about our religion.

Well, were you encouraged at all to have any kind of relationships outside of your Jewish friends?

Not, not really.

Were your family interested in the secular culture such as art and music and philosophy...?

Definite. Our school was so wonderful and it's very high graded. The conservatorium used to send an orchestra to our school in a gym because was enough place. And now, we didn't have in Będzin, so they used to come from Katowice, which was not very far. They took a streetcar. And they told us every instrument, what it is. And played for us places, pieces, which we liked it. So, there was a Beethoven, of course, and there was a Bach and...

Did your parents attend concerts or plays?

No, they were not really. There was other, maybe, places but they didn't go, as much as I know.

Okay. Let's see. Were the Jews where you lived, were they accepted by the general community, would you say? Or was it always kind of separate?

I think it most of the time separated. Like I didn't know that, I didn't, I didn't know about it because most of my friends were in a better money or finances situation. But since, we're not really poor but not enough to make anything special.

Did you experience any antisemitism that you remember?

Not in Będzin because, I told you, every rock, every stone was Jewish.

Really? And what about before that, had you ever experienced any...?

Not really, not myself.

Okay. Now, before the war, you said you worked as a bookkeeper?

Yeah, um-hmm.

Okay.

The name was Myeren. I know the name of the people who owned it.

What was their name?

Myeren, M-Y-E-R, Myeren... E-N.

Did you enjoy this kind of work?

Yes, I did work with another lady who was really a, how do you say, not the keeper but she took care...

Office manager or...?

No, no, no, no. It has to do with the bookkeeping.

Oh, an accountant?

Accountant, that's correct, uh-huh. And she helped me a lot. They also used to send me out to different cities to collect money, which people used to buy and they didn't pay and so they said I could [unclear] and I did want to go.

You did like it?

Yes, I did like it, yes.

Okay. Did you work with mostly Jews or non-Jews?

You mean people...

At work.

At the work? Jewish people.

They were all Jewish people. Okay. And now how far did you go in that job?

Well, I couldn't go too far because the war broke out.

Okay. So, that kind of ended that?

Um-hmm.

Okay. Did you, were you, did you get married before the war?

No, I was not married before the war.

Okay.

I married after the war.

Okay, we'll talk about that later.

All right.

When and how did you first become aware of the Nazi presence?

You mean when the war broke out?

Well, before... like when did you realize things were changing? That the Nazis were...?

We didn't know very much about it, really, except that my oldest brother loved military. He was a higher ranked military man. My mother was very unhappy. Plus, he played soccer, which she didn't like it either. And so, this time, we didn't know very much what was in Germany. Maybe later on, yes. He was called to come to the military. It was August 1939, and the war broke out September the first one, 1939, when I supposed to the third one, go to school. So, this is as much as we knew it. Sometime in the papers, of course, you know, they wrote but we didn't just thought this was sometime to be afraid to.

Do you remember the first day of occupation?

Yeah, very vividly.

Okay. You want to...?

They came the first day. We knew they were coming so we barricade the door, to open when, we have to open it when you go to somebody's room. But I decide to go out and see it. So, they came, was a [unclear], all on a bike, on a motorcycles. Leather boots, leather coats. And when they march until evening, we heard already that they took, taken, they are taking men and they have never seen those men again.

Oh, really?

So, we knew already what was going to happen in our city.

You remember how you felt? Were you scared? Were you... how did you feel at that time?

I was scared really. I always thought, "What I'm going to do with my family and something happen?" Later we have seen the synagogue was on fire and they didn't let the people out from the synagogue.

In your town? In...

Outside. They burned the synagogue and have the people in. So, there was a window, which we could see the, the fire. So, we know that things are very bad for us. Now we didn't have any communication. So from word to word, somebody knew from somebody, the Polish men or somebody was telling us which happen. There were... every week, they had always hanging papers how the Jew looks and they have to do something about it. They don't want them. You would announce...

Um-hmm.

... there was, I think, [unclear], and every day like that, so we still didn't go to the ghetto. That was only on the beginning of the war.

Where you lived in Poland, you had to wear the yellow star?

Absolutely, yeah.

What was it like to wear the Star of David and to be prohibited from public places?

Well, here, I think I have a picture of when... Stan, my son, I think has it. I'm not sure. They call it *Schandebande*. *Schande* means...

Bad?

Bad, uh-huh. *Bande*, this, that's the *bande*. So, that was a bad Jew.

How did you feel wearing, having to wear this?

There was no other way. We still could walk on one side of the street. On one side, we could walk but we did have to have that *Schandebande* on the arm. Later, they were on the back, too, and the front. It changed.

And you were prohibited from going to many places?

That time you couldn't go any place. That was it. So, the next step was, of course, go the ghetto.

Did, and so they... they took your property?

Yes, um-hmm.

Did any non-Jews help you at this time?

Not that time, only I told you about that friend of mine.

Right.

[Unclear but saying the girl's name], she sent, when they still could have packages, she used to send packages to my cousin in Warsaw, which she was in the ghetto, too, now. They still could receive it. That was in the beginning. Later, of course, it's no more. It's a very, of that family, but I just want you to know that if not the Polish officer, I wouldn't be here today. And I met him in Germany in Sommerfeld.

Was this when you were liberated?

Yeah, because I escaped from the camp.

Okay. Now, okay, you were in a concentration camp in Germany, is that it?

In five, in five places.

What events led up to this? Were you taken from the ghetto or how ...?

How did it happen?

How did you ...? Yeah.

Well, maybe, yeah, it's a good question. Our built a bunker and we heard the military going from one door to the other, "Juden, raus." That means "Jews out." So, we decide, instead of to go out right away, to go to the bunker. Was my sister, my younger brother, and my older brother; four of us because we didn't have any more the older one with us.

Were your parents still with you at that time, too?

That time? No, they were not. Anyway, we stayed in bunker for three days. There was a baby. A lady had it and she did have to put blanket over the child's head to kill it because it would cry and if it's cries, they will know where we are. So, that was once. It was August and it was very, very hot and we didn't have any water, or toilet, nothing. So, we decide to go out. So, when we went out from the bunker, I have seen thousands and thousands of people laying on the ground... thousands. So, we have to, we decide to leave. This is it, we have to just stay, see which happen. They did need 120 workers to a Rossner factory. There was a... they used to make clothes for military for German and he employed Jews in Będzin. Hundred twenty he wanted. So, one of the Gestapo people... my oldest brother was a very good tailor, very capable artist. And you remember his name, Rydelnik, and he called, "Milton Rydelnik." And when he called his name, we all went with him. So, if we would be shot, it was bad luck, but we did survive. So, that's what which happened. And the rest went to Auschwitz and we went to a camp.

Do you remember the name of the camps that you were in?

Absolutely.

I bet you do.

Was Bendsburg, because during the German time, there was not Będzin, it was Bendsburg. Later, Annaberg. From Annaberg, we go to Neustadt, with my sister that time. And later, to a very bad camp, Greenberg [sic: Grunberg]. And from Greenberg, our shoveling snow in the front of the factory and German trucks going back, they were hollering to us that we going to be freed by the Russian army pretty soon. So, I came to camp and I told the story to the girls but not so. We didn't [unclear] Russian military. We went on a death march. And they came from Auschwitz that time, women from Auschwitz. They didn't have any shoes so they had blankets. And they couldn't walk on blankets. They were shooting them.

Was this the last camp you were in?

Yeah, no, no, no, not the last one.

Oh, okay. So, this takes you up to going to the camps?

Camp, that's right.

Okay. This completes the pre-war interview with Hanna Sukiennik.

[TAPE PAUSES]

This is the post-war interview with Hanna Sukiennik. Hanna, would you describe the circumstances leading up to your liberation?

The camp, we went to camp Christianstadt. There were billions of lice. There was no food. We would lie on the floor and worry about those lice. We didn't have any place to even put your head in water, or something after, being in a death march. And from that camp, I decide, I made my mind up that I have to escape. If not, I'll be shoot. They look if you have a sore on legs, if you have shoes. I had wooden shoes, of course, and I couldn't walk because the snow would stay on heels and I couldn't walk. So, I decide I have to escape somehow, somewhere. And another two girls and my sister, at 3:00 in the morning, we escaped and stay in the forests so, that we thought maybe there are some partisans. But, we had a mistake because in Germany, there were no partisans. In Poland and Russia, yes. So, we decide after a few day laying on the snow that we have to separate ourselves. Not to go together five of us. And not to look where they go because there's a tendency to follow. So, I went with my sister out and I was surprised to see that it was on the edge of the forest. We didn't know it because we were covered up with tree branches. And when I went out, I saw a German woman having a, a cow with her, or ox, whatever it was. And she said to me, "*Sind Sie aus Osten Flüchtlinge?*" If I am from the *Ost* a refugee. *Flüchtlinge*. So, I told her, "Yes." So, she said to me she doesn't have any place to have us because she has a lot of military, so maybe farther there, she said, "You will find somebody who will take you." And we went and we found a house with no windows, nothing. Just somebody left it like that. So, I said to my sister, "Let's go in." And we went. All of a sudden, maybe an hour later, I saw a man carrying a bike, because it was snowy. He couldn't drive the bike. But, on his jacket, it was a big P. So, I said to my sister, "I can tell you one thing. This is a Polish man and I'm going to talk to him." And I did. I walked out and I told him that I'm Jewish and I escaped from camp and I need help. So, he told me that he will help us but it has to be evening to come to the corner of the village. And I didn't believe that he would come but he did. And he give us something to eat and that we can washed. He slept on the floor and my sister and I in his bed. Yeah. But, he couldn't keep us because there were military and he was helping them, to shave them, to wash for them, whatever. So, he went to Sommerfeld, twenty kilometers from that place we were. And he went to share his troubles. And Sunday evening, they came three men and they were all drunk, because that's the way they are. That they don't know what to do about it so they are drunk. So, anyway, they met us and they told us they live in Sommerfeld, it was twenty miles away, but we have to walk by ourself and come to their house, and they give us the number, *Morgenstrasse*, and they would take care of us. And yeah, that was true. That's the way it was. We came to Sommerfeld, and we met him then, and we asked him, "Where is *Morgenstrasse?*" So, I think he was hard of hearing and he said, "Five, *fünf*." So, I said,

“Well, that’s odd he would talk so loud so the Gestapo, whoever it is, will catch us.” But we found that way. We found the place and we stayed there until it was in December, and we stayed until February and the Russian army came, 1945.

So, the Russian army liberated you?

Yeah. Uh-huh, yeah.

How did they treat you, the Russians?

Not specially.

Not very good?

No, not in the case, there were a lot of Jewish military men but the rest of it, we did have to spend a lot of time in a cellar, in the basement, because they were raping women, regardless. So, this wasn’t very nice and there were a lot of Ukrainian and they were hooligans. So, it really wasn’t at the best time.

What was your reaction to your liberation?

Well, I didn’t know what to think because my first thought was I would like to see who is alive.

Do you recall the moment you felt you were free and how you felt?

Well, they were bombing the place where we stayed, Sommerfeld, and the siren went up and they were supposed to go to the basement, everybody, but we couldn’t because we were Jewish, concentration camp.

Oh, I see.

So, we told them, two people that was military men, to go without us. And they said, “No, if you not going make it, we’re not going to make it.” So, it was nice enough. Of course, I was happy. I took something to Jewish people... I have to tell you this little thing. I work in hospital because they needed somebody because the people were killing so many things and there was a doctor, Dr. Rivkin, and he said to me, “Close the door and I’ll ask you a question. The war’s almost over. Where would you like to go?” So, I said to myself, “Well, I will tell him that I want to go to Russia,” because I didn’t know who he really is. So, he said to me, “No, not to Russia. Go to America, or to any other places, but not to Russia.”

Really? That was good advice, wasn’t it?

Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

What was your physical condition when you, uh...? What was your physical condition?

Well, I, the walking, until today, bothers me.

So, you had a hard time walking. Were you malnourished?

Well, what can I tell you? It was snow and it was December and I couldn't walk. And even today, I think psychologically, I can't walk too much.

Where were you taken when you were first liberated, after you were liberated?

So, we decide to go back to Poland.

Oh, you didn't go to a DP camp or anything?

There was no DP camp that time.

At that time?

DP camps were the American came. Russian didn't have DP's.

Okay.

We came, we took the, we could take a truck to go a little bit, and a train a little bit, so we just made it. And, of course, we came to our city and we didn't have any place to sleep. So, I said, "Well, somebody told us here's a Jewish man who survive and maybe you can find place with him." So, we rang the bell and he opened the door and we asked him if we can stay overnight? So, he told us, "No."

Um hmm.

So, I said, "If no, maybe we'll go on it, Union Station and sleep on the chairs there." But, somebody else told us while we walking, "There is a lady with a girl and maybe try her." So, they show us where she lives and we did. And she said, "Yes, you can stay all night or whatever it is." The next day, her girl came from orphanage house and brought some soup. Well then I said to my sister, "We can't do those things like that. I have to work, because she can't afford." And so, came her friend and I asked him, and I told him that we was Jewish. We survived. And I said, "I can type and I have a little education and I think I could maybe work on the police." And I went to the police there, in the Soviet it's a different place, and I worked there. And worked there for some time but I didn't want to work there all the times because they were all, not Jewish people. I did want to be with Jewish people. So, somebody told me that I could go to Katowice and have a job there. And I did and I did have a job.

So then you never were in a Displaced Persons camp then?

No, I have not.

Okay. Now, was there, what was your mental state? It sounded like it was pretty good at that time?

It was and it wasn't because I was very disturbed because he didn't let us in. And it looked like nobody [voice breaks and she seems to be tearful]... **nobody wants us.**

It was hard.

Yeah. And later, of course, I had a lot of news when I was working. I was a secretary to the president of their state committee, not the local, but the state. And people were coming from camps and they'd been...

[END OF SIDE A; SIDE B BEGINS]

This is continuing the interview with Hanna Sukiennik. Okay, you were telling me about a book?

The book came from *Bayern* - Bavaria - and on the last page with a pencil written, was my brother, and he's, my younger brother and my older brother alive. So, the one thing with the going through it to come and see them or leave them with it, leave with them. So, we went to Prague, Czechoslovakia, because we had some girls who were liberated and lived in Prague. They were, they were Czechoslovakian Jewish girls. So, we stayed there and we did decided we had to get farther to go to Poland. So, there was a French transport going home. People, men, who did work in Germany because they took them. And we asked them they will take us. They said, "No." So, later on it came Italian transport. They were going home to Sicily. And we asked, we need some help. "Come on." And then he took us, we went out in Munich, when the train slowed down, we jumped out. So, they were disappointed because they thought we going to Sicily with them.

Oh.

But, that's the way we came to Munich. And we find out, at the Munich has a *Deutsches Museum* that people who look for somebody who is alive, go then register themselves so we find a way to the *Deutsches Museum* and find somebody who knew my brothers. He had seen them. They said they live in a little village called Markt Oberstdorf, in the Alps. So, that's the way we met the family. The rest of my family, of course, was in Auschwitz.

So, who survived then? Your sister and two brothers...

Yeah, that is it.

... and that was it. Describe how you tried to put your life together.

I really didn't know what to do. We lived in that small village and it was just like vacation time. But, we did beginning to think about it, what to do. I mean, just to do nothing? It was just not my way. So, I thought that maybe I will go to Munich to some, not family, but others and I'll get some job. But, in meantime, I met my husband.

Okay, then let's talk about that. When and how did you meet your husband?

Somebody introduced me to him. He lived in Munich and lived in Markt Oberstdorf, in the Alps, as I told you. So, I really wasn't ready to be married. My husband had a wife and a daughter, which they didn't made it. And he was at that time 36 years and I was, like, 22. And I really was not marr-, wanted to get married. I didn't want to.

But, what attracted you to him?

He was coming every week. And he told me that we have a lot of friends in Munich and he would provide, that I shouldn't worry about it. So, in Munich, we were married in 1946.

Describe the wedding.

It was nice. It was Reform type because there was no other synagogue there, just a German synagogue. So, I remember I was wearing a blue dress because I didn't know that exist a white dress or, what, a veil. I didn't, no idea. So, I don't know, maybe was not style because I didn't know it. And we got married and then we had then in a restaurant in Munich. Some friend of ours came, which we knew them already they're whole life.

So, it was in a Reform... was there any synagogue? There wasn't, no?

No, there was no, none, no.

So, was it at the restaurant, the wedding, or at a house?

No, the wedding was actually over there, Reform synagogue.

Oh, okay.

But, we did there and... what time would they want to have it, we had it.

How many people did you have there?

Oh, I would say about 50. Not more than that, maybe a little less than that.

And it was a Reform rabbi who married you?

Yes, right, uh-huh.

Okay. And did you have food and music and dancing?

Yeah, we had, yeah. Um hmm.

Okay. What was your husband's occupation?

He used to have, now, just a second, hardware. On the *Schulstrasse*, they put, he and a friend ...

A store?

It's a wholesale place and they used to go to selling them, with the German people they took them, they used to buy things there. And I had a telephone, which we didn't have that before. We used to have it, they tell me, when we lived in Zagórze but later we did not.

So, you had a telephone with him?

Yeah, uh-huh.

Were there any children? Did you have any children?

Yes, I have two children.

Okay, what are their names and when were they born?

Stan Goodman, and he's born in 1951... when was the flood?

Now, you had already come to...?

Yeah, but we're not... oh, just a second.

Now, you got married in Germany?

Just a second. So, I had the one, my daughter was born in Germany. I forgot that... in Munich, Louisa. She used to be Louisa Goodman and she lives now, she used to live in Kansas City. But, she was remarried in Washington, D.C., by a Jewish man who she met in temple.

Oh, okay. So, now she lives in Washington?

Um hmm, right.

Okay, now when did you come to the U.S., to Kansas...?

In 1949...

Okay.

...to St. Joe, Missouri.

What made you... this was after you were married, and what made you decide to come here?

See, you have to have somebody, a sponsor, that you have a roo-, live-in place and work, and our place was Mr. Keller, was his name. He was a furrier. This the way we came to St. Joe.

I see.

And we stopped in Chicago because the train, we were changing, and we went to a deli because we didn't like the bread, the white one. So, they asked us, "Where do you go?" So, we told them to St. Joe, Missouri. So, he said, "I feel sorry for you," because it's small, but people were very wonderful to us. So, that was in 1949. And a year later...

And you came, your husband, and your daughter?

Yeah. Louisa was born in 1947.

Okay.

October 10th.

And your son was born in 1949... '51?

'51.

'51, okay.

He was born the 7th of May. His daughter is born on his birthday.

Oh, really? That's a coincidence. How did you travel here from Europe?

By boat.

What were the first impressions that you had upon arriving in this country?

We came to Boston and I saw big sign "Gillette." And I said, "So dark." I didn't expect it. There was so dark, that sign was so dark. But I thought I have seen it because they came, the Red Cross, to us. We came with the General Holbrook, that was our ship and we had awful experience with that ship because it was so, the changing weather and it was so very dangerous. But, anyway, so... so, later, when we came to Boston, it came the Red Cross, and give us some chocolate and some sweet things. So, they were too sweet and the chocolate was too sweet, too. It didn't taste good, to us.

That's the first thing you remember?

Yeah, um-hmm.

And so, were you just there for a short time then you came to St. Joe immediately?

Yes, I did. Not just... Right away.

And how did you end up in Kansas City?

Well, we have been a year in St. Joe and there was no progress and really, the Einbender's out of business, says "Out of business," couldn't work, couldn't find the work, so a friend of ours, Mrs. Kushner, she lives next door, she left, she said she has a daughter who lives in Kansas City. So, she said, "Well, she can have a child with you," to my husband, because the lady has a heart problem so he can stay in her house so he doesn't have to pay. So, he found a job on Broadway.

One of the wholesale...

Yeah.

... manufacturing?

Manufacturing company. And he worked until, because later we open the business, he opened his own business.

What kind of a business?

A tailor business, and a furrier, too. But, he died in 1974.

Your husband?

Um-hmm. He had a heart attack. This is my second husband, then, Ben Sukiennuk, but I was Goodman before.

What were, what were your first impressions of Kansas City?

It was dirty downtown, so many papers, and we couldn't find any place to live in Kansas City, that time.

Where did you live when you first came here?

Well, we couldn't find a place but finally, there was a very nice lady named Helen Loeffler, who told somehow through somebody that she's moving, she lives on 33rd and Woodland, and she has a house to move. So, if we need a house, apartment to live there, we can do it, we can have it. And we did have. Leona Koch, I don't know you know, maybe Harold Koch?

Sure do.

It was his family...

I see.

...and they were wonderful to us. I cannot tell you. So, we had here a one restroom, we'd had that, and one, but we didn't have any to take bath. We're seven people, she rented that, so we had a hard time to do it. So, in meantime, came one of my city. We didn't know each other but he said that he's moving and if we give him a hundred dollar so I can have his apartment, and we did. It was on the third floor on 39 and Wyoming.

And it was a bigger, more room?

Bigger, that's right.

Did you know English by then?

Some, yes. I did took some English by English professor in Munich because I knew that we going to go to... And later I studied at, in St. Joe, there was a doctor and a teacher and he taught us and I wasn't very nice to them because I thought always that I'm criticizing too much. Which ever they said, I said, "Do you have any composing words, wrong?" But, later I find out that they are composers, anything else, of course, but it took time.

How did you adjust? Did you adjust quickly to your new country, do you think?

Yes. After that, after I begin to read the sign - you know what the sign says, I was happy. I had a book, a dictionary, so I was reading some names for it and my neighbor was Rabbi Well, Wells, Well, or Well?

Wells.

Wells, because his son lived in Kansas City and he was a [unclear], wasn't he?

Right.

Yeah, so I was a neighbor. So, once I washed clothes Saturday and Mrs. Robertson came and she said, "Today is *Shabbos*." She would give me candles and, I shouldn't do that because that's not a Jewish tradition. They were very, very kind to us.

What was your biggest challenge coming to this country, would you say?

Challenge? I had, Stan was born and he was two years old, so I decide to go to work. And I didn't know which kind of a work was I looking for, so I went to a Jewish employee agency?

Jewish Vocational Service?

Vocational service. And I talked to him and I told him that I was maybe that I'm 30 or 31. So, he said, "I have for you something. Maybe you want to go and try." And there was Leiter's on the Plaza and I went to Leiter and I told him that I would like to have a job. I don't have experience but I'm going to try to do my best. So, he said to me, if I, if I belong to a sisterhood, which I didn't know what he was talking about. I said, "No, Mr. Leiter, I don't know what it is." I really didn't. So, but he was not, he was very anxious to have me. So, I start to work in a beautiful designer shop. The fabric was gorgeous and to...

Now, it was an interior design? Is that what...? Was that... what was... was that what that was?

There was like, are you familiar with Kaplan, who has the fabric?

Yes.

That was Leiter.

Oh, that's right. It was a fabrics...

He was not Jewish but it doesn't matter. They were wonderful to me. But, I had a hard time because the only people who work in the store didn't want to help me. You know, fabrics have names and I didn't know what they, you know, what they want to. But, after a little while, I think I manage it. And I was there sixteen years.

Sixteen years?

Yes.

So that was a nice career for you?

Really wonderful, whichever he was, artist. The family was very knowledgeable, intelligent, really wonderful.

Did you, excuse me... did you face any discrimination at all after you came here?

No, no, no. I didn't collect, call myself, I call myself "second citizens." Second, second, did I already say right? Second? I'm not the first citizen; I'm the second part. I wasn't treated as a first one.

Oh, as... As a native?

As a native, right.

But you didn't really face any kind of discrimination?

No, not really, not. We belong later to the *shul*, which we still are.

Where did you find the strength to overcome what you'd gone through, because you'd been through a lot?

Yeah.

How did you manage to go on?

I didn't go on. I was sick.

Were you? Did you talk about your experiences?

Some time, not that much, but I was in hospital for some time.

Really? For physically, or mentally, or both?

Mentally.

Uh-huh. But, you didn't talk about... you didn't talk... How long did you keep it in?

No... Quite a few months until once I decide to share that with the girls, who were there, too. And I did. And later, my boss, who was the young man. There was a senior, a junior. He came and he tell me that he needed desperately, he needed me. Authorities come for hour. And you know what? I thought maybe he's right, which I'm going to do here.

Now, where were you at this time? Were you in the hospital? Was that right?

Yeah.

Was this after you worked for sixteen years at... or was this when you first came...?

Before.

Oh, before, okay.

Before. So, I took a bus and I went for one hour one day; second day, two hours, and so far and so far until I changed my place where I live and I went to work, went to work. And that time, I work until he dissolve his place because he had different ideas. But wonderful people; still see me. The young man is not married, now he's remarried but he divorced his wife. The 25th anniversary I send him flowers.

So, you made very good friends and...?

Oh, yeah. Today, too. If they have anything going on in the family, Leiters, I'm one of them.

You're one of them?

And I love them. You probably know Connie Leiter, Constance Leiter?

I know the name. How did you meet new friends when you came here?

In Kansas City, we had the club for the Jewish people, for the newcomers. They call themselves "New Americans."

Yes, okay.

And that was the first, which we could find friends and know them.

And did they become your closest friends, would you say?

They were supposed to be the closest. Not quite but I think this is as far as people go.

But they were, they were mainly fellow survivors, right?

Yes, they were survivors and they were quite intelligent and we enjoyed each other but there were some other things like business, or whatever, so they kept for themselves. Today I understand that better than that time. They are all gone. They are all died except two of them. I didn't know it, they have their graves next to my husband, and I didn't know it until Harry passed away, going to the funeral and here it is, he and his wife next to my husband.

Were good friends of yours, I mean, that were in the club?

All the years.

Really?

But the other couple, did not, is not alive anymore either. Today, I spend more time with my family - my daughter, my son. I have a son-in-law who is just super. He include us at every activity.

Do you feel more comfortable with fellow survivors than with people who didn't go through this thing?

Yeah. Yes, uh-huh.

You think they're... Is there kind of...?

There is something to it.

...kind of an unspoken understanding, do you think?

Yeah. Because when we were in the *shul*, we kind of see the emotions are here, which we are friends, or hunt somebody, Voloskevs is here. See, we looking for those people we know for so many years. That doesn't mean I don't have...

Sure.

My son is married to a very nice family. I know you know Ros Greensburg?

Uh-huh.

Sharon Greenwood?

Uh-huh.

Sharon Greenwood's sister, Janie, is my daughter-in-law.

Oh, okay.

So, I'm very lucky that I have those because every holiday one of the girls invite us or us be together.

Were there any people who helped you a lot, you know, find a job when you were here? It sounds like you did a lot on your own, too.

Yeah, very much. I always was very independent.

But, did...?

I think only then employment, or, how do you call it?

The Vocational Center?

Yeah. They were very, I mean, I couldn't, and they knew it, I guess, which I could do, which I would like it. I think so. They didn't send me to factory because I wouldn't know how to do it, but they send me to a place which I will enjoy.

Did you go to school after you came here at all?

Yes, I did.

Where'd you go?

Mrs. [unclear] was a teacher. On the floor, I was temple. I don't know if you remember, on the floor, I was the Jewish camp temple. We used to have the classes there.

What kind of classes?

English.

English classes?

Yeah. So, I did some other there. I learn more and how to spell it. But, my husband said once to me, my former husband, “Why don’t you just stay, take more than that?” So, I went to the Jewish Community Center and they had some English classes, but I couldn’t make it. There were things what I didn’t understand it. And now probably today, I don’t, maybe more so, but similar.

Sounds like you’re doing okay?

But, I told him yet am I worse I went and I didn’t want to go but I did used to go when the poets, poetry.

Oh, uh-huh.

This, I liked it, uh-huh.

When did you become an American citizen?

1955.

Was that very significant for you?

Yes, uh-huh.

Why?

Why? Because I didn’t, I felt that without to be any citizen, even a nobody, is no heart of anything but whatever happened to us, if we are citizens, I’m sure that somebody will. And we ask that time Louisa if she wants to be or she wants to wait, because she was not, she wants to have right away she wants to be a citizen. She was five, I think, that time, and she became citizen, too.

Okay. Would you like to tell me how you met your husband or...?

My husband died... yeah.

No, Mr. Sukiennik.

... in ’74, in 1974, in January 30th. And we knew, I knew Ben. As I knew because he used to come to the club sometime, later when we had the newer club, but we did move here and there. Not, I didn’t know him very well but, enough, I guess. And I think, maybe a few months or so he called me because his wife divorced him.

So, how long have you been married now?

Uh, Ben, how long are we married, 25?

[Mr. Sukiennik speaking] 23.

23.

Usually, it's the woman that remembers.

Yeah, he does.

Have you had other jobs over the years other than ...?

Over Leiter's, you mean?

Um-hmm.

I don't think so, I had any other jobs. No, not necessarily.

Okay. What kinds of hobbies and recreational pleasures have you come to enjoy?

I do like music.

Um-hmm.

I do like lectures.

What kind of lectures?

Any lecture - I think most of them are about Jewish life or what happened to us. That's very interesting to me. And I always, in television, or in newspaper, the first thing what I do is look to see it.

What, if any, post-war events have had a great significance to you like the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, or Vietnam, or any, anything that has happened since the war that's had...?

Well, I am against the war, so... and I told my son that he has to be a, how do you say that, that he doesn't want to go to war?

Pacifist?

No...

Conscientious objector?

Yes, uh-huh. And he didn't go. He was on the lottery, he was at KU that time and he was supposed to go but he didn't go because conscientious and I think he had flat feet and they let it go. But, I am very definite about that.

So, the wars really, are significant events...?

Very tragic.

What about the state of Israel? Do you remember how you felt when Israel became ...?

I was amazingly happy. When I came, the first time, to Israel, I kissed the ground.

In light of what you went through during the war, how did having children affect you?

In the beginning, I didn't want to have children because really, I told you, I wasn't even ready to be married. But, since my husband was much older, so he explain it to me that he would like to have children. That's the way I had that but I really wasn't ready for it, which I would never regret if I wouldn't.

Well, what were your emotions after when you had your children?

Well, that's very, I mean, everything was changed. I was with the children when they went to the school, the preschool, and, 1 2 3, and made friends with a lady who was a nice lady and watched the children. And later, there was Scouts and I used to meet those ladies, too, whenever we had some programs or things to do. And later, of course, I was very anxious they will go to school later, so, both of them, that Louisa went to Mid-Tennessee and Stan went to KU. Now, their children are now, my grandchildren, are already finished school, too. Valerie was in NYU in New York and my Ian is, was, in Florida, automotive technology, and he's graduated in '82. So, both of them are graduated.

So, the tradition your mother started for education has carried through.

Very much so.

Were either of your children named after members of your family who...?

Yeah, Louisa, like my mother. [Unclear], so we call her Louisa. In Germany, they used to call her Louischen.

Pretty name.

Um-hmm.

Did you talk about your experiences in the war to your children?

Some.

What prompted you to do that?

They had some company, I think Louisa, my daughter. Plus, I have another granddaughter, Stan Goodman's, Jane's, Laurel, wants to know. But, as a matter of fact, she went to Poland and she wrote it down for me, all the camps she wants to see. So, the other camps I didn't know because I was not in Polish camps, just in German, but Auschwitz meant so much for, to her. But, what she did in Poland, she brought a tape in Polish to sing, and a newspaper, a Polish newspaper. And I thought, and [unclear] picture. I thought that was sweet.

So, your children and grandchildren asked about your experiences and wanted to hear about them?

Yes, um-hmm.

How old were your children when, your children, when they first found out?

Well, Louisa already was married that time.

You hadn't talked about it to her at all, your experiences, until after she was married?

Very little. Very little.

What were your children's reactions when they heard what you went through?

Until today, they can't forget.

Do you still talk about it to them now?

No.

How do your memories of what happened during the Holocaust penetrate your life today?

I told you, the walking.

The walking? Is there anything else? Are there any sounds or smells that bring back ...?

Well, the lice, of course. Of course, I was very fortunate in that the Grunberg concentration camp was very bad and they were looking for women to do men's work because they were transporting somewhere else. And the director asked me if I would like to be a welner, no, how do you call it? Wel-... Ben? Yeah, to do, welner? Welner? Ben...

[Mr. Sukiennik speaking] Huh?

How do you say? Weln... let's put things, machinery together?

Not a welder?

Welder.

Oh, they wanted you to be a welder?

Yeah, um-hmm, and I was. So, this way I could help a little bit my sister.

How did the war affect your attitude and practice of religion?

The religion? I think that right now, we go to synagogue every Sunday and I look forward and I like the rituals and I like the ceremony. So, now I really very seldom not go, at least I have to be sick or have a *Bar Mitzvah* some place else, like we had there the last week, but Sunday I went. So, I think I might as well be Jewish because I am Jewish.

Did you ever stop believing in God?

Yes.

And do you believe in God now?

Yes, to a certain extent.

Which synagogue do you belong to?

KI.

And you're active there?

Not very much active any more.

But you go, you go a lot?

Yes, uh-huh. They have a... see, I do work. I have a tailor shop when my husband passed away and people who worked for him, they called me. I was sick already that time, that they going to work for me. They will help me to open it and I did open it and it's still open.

Still open?

And I do go now only from ten to two.

Every day?

From ten... yes, not Saturday, because I go to the *shul*, but every day.

Wonderful.

Uh-huh. It's my therapy.

Well ...

Might as well.

Yeah, work. Keeping busy.

I don't know how to sew but I know how to fit and I know how to, you know, if somebody comes, how to wait them, then because this I already had experience with the people and they're lovely.

Wonderful. There's not a lot around, not a lot of you around, I don't think, that can do that.

Not too many.

Now what's your favorite Jewish holiday today, would you say?

Actually, I think Yom... Rosh Hashanah [crying] I'm sorry.

No. That's okay.

Yom Kippur.

You want me to turn it off?

No, I'm fine. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

And what traditions from before the war have you shared with your family?

Yes, the same thing.

You do the same?

Um-hmm. But, I remember my mother used to go and I was anxious to go home already and she would say, "Well just a little bit, in another ten minutes." And the ten minutes were half a day, but I remember I used to bother her that I want to be with her, which ever.

To what would you attribute your ability to adjust to a normal life after the war?

After the war? I think I did which I know how, what to do. I think, to me, work is the most important thing in my life.

Keeping busy helped you...?

Absolutely, with going forward and seeing my people working and people coming and...

Being involved?

...involved, um-hmm.

What does being an American mean to you?

It's a very hard question. I always fear that something may happen here. I have a cousin. She is not alive anymore. She lived in Australia but she went to ghetto, Warsaw Ghetto through the worst, with her husband and mother and they had papers from a friend of her, who, she was not Jewish. And finally, she went to Australia and she had two children and her name is Pulkovski and, which, John, is John Pulkovski and Margaret Pulkovski. I said, "Your name is actually Latin, or Bella." He said, "No, I'm Stanislava Pulkovski," and something happened. "I am Stan Pulkovski." If something happened to the Jewish people...

Oh, I see.

... like *Marranos*.

So, he kept a ...

Like *Marranos* in Spain.

Yeah, I see.

I did through tour a lot of countries, I love to see people, how they live, and what they do.

Do you think most Americans take their freedom for granted?

Not all of them. There are some of them are influenced but people who don't like different races or languages or religion, are more than sure. Some of them are very, you know, I go to the rehab three times a week because I had heart problem. I had bypass, six...

Oh, oh really?

...and there are quite a few people there are not Jewish and they always ask me and they understand that and I know they will be never against the Jewish people but there are some, they don't want to know. They don't want to know, just for us, but not them.

Not them... um hmm. Hanna, is there anything else you'd like to say before we conclude? These are all the questions I have, but is there anything else you'd like add?

Did I enjoy it, talking to? [crying] I'm sorry.

It's okay. Thank you very much.

You're very welcome.

This concludes our interview.

Yes.