

Sonia Warshawski Interview

Two sessions in May and July 1999

[Interviewer discussion of interview techniques. The May session was a model interview for training other interviewers.]

What were, when you were born, what was your given name and how did you spell it?

[Laughter] My Hebrew name is really Sarah, but I was called, all my life, Sonia. In Polish Sonia.

And what was your maiden name?

Grynsztejn.

Could you spell that, please?

G-R-Y-N-S-Z-T-E-J-N. It's exactly the way it was written in, you know, Polish. Of course, in English probably it would be not a Z but S-H. [Laughing]

How do you pronounce that again?

Grynsztejn. It's like Greenstein here. You know, you probably...

So the Greensteins of Kansas City were maybe one day - were once Grynsztejn?

Grynsztejn, yes.

And what, where were you born?

My hometown has a Jewish name Mezerich and the Polish name was Międzyrzec. Międzyrzec in translating means among rivers. And we did have three rivers in this small town. So this was the, the Jewish translation I really don't know why it's called Mezerich, but this... on the map it's Międzyrzec Podlaski.

And this is in Poland, right?

In Poland, yes, more to the east.

Were there, and this is, I'm just segue off for a second. I noticed there is no question here. How many, were there many Jews in your town? It just occurred to me and I'm going ask it, even though it's not written here. [Interviewer is speaking to the trainees more than the survivor.]

Yes, it's okay.

Okay. That's how you can take it where it needs to go. Were there, how, was there a lot? What was the Jewish...

Our Jewish population was larger than the, than the Poles.

Do you remember what the, what the...

Well, I looked over the book, you know, what I got from my hometown and it says that it was 18,000 perished Jews in our hometown. And the survivors, I would say, would be probably not more than 300. So it gives you an idea about, yes, the...

How big was the total population of this place?

The total population, and the way I gathered, is about 25 - 26,000.

So, so it was mostly Jewish?

Yeah. That's right.

Do you remember, I mean were you born, this was... what year is this? What year were you born?

I was born in 1925, November the 10th.

Same year as my mother. November 10th. Were you born in a hospital?

No. At home. I remember mother was... mostly, at that time, when I was born it was at home. You know, how do you call it? The...

Midwife?

Midwife, yes. I mean helped by a midwife. But later on, in the later years, if someone had difficulties, went to the hospital. They were already performing, at that time, the *kaiserschnitt*, we call it. Like ...

Cesarean?

Cesarean. But it was very much more...

Rare.

Yes, dangerous.

Your parents, what were their names?

My mother's name was also Regina - Riwka. Yes, Regina is named after her, yes. And my father's name was name was Mojsze - Morris.

And your mother's name was Olge, O-L-G-E?

No, no. Regina.

No, the first name. What was it?

Riwka, in Hebrew.

Oh, so her first name was Riwka?

Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. Riwka what?

Grynsztejn. Oh, her maiden name was Eisenberg.

Okay. And your father was Moishe?

Yeah. Moishe Lazer. Yeah, Moishe Lazer.

What was - how did your mother and father...?

Met, you mean?

Yeah. How did they meet?

That's very interesting because actually my mother came from a different town and they met. I believe my mother came to a wedding to our hometown, Mezerich, and my father fell in love with my mother. And it was a very long dating. And I remember my father used to say that he would never allow his children to, to have such a long relationship the way, you know, they had. And this is the way he used to travel back and forth and then they got married and moved to, to Mezerich, to our hometown. The town where my mother was born was Losiec, Losice was in Polish. And that's the way it...

It, was it arranged, were there, were there...

No, it was really a romance, whatever you call it. Yes, first sight love, yeah.

What kind, what was your household like? In another words, was your mother, did, what kind of, what did, I mean, was your mother most, did she work? Did she...

No. My mother was strictly a housewife, which most of the women, you know, that's the way the, your family was the most important thing to the woman. And, of course, as you know those days, they didn't have the luxurious washing machines and the sweepers and all of those things. The woman worked very hard to keep the household. And, of course, the washing was not like here that you do washing, you know, almost every day or whatever. [Laughing] It mostly like once a month after, you know, it accumulated. The, you know, bedding and all the, then it was washed.

How did she do the wash?

Mom, mama used to always have someone to help, you know, with the washing. It was a very big chore. I remember later when we moved to another place, this place they had... I don't know how many people, how many families were living there. It was a very big place. And they had one special room with a, with a kitchen that you could boil the, uh, you know...the um...

Water?

... the water for the bedding, you know, to... and it took days really to...

To do it?

Yes, to do that chore. Yes, to have it done. And... but, of course, by hand to do the washing.

Same thing with cooking I imagine. It's not like you can...

Yeah.

...just go to the grocery store and buy pre-...

Actually the shopping was a daily chore because the meat, you know there was no refrigeration and we did have later, like, some ice. You know, there was a man who would go door-to-door and sell the ice. And the ice was really very interesting because in the winter when everything froze, the rivers and the ice was really very, very thick. And then was the, they cut all the ice in big, big, you know, chunks like squares and this was... I don't know how do you call the, when you do some... it's from the wood, little pieces. How do you call it?

Shavings?

Yeah, the shavings from, you know, from the wood. This used to be, they covered it, very, very, you know, very thick...

And it lasted a long time?

...and it lasted through the summer. It's just like a pyramid, you know, they had it. And this is the way they had the ice.

This is the way you met, kept things cold? Preserved things instead of a refrigeration?

Yes, because, you know, we had ice cream, you know, like the stores and they needed the ice. And this is the way. Like, for example, my grandma had a restaurant and they, she needed, all the time, the ice to keep the food for, you know, for a little longer. So she had all the special space that it was kept, the ice, in like a cooler.

What did your father do?

My father was a merchant in, with fur. Fur and also pelts. I don't know what you, I will explain to you. It was a very big business in our hometown. It was very well known from brushes? Bristle, bristle. And we imported bristle all over the world. And also fur and leather and also my...

You exported it, right?

We exported, yes.

Okay.

From our hometown even in the United States, Germany, England were buying the bristle.

Bristle?

Yes. The bristle it came from the, from the ... how do you call it? My gosh. But you have the bacon. How is that animal, what do you call it?

A pig?

Pig, yes. [Laughing] The pigs, from most of the best longest hair, the bristle hair, came from Russia. The Russian pigs.

Oh.

Yes. And this...

So the Jews sold Russian pig hair?

So the merchants used to buy the hair, you know, the bristle. It was very expensive. It had to go through a chemical, you know, to make it.

Treatment?

Treatment, yes. And it, it was not like with machines. Everything was done by hand. And it was a very, a very big thing in our, you know, hometown and then we made brushes actually.

Uh-huh. What about...

The bristle is very, very expensive. Even now, if you want to buy a brush, or a bristle brush, later on you got the nylon. Well, those days, and this was a very big business, but my father also had... we made from sheepskin jackets and coats, longer coats and they came like in... the tanner who did the leather, you had three different maybe four different colors, like, you know, reddish, and reddish-brown or white, gray and it was really very, very beautiful. It had a lot of embroidery all, all around and this was a very big business too. And then my father used to sell also the wool from the sheeps. Went, you know, to, to make wool and then it was going for to make felt. It was a big business for, because it was, we had such cold winters that we had, it was like a boot but of felt - made from felt. And this wool was, it was made out of this wool too. So this was also what my father sells.

It sounds like, it sounds like he was probably a fairly successful merchant.

Yes.

And in business that did well.

Yes. And we had several people working on the, those jackets and coats for him.

For him?

Yes.

Did you live on, what kind of street did you live on? Was it big houses or...

No. A matter of fact ... you want to know how many rooms?

Yeah, sure.

Yeah? Well, it was not very big. We had a kitchen and then we had, like would be here... an eating room, yes, an eating room? And then a big bedroom. A very large bedroom. And this was all... we were three children at home.

I was going to ask you that.

Yeah, three children. So I slept with my sister on a ... it was very special white couch. And my brother slept in the... you call it family room here, whatever. You know, dining room. How else you'd call it more...

So by our standards- it sounds like it must have been pretty small by our standards.

Yes. And just, just before the war, my father was in [unclear] buying, you know, a home. But it was already too late.

Just before the war he was what?

He was, you know, he wanted to buy a house...

Oh, but it was too...

...because we were renting it. You see this was rented. Yes.

I see. Tell me the names of your brothers or your siblings.

Yeah, my brother's name was Gedalye. Gedalye we call it in Yiddish. And my, my sister survived too. From the three children, it's me and my sister and she's in Israel and her name is Mania.

M-A-N-I-A?

M-A-N-I-A.

Yeah.

Mania.

How were they relative to you in age?

Well, my brother would, if he would have survived, he would be... I am 73. He would be 75. And my sister is just turned 70. Yeah.

Did you take vacations? What kinds of things did you do with your family?

Actually we really didn't take vacations. Most of the people from our hometown, let's say in the summer when it was very hot, we had a lot of forest around this, this city. Especially in the, in the... we had a lot of forest all around us because in the eastern part of Poland, geographically you can look it up, were more and more forest than in the west. And lot of people went to, they rented from the farmers a place each summer because it was much cooler. And the, this was the, they call it vacation. I don't recall, maybe very wealthy people, if they went some, someplace else. I don't know. I know if someone was sick to go to a special place to, you know, to... they had problems, let's say with tuberculosis or something, they would go where the, the mountains and so on. Or, like I say, could be the more wealthy people went on vacations like to the mountains for skiing and things like this. Yes.

But you pretty, you took these summer trips to these outlining farms? But that was about...

This is all about, yes. My family too. Yes.

What kinds of things did you eat? What did people eat in those days?

Well, it was mostly ethnic, ethnic foods. And, more or less, as you know, what the Jewish cooking is.

It was what we think of Jewish cooking?

Yes. And, of course, we did not eat every day meat. Meat was very expensive and, but I have to tell you that Sabbath, like my mother already like all the other women, Thursday was already a day at the marketplace, and we had for every Sabbath had to be fish. No matter how someone was not, even the not so wealthy, everyone had to have, you know, fish.

So what you are saying even the poor people in town?

Even the poor people.

They had fish on their table.

They managed. No matter how it was difficult all week, maybe they wouldn't eat any meat. But for Sabbath, always had to be on the tables, fish. Yes.

What other things were on the Sabbath table?

Well, we had also meat. We had mostly chicken soup. It had to be chicken soup, you know. So it's basically the ethnic, you know, Jewish cooking. And the baking, my... when we were younger, my grandma used to bake for us for eat for Saturday all the goodies. And I do recall one time I was carrying, you know, a big, you know, basket with all the goodies and some of the Polish, you know, boys walking to school in the morning and they could smell the aroma. They start grabbing from, you know, from the basket [laughing] and I was crying when I came home telling mama what happened. So...

Were your grandparents around a lot? Were they part of, with the dinner?

Well, I lost my grandpa when I was very, very young. I must have been not more than seven years old. So my grandma was running, like I mentioned to you, a, a restaurant, what you call it here. And her daughters were helping her with this business. Especially one daughter which lost her husband. My uncle passed away and she was with, with my grandma. And then two daughters, which at that time they were not married and just before the war one got married. So they were running this restaurant and it was very famous. The food was, my grandma's food was very well known all over. And it's not only...

Did Jews and Polish people go to this restaurant?

Yes, especially when the, on Thursday when the market was in our hometown. They used to come, all the farmers from the, from the villages, to sell their goods. And naturally this was a game for all the restaurants or other, you know...

I think I'm going to do a segue way now because I'm pretty sure these questions come later, but I feel like this is the proper time to ask. What were the relationships in your town between, like, between the Jews and the Gentiles?

Well, basically, I will tell you, I was going to a public school, which was mixed. We had more Gentile students than Jewish. I had a lot of friends, non-Jewish friends. But still the antisemitism was felt all the time. Even in school, they had it... sometimes you would see on the walls outside, written, they would write down *zabić Żyda*. It means kill the Jew. So there was always a antisemitic, you know, atmosphere. But basically in the classroom, the classroom mates they were friendly. I cannot say... it was a normal, normal like you would go to school here with other, you know, religions mixed. But, in the class you had always on the wall was Christ. You know, um...

They had the crucifix on the wall?

Yes, crucifix. Yes. And every morning they would say the prayer. And we, Jewish students, we didn't. We just stood. But also, I must say, we did have a Jewish teacher because the Christian, they had the priest. Once, I don't know, once a week, I don't recall exactly, and we had also an hour of teaching by a Jewish teacher to give us the history of our, you know, of our people, and this was very important. As being in, in not in a Jewish school, I had to get, I... when we had vacation, I was going to a *melamed*. My sister too, who was teaching us to pray in Jewish and to write and read and how to *daven*, you know.

So is it, you were taught, you had a private tutor to teach you ...

Yes.

...the prayers and the...

In Yiddish and to write, yes. But, not to say, I must tell you that our hometown had several schools, like the *Tarbut*, which was Hebrew and Polish. Then we had *Talmud Torah* where my brother went. Strictly for boys which was only Hebrew, also in Polish.

Did they, your brothers go to the public school and the *Talmud Torah*?

No.

They went to...

Strictly *Talmud Torah*. This was a private, you know, my parents, you know, paid for it. And, of course, the, the *Kehilla* also helped to support all those private schools. Then we had the *Folkszule*. A *Folkszule* which was, this was mainly Yiddish. Yiddish and, you know, Polish. And then we had also *Bet-Jonkew*, which for, this was strictly for women. Was very pious, you know, very, you know religious school. And then we had also the, a private Jewish *gymnasium*.

High school?

High school. And it was expensive. Not everybody could afford to go to the *gymnasium*. And, we did not have a university in our hometown because this was in Kraków and Warsaw. It was very difficult for the Jewish students to get, I'm sure, you know, from the history it was getting very difficult...

To get into the university?

Yes. Our students had to stand for the lectures. It was, it was very sad.

So even at this time, before the war, from as far back as you remember, the discrimination at the university level had been, was...

Oh, absolutely. And not only that, close to... before the war, we started having difficulties with our *kosher*. You know, the way we, the killing of, yes.

Uh-huh. The *shechita*.

They felt, yeah, the *shechita*. That this is not humane. So...

The Gentiles felt...

It was, the Gentiles, yes. It was getting very difficult. And also they, the antisemitic organizations, they had actually ordered antisemitic organization which they tried to get the Poles not to shop at the Jewish stores.

When did this, I want to...

This was closer to the war.

I think we're moving closer to the war.

Yeah.

You described three things. The universities, the *kosher*, and the clubs that were forming. But when did the problem, was the problem with getting university status? That was probably always there, right?

Oh, yes. Yes.

There was never a time you that you probably can remember where a Jew could just be enter into class?

Yes.

But the problems with the *kashrut* and the problems with the clubs, that came closer to...

Yes, that's right. But actually we had a lot of freedom. I must say, that we had a lot of organizations geared to Zionism to, you know, to Israel. And this was a very rich movement for all our Jewish children. And, because it was very, very high level... how shall I say? The, the patriotism. To look forward we had a zeal that one day that we will be in, you know, Israel will be, at that time we taught Palestine, will be ours.

So that was always something that was that...

Very much.

That was always there?

Yes.

From 1925, from as far back as you could remember?

Oh, yes. Absolutely. And to this was... you know, by the way, I want to mention, we also had a school for deaf people.

Oh, really?

Yes.

A Jewish school?

It was owned by Jewish, yes. Yes. And, of course, the ORT was always there, I want you know, and this was a big help for the student, for the, you know, people where they couldn't afford to go to the *gymnasium*, and to learn a profession was very important.

The ORT? O-R-T? The women's organization?

Yes, the ORT schools. Yes, we did have it. It was the evening, you know, usually during the evening they were teaching.

They were lots, there really were lots of educational options for Jewish families, even up to the university level.

Oh, yes.

There were public and private.

Yeah.

There were public schools and their Jewish private schools...

Yes.

...that they could send their children to.

Yes.

Did you...

Of course, I have to, excuse me, mention that thanks to the, we had a lot of landslide. You know what landslide? Where the people were they went to the United States before the war many years ahead. And they were, we had one fellow, Kajete was his name and he was the one that he was traveling back and forth to the United States and bringing, you know, funds, money, to develop all of the culture, the Jewish culture. We had also for... orphanage, a Jewish orphanage, and very modern. It was built also helping by here at the...

It just occurred to me that 18,000 Jews, you had a community about the size of Kansas City.

Well, yeah. But it was not that big as...

But you about had about the same number of Jews...

Yes.

... building, taking responsibility for themselves as you have here.

Yes, yes.

So they had all these supports. Tell me about the culture. You, you alluded to that before we actually got started.

Yes. The culture was like on a very high level. And since of the... it was very organized. The culture was coming also from those organizations, like I mentioned to you. I know that the children here, when they go to Hebrew school, they probably never heard of our heroes. This gave us, you know, a lot of strength what to, for example, I belonged to the *Betar*. Jabotinsky was the one who was in charge of the, of this doctrine. I don't know if ever heard...

I heard of Jabotinsky.

That's Jabotinsky, yes.

See this is what it is. It's not only the religion, the, the... Our history, what really took place in, in Israel before. Like, it gave you such idealism or to, to yearn to... that you had a future in, in our homeland - the homeland. And this was very enriching in us and this was our dream. So we did have, I don't know how many organizations. Some organizations were more to the left. Like, they felt they are first, like here you could say you are American and then you are Jewish. Okay? And this was, we had organizations like this too in Poland.

Meaning that you had some organizations...

The *Folkiest*, and the Bund, and then we also had the Communists too. And you'd be surprised, from a lot of very wealthy, wealthy families, that the students from the *gymnasium*, very, very well read and very high cultured, that they were Communist, too.

So you had the whole gamut of political movements going on?

Yes. Oh, yes. Absolutely, yeah.

And the Jews were in all of them, is what you are saying?

Yes, yes. And the organization that I belonged was Zionism but in a different way because, let's say, we had the *Hashomer*, *Shomer Hatzair*, *Shomer Alumie*, *Shomer Hadati*, *Mizrahi*, and this is all their, their dreams where already, how, if we will have our county, how we will be running it.

That's what you were focusing on?

Yes. And we focused, focused on that the only way to win the county is to fight for it. Not to, with money, to buy the piece of land and another piece of land, which is *Keren Kayemet*, you know about those days. They were buying off land. We did not believe in that. Our doctrine was Jabotinsky's - that we will have to fight for our land.

Don't buy it. Fight for it to take it?

Yes. Yeah.

So you must have been a [unclear] of a hell raiser?

Yeah. We had the *halutzim*, you know what they were going at that time to Israel, and...

Did you want to go to Israel?

This was my dream. My, my brother was very active in the organization too. And this was all of us dreaming that one day we will have our homeland. And the *Irgun* was very, you know about the *Irgun*? The *Irgun* was a very... they did a very, very important thing. They came, some of them from the *Irgun* came to Poland, to our hometown, I remember like now. And they were training young men from Poland. They came to our ... it's a place around where the forest were because this was something that, that no one knew exactly what's going on there. You see?

Kind of a secret.

It was a secret, yes. We - I was there also in the summer. We went like to a camp. You go here to a summer camp? So that means openly it was a summer camp. But this was also going on there, that they were training those young men, like you go through to a training to be soldier, but they had to do it in a very short period.

Were they - were these people they were training going to Israel afterwards?

Yes, yes. I have even, I think, a picture here. I will show you.

Did they train them in Poland and then these young men would...

Yes.

Were they men and women? Or just men?

Men. Just was all, and this was really the crop of the, how do you say it?

The cream of the crop?

The cream of the crop. Those boys were sent from all over from Poland, and this was secretly. And the - from the *Irgun* they came and they were...

You know what this makes me think that, you know, we have this image of the Jews in Poland and in Europe kind of sitting there doing nothing and then this wave of horror overtook them and they really were not prepared for it. And what you're saying is they were very - they were doing all kinds of things. I mean, there was a lot going on.

A lot going on which people don't even realize.

Right, right.

Yes, that's right. And then on the end when they went through already this training, Jabotinsky himself, I will never forget this in my life, he came and he, they were sworn in to be soldiers. And, and then they went to Israel, to Palestine.

Did you know a lot of young men that went to Palestine before the war?

Of course, you know, I was so young. We knew that a lot of - you had to be a certain age. For example, my brother couldn't go because he was still too young. And...

But this group you were in is the same group that was...

No. The group was, I was in, I was in my age. Okay. This is was already...

The older...

This is older, you know. When I went, for example, to that camp. Okay. It's like a summer camp. So we were just, you know, like here any other summer camp. And we taught all kind of songs and culture about our heritage and so on. But this was behind, you see, in secretly training those young men for the future.

I just wanted to make sure I understood that the, that the training that you are talking about and the work the *Irgun* was doing...

Yes.

...was connected with the older kids of the group that you were part of.

Yes.

Okay.

Of the... with the revisionist, they call it.

That was your...

The *Betar* was the younger, the younger ones.

That's what you were?

Yes, that's right. Uh-huh.

It's so organized.

Yes. You'd be surprised.

Really organized.

You'd be surprised. Yes.

When, so you were born in 1925...

Yeah.

...and you went to this...

[Tape stops and picks back up]

Okay.

Okay. This was a school, seven grades. And after the seven grades, just, you know, the war came out. I finished school and ready to go into the *gymnasium* but never made it. And...

Because of the war?

Yeah. 1939 you had the war. This was in September.

So how old were you in 1939? You would have been 14?

13.

13?

Going on, yeah. Going on 14. And, so what else do you want to know?

Back when you, you had mentioned that you were a member of this club. What other things did you do with your friends for... What did kids do when...

Oh, yeah. Well, we were very active in sports. Very active.

What kind of sports?

Also we were...

What kind of sports? What kind of things were, you thought...

In school we had a lot of, like you talk about gym. We had a lot of also gym and, and even at home, we played like, like really normal children here the same way really. And we were also very much with reading.

A lot of reading?

Yeah, a lot of reading.

Did you have a library?

We had *bibliotechs* in our... yes, several *bibliotechs* we had. And especially on, in these organizations you belonged, they had also *bibliotechs* connected with the organization. And, yeah, we really read very... books which there were, you know, classic, classic books.

I don't know if you know, we had wonderful writers. This is one thing about Poland. We had a lot of wonderful writers. And, also we had a habit of discussing - when you read the book, to discuss later, you know, about discussions about the books. And, so it was also very, we... like in the summer we went swimming. Of course, we had the rivers.

In the rivers?

Yes. It was... in our hometown we had those sports clubs, which, you know, we were older and it was, the... like here, you know, you have other games. The soccer was very popular in our hometown and this was very popular with the boys. We had the Maccabi. Maccabi, you know, sports club and we had then several different, what they played under different names. It was very... It was very highlight, highlight for the city.

There were a lot of organized things for kids to do, it sounds like.

Well...

Sports-wise.

Sports-wise, yeah. We were very active this way. And, like kids, we played, you know, hide-and-go-seek and things like this. And the tradition was very rich, the holidays. We also had, like *Purim*. They had, they chose the queen, you know, like a beauty pageant. We had, but this was all... You know I was very young but I want you to know, that this all took place. And the family knot was very close.

The family was tight knit?

Yes. Tight, that's right.

What do you mean? How did you... How did that..? Give me an example of what, what do you mean by close?

What I mean by close that probably through the traditions we had through the holidays and the Sabbath...especially Friday when I used to come home, the aroma of the Friday, you know, the whole, you could smell it far away. And it was, it was... how shall I say? The life was a rich life, even though that we didn't have a lot things what we have here, but it was very meaningful. Very meaningful. The holidays were so meaningful. And, and like I say, visiting with my grandma so often and all my aunts and uncles. It was, it was very different, very different.

This ... I'm sorry.

The Sabbath was observed because...

Yes. That's what I was saying.

Yes, that's right. Then we had also *Yeshivot*, the *Yeshivas*.

Was the Sabbath... Did you... Were you on Sabbath... On Friday night, you would have Friday night dinner...

Yes.

... in your home. Did you have guests sometimes?

Yes. My father used to bring almost every Saturday, this was a meaning from, because when he went to pray to... you see we had the most gorgeous *shul*. A very beautiful *shul*, which, which it's very sad. It was the burned with the people when the Germans came. But we also had in certain streets, smaller, you know, *besmedresh*, we called it. Yes. So in this street where we used to live, it was just almost across from the building and my father used to go every Friday night with my brother and, and he used to bring always someone. The... we had poor people too. Let's face it. And if someone didn't have anybody and couldn't go to have a *Shabbos*, so we used to bring those, somebody with you to your table.

So there were lots of people that passed through your house that you'd probably never ... didn't know but they were...

That's right.

...guests for, that your father would maybe bring home from the *shul*?

Of course, yes. Yeah.

And Saturday's... Saturday you were *shomer Shabbos*, you wouldn't...

Yes, that's right. And it's a rest day. Saturday was a rest day - resting day.

I imagine the town was pretty much shutdown on Saturday.

Yes. Saturday was shutdown. But those some stores, you know, were just the... you see Friday, at a certain time, there was going through the streets the - not the Rabbi but the pious, you know, Jews which they were just, you know, where they...

They let you know...

Let you know.

...and ring a bell?

Yeah, ring a bell and let you know to close up the, the shops. But some shops were like the doors were closed but you could go inside, you know.

Yeah. What other holidays beside, I mean, Shabbos you remember very vaguely?

Hanukkah. Hanukkah was very sweet because... it's not like here that everyday you got a gift. [Laughing] No. We had Hanukkah *gelt*, which my grandma used to give us, you know, like ten *groszy* or a, you know, the money at that time we had. And, and we played a lot of games through Hanukkah, and, and usually on Hanukkah, it was very cold outside, a lot of snow, and.... So it, it was very cuddly, very warm to be, you know... and *latkes*, of course, yes. And there were parties too like, *latke* parties. You know you used invite a lot of people and make *latkes*.

Not so different from...

No, not different. Yes. And played the *dreidel* and, and all kind of different games we played.

Pesach?

Passover was really the most difficult holiday for the women. I remember my mama use to say, "This is a holiday for the men, not for the women," because constantly you had to do cooking and baking. But it was just like you would move in, in a new home. Everything had to be taken out, even the beds and whatever you had furniture. Everything was complete.

Complete?

Yes, that's right. And, we had our Passover dishes. It was on, in the attic every time.

Bring them down.

Every year my father had to bring it down. It was very, very well observed and very difficult. But the children, we loved it. We loved it the holiday because it was especially clean and neat, you know, and good food.

Seders? Long seders?

Yeah, very long *seders*. Oh, gosh! Very long *seders*. Yes. [Laughing]

Did you celebrate any secular holidays? Were there any holidays, like is Polish holidays or ... that were important?

No. We didn't. The only thing in school, let's say, when Christmas was a very big holiday for, you know, for the Polish people, and we did not go to school in this holiday. And the holiday, Christmas, is observed in Poland longer than here.

So you were off the whole time?

Yeah.

But did you ever share in any of the Christmas activities?

Yes, very much because in school we made all kind of decorations for the Christmas trees. You have to keep in mind that those days, I don't know probably changed now too, it's more commercialized. All the gifts what you gave in Christmas or even on our holidays, was all handmade mostly except some things what they were hanging on their Christmas trees. Which, like I said before, I did have Christian friends and I visit them during the holidays, and... But it was everything handmade. All the decorations, 80 percent of decorations were all handmade. And we made them in school also because of lot of, we had a Christmas tree in school, of course. And then they had, you know, Santa Claus who was giving to the Christian children some gifts.

So Santa Claus would come to school?

Yes. Yes.

And give gifts to the Christian children?

Yes. Yes.

But not to the Jewish children?

No. No.

Okay.

That's right, yeah.

Okay.

And also I must say that it was good system, as far as for the... we had a lot of poor children coming to school without breakfast. So they could... they were getting like hot milk - cup of hot milk and a little bun, you know, for lunch. This was free to them. To the poor. Yes.

Did, what went on in school, the Christian celebrations and so forth in school, how did that make you feel? Was that a problem for... we make a big deal if there is the least bit of religion in public school here and it permeated your school. You had a crucifix hanging there. Did that ... did that...

It was just like a way of life, I guess. We knew that. Why my parents sent me and my sister to the public school I really don't know because my father could have afforded to sent me to, us to a private Jewish school, like the *Tarbut*, you know, was very well known. But, I don't know, maybe they felt to be also around with other, you know, religions. But, I must

say, of course when you -when they say the prayers and you standing still, you felt you were not one of them. You are an outsider.

But, were you parents or was your family at all interested in... There were, there are the art and the music and the culture that was in your town... Were your parents involved?

Yes. Yes, very much. We had the Yiddish theater and we had very famous, you know, artists coming to our hometown. And, like Kamińska, you know, and who else? I was, like I said, still very young, but my grandma had also, not only restaurant but she had a few always rooms for people to, you know, to be staying overnight. So they always had free tickets to the theater. And especially one of my aunt, which I have a picture of her, too. She had the most gorgeous voice. So whatever it was, the play was and there was music, she would always come and sing the, the pieces of the music. Yes. And also from the schools like the Hebrew schools, we had all kind of plays. And even at Hanukkah time, we always had some, you know, *Purim* was very also observed and it was very, very, very nice because we used to go, like, from one house to another and, you know, and sing songs, you know, read songs.

Really?

Yes. And we used to give them money or whatever, yeah.

Kind of like Halloween?

Yeah, it's similar. Similar. That's right.

But it sounds like the culture that you had was pretty much Jewish culture.

Yes.

It wasn't secular culture in that it wasn't art galleries and classical music that we think of today. Do you follow what I am saying?

Yes, I know. Yes, it was not, it was not the same. If you acquired it, it was through your parents.

It was not through your parents? No?

Yes, through your parents or in school, you know, because in the public school too we had time to time very place, all kind of place, which I took also a part very often. And then, you know, people would come and see the play. It's like here, you know. And it was very, very educational for us to be exposed to, you know, to act and...

But you don't remember - you might remember your parents going to Yiddish theater. But you don't remember them going to the movies?

Movies?

They did go? They...

Yeah, we had a movie house also owned by Yiddish...

Again it was in Jewish, Yiddish?

Jewish hands, yes. Matter of fact, I must tell you that the, the Poles were saying, you know, they called us small Am-, that means Little America for our hometown. And they used to say, "Our streets, but your buildings." In other words, the Jews owned the ... yes.

The resentment.

There was resentment because we did have a lot of very wealthy Jewish population.

Mostly merchants.

And also poverty too. There's no doubt about it. But it was very well organized that we helped. You know like I mentioned before. We did help the poor and the sick. We had a home for the elderly also. Supported from the United States a lot of money to gain.

And the orphanage, and all these schools....

Yes.

Was the Yiddish the spoken language of the Jews, between, among...

Yes. Let's say, in my case, I spoke Yiddish at home but otherwise only Polish. It is like your, you know you would be with your parents. You speak Yiddish and then you speak English all the time with the school and so on. That's the way it was.

Okay. What is your profession? You were a dressmaker?

Yeah. Well, you know, I ... [laughing] alterations. Well, I will tell, my husband was a professional tailor. In Poland, those days every girl had to know how to sew. We took lessons in the school and it was very, very important. We had even cooking classes too. I have to tell you too, yes.

Home Ec?

Yes. Home, yes. And so this was something natural. You embroidered, you, you crocheted, you had, this was part of the woman's...

All the girls do it?

Yes, all the girls. Yes. Because you didn't throw away stockings or socks like here when I came to this country, I couldn't comprehend. When there is a hole, we were, you know, darning, darning, and you had to learn this. You know, automatically your mother would teach you and so on. So the average girl was always good in sewing, you know, unless if you want to pursue in that to be seamstress then is a different situation.

So you had basic standard education in terms of what most girls had?

Yes, most girls. Like I say, when the war came out I was 13. So that gives you an idea. But, like in the war, for example, I would take sweaters where they were ready-made and we would all, how do you call it? You know, use the wool from those sweaters and make it like from two sweaters to one sweater, you know. We would do it, you see? So it was very normal for each girl to do those things.

Okay. When, when did you become aware that, of the Nazi presence? When did things start to change in this, this, this life that you had?

Yes. Before we go there [UNCLEAR] it is very important for me to tell you that our cemetery is still taking care by, by our, from our hometown, people while they're still here in the States. It is supported. And that we have a caretaker.

The Jewish cemetery?

Yes. And it, they get paid for it, of course. And as long as still we will be around, this cemetery is ours. The Poles cannot do anything. That's right, yes. And every so often, like two years ago, some of our people from here where they're still around and went there and this is something very important to us.

The Nazis didn't desecrate the cemetery?

For some reason our cemetery is still there. I wouldn't say ... I wasn't there myself so I can not tell you if the whole cemetery, but this is what I got the news from the first hand news that it's still there and it's taking care.

That's great.

It been taking care, yes.

Is there anything else, before we go there, that you wanted, about where you grew up? Anything about that life that you want to share?

Yes, I must also tell you about the *shohet*. You what the *shohet*?

The, the *kashrut*, uh-huh.

Yes, because usually me and my, my sister, we, you know, like I mentioned before for *Shabbat* you used to have chicken soup. Yes? So the chicken had to be killed by the *shohet*, and this was... And we would go there, you know, and you had to pay and the *shohet* was, was doing it. It was just like, you know, something like a train and he is inside and when he does, he performs the...

The slaughter?

... the slaughter, you, you have to be hanged until the blood goes down. So it was like hooks and things like this. And then we had to pick the feathers. [laughing]

So you would go into this *shohet* who had this little place that looked like a little...

Yes, it was a special place. Yes, that's right.

Where was it located in the town? On the edge of town or was it...

Not really on the edge of town. It was, I would say, maybe in the middle of, not exactly the middle from where, it was a little farther than... but it was in town.

So your mother would send you there to get the chicken for the Friday night dinner...

Yes.

...and it would be hanging there with the blood dripping down?

Yes, that's right.

And then you'd have to stand there and pluck the feathers out?

You had a choice. Do it either, we usually used to take it at home and we did the plucking.

This was the girls' job, not the mother's job, right?

Oh, mama did it too, but we girls, you know, we were helping with it. [laughing]

You did this once a week?

Yes, mostly because later on we had our own chickens too. My father liked to tend to things like this, you know, like geese, so we had a special place with a cage for the chickens, and... So it was...

Then you take your own chicken to the...

Yes.

...the guy to be slaughtered?

Uh-huh, that's right. And if not, people used to buy the chickens from the farmers. Yes.

Wow. Okay. When, when did all of this start to change? How did you become aware of it?

When it start to change, when... well, when the war broke out, of course.

When the Nazis marched into Poland?

That's right.

So before that, it was that sudden?

It was not sudden because we already knew what is going on in Germany because we already had a lot of people, Jewish people, resettled from...

Germany to Poland?

...Germany to Poland. So we had a big number of German Jews in our hometown. And, of course, we, in the newspapers we knew, we read about it. But still you could never dream and believe what really will happen at that time.

What did you heard, what had you heard? I guess you were only 13 or 14, so I don't know how much of it a 13- or 14-year-old would know. But what did you know was going on? Not there but to other Jews.

Yeah, we knew that, what is taking place in Germany. We knew about it.

Like you knew about *Kristallnacht*?

This I don't remember. I cannot, you know, tell you if I remember anything about the *Kristallnacht*, but we knew the plight of the Jews already.

That they were losing their, that their businesses were being taken away?

Yes, being taken away. That's right.

Had you been heard that they were being sent any... well, you knew that they were being..

In Poland they took in that many Jews and then they were... each city got a certain number of the families. And we took them in and we took care of those people.

Took care of them meaning?

Meaning, giving them a place to live and, and helping them in every way. That's the reason we were organized with the *kehilla*, which always had some funds to do things like this. But still we did not dream that it will, things like this getting, you know, worse and worse. This was in the beginning. And then when they marched into Poland, the atrocities started right away.

Right away? What happened when you weren't...

Not right away because there is... first when they come in, it's not the SS. It's the *Wehrmacht*.

The, the...

The *Wehrmacht*. That means the soldiers. Okay. So that time you still were pretty free.

They just had soldiers walking around?

They had... Yes. And then the SS takes over. You see? When they take over, then the atrocities, they started. They started with our, with the rabbis, you know, and killing.

Killing rabbis?

Killing, yes. And it was horrible. It was horrible. And then taking away all the goods from the Jews and their homes and, and then finally systematically until we went to a ghetto. But it took, took time.

What happened to your family personally in terms of... I mean your father had this business and you were living in this house.

You see I have to tell you also that the hometown where I come, we went through a big trauma because of the historical, if you know that, that Stalin and Hitler, they had a pact. First pact was, let's say the border will be here and so on. So the first pact was that our hometown fall into the Germans. And then the Germans left and the Russians came in. So we were under the Russians, I don't know for how many weeks, and then it's changed again. The border was farther and the Germans came in. So, at that time, a lot of people could escape with the Russians because they were, you know, willing...

There was like a window of opportunity.

Yeah, they were willing for you to come along. They would take, if you had a factory, they would take the machinery. They would take all of those things. You, yourself, you could have only one little luggage, piece of luggage. Let's put it this way. But a lot of our people from my hometown, they did and they survived later even in Siberia they were, you know.

So if you were willing, when the, during the window of time when the Russians were controlling your part of the county, if you were willing to basically take everything you own in one suitcase and give them your...

Yes.

...you could, they would...

Yes.

...allow you to move east and...

Yes. Yeah.

Okay.

Yes. But there is a long story about it, you know, later on what happened. But, anyway, to, to be specific, a lot of our Jewish people survived in Russia. You know that.

Well, a lot of them also got killed in Russia. But that's another story.

Yes.

So your parents didn't do that?

No, we stayed on. My father really, when I look back, was really... he could foresee more than, than my mother, herself, and, of course, a woman is a little different because he was begging my mother that this is our opportunity to go with the Russians. But you know how a woman is. She could not separate herself from the house, from the furniture, from, from the things. You know I don't have to tell you. And she just couldn't do it and we stayed on.

So then did your father... then what happened when you stayed at first? I'm not going too far in this direction...

Yeah. No. No.

But I want to know did they, did...

What happened is, I'll give you a quick, you know, picture. My father and my brother were killed. Okay?

Right, very... right.

They were, later on, I mean this would be too long to tell you, they were killed by... they were in hiding and some of the Poles, supposedly we don't know for sure how it, that

someone gave them out. And my father, they shot my father and shot my brother. In this time, before this happened, my younger sister was hiding with a farmer on the farm, and... But as soon they hear that my father and my brother not alive, they just ... they didn't want to keep her any longer. So she was... she survived in the forest because it would be too long to tell you the story. Okay? And me and my mother, we went to... when they took us out from the hiding and, we went to, supposedly our... we supposed to go to Treblinka but Treblinka was so busy that they, instead our re-railing went to, the train went to, to another camp.

Before that, I just, there's a piece of it that I want to fill in.

To Majdanek. I went to Majdanek. Yeah.

Okay. It's difficult to know you are going to cut off because the story...

Well, sure. It take hours to tell you.

...becomes so intense and you know you are going to cut off. Anyway back to what we were doing.

Yes.

Before this part happened, but the Nazis came in but there is this period that is a little bit still vague in my mind.

Yes.

They're there. They marched. Then you said that you described that they marched in.

Yes.

How long was it between when they marched in and when all this hiding started? When you, you mentioned that your sister...

In the hiding. Oh, sure because this was already in the ghetto. The ghetto. You see, they did systematically. For example, myself in the beginning, you know, when it was not a ghetto yet...

The town where you lived? They turned it into a ghetto? Is that right?

Oh, yes. Because of the industry, what we had, and as far as size being smaller than other cities, ours became, they call it *Judenstadt*. *Judenstadt*, that meant they were bringing in, resettling Jews from other cities, from other towns, bringing it to our city. And the bigger settling was like to Treblinka or killings were to take place in our hometown.

Would not take place?

Yes. It took. It took, yes. Because, for example, myself through my father's, you know, protection, I worked in one of the brush factories. Like I mentioned to you before, this was a very big, you know, industry in our hometown.

Now your father got you a position...

Yes.

...after the Nazis came in?

Yes.

He was able to find you work in the ghetto?

Yes, that's right. And I had a permit, okay, that I work in this, in this. But also I want to mention to you, my father had one fellow who worked for him who, I mentioned to you about those sheepskin jackets and so on, that he moved back when the war broke out to his little hometown, not too far from Treblinka, and at that time we didn't know yet a lot about Treblinka. We saw a lot, you know, passing by our railroad station already from friends, you know, the Jews and in very nice trains, this especially they did it for them not to, to orient themselves where they're going. And they even had their luggage and everything. We didn't know at that time that this is going to Treblinka. But he came one day and he was very, very careful. He said even to close the window and, and tell us what is taking place. "If they come to take us to the marketplace first and then they will, we are going to our death." That's the way he told us. And he told us exactly what they are doing to the Jewish people in Treblinka. This was the beginning.

This is really how your father became fully aware, your parents became fully aware?

Yeah, we came aware. That's the reason my, I kept, my family was almost, even to almost to the end, I had the whole family because - immediate family I should say - because of this hiding that we knew all the time that we're going to our death.

So when you became aware of it, that this, that that's where they were sending these people...

Yes.

...back when your father made arrangements for everybody to go into hiding?

Well, it's not only hiding. Like my brother, you had to, in the beginning...

Or to get work?

Get work. Okay. My brother worked under an engineer, a Polish engineer. What they were performed like measuring streets, you know, things like this. So he was not really in the ghetto.

How old was he?

Most of the time he stayed out of the ghetto and that was a big help for us that he could, you know, like if you had a piece of fur or leather or something to exchange with the, with the farmers and you could get some, you know, food. Because food was very scarce and it was the black market too at that time. It was, the ghetto was a horrible thing, you know, what was going on because it was so many people. We had only one small little room and luckily, luckily that, that mother had a little tiny stove in one little corner and we could have two beds in this room and one table. That's all, and we were very lucky with that at the time being. But as time went on, you know, there resettlings were... we had in our hometown, I think, seven settlements. I went with my mother. It was before the last one, the sixth, and we went to Majdanek.

Resettling was when they would take you on the trains to...

Yes. And then they made *Judenrein*. That means no Jews anymore, was the last, the last one, the last that took place. I went in the beginning in May 1943. I found myself with my mama in Majdanek. And in Majdanek I lost my mother before they sent me to Birkenau Auschwitz she went to the gas chamber knowingly. Yeah, knowingly.

She knew what was...

Of course because when you were there you, you knew what was going on.

How old was she at that point?

I thought at that time that she was, you know, an old lady. She was only 42, 43 years old. Yeah.

You had been in hiding though before that? This was, you kept, when is hiding [unclear]?

Well, we in... we hide in a cellar in a room where we were living, but the Germans, for some reason, they had dogs with them and they could, you know, smell out where ... and they took us out from the hiding. But it's a long story about it. My sister still, you know, survived, but... It would take too long to tell you anyway. She survived in the partisans later in the forest. So it's me, my sister from the entire family. The rest of the family all perished in Treblinka.

Aunts and uncles?

Most of them. Most of them. Uh-huh. And then I was in Birkenau Auschwitz and liberated in Bergen-Belsen. And the day of the liberation I was shot. The bullet came in right here and came out through here. This was my liberation day. But, as far as the survivors from my hometown, like I mentioned before, it's a few hundred of us survived. This is already including the, from Russia where they survived.

Probably all younger people? People that were younger?

And from Russia we had survivors, elderly too. Yes. But from the camps, mostly, you know, younger, unless you were not in a concentration camp or a labor camp, some elder maybe survived. But not in Auschwitz-Birkenau. There are some children that survived in Birkenau Auschwitz through, you know. It was a miracle because of, if the Russians wouldn't come that early, there wouldn't be any survivors. And, as you know, in Birkenau Auschwitz, we had Mengele performing all kinds of experiments. And I had been, to be in a barrack, which was just across from the crematorium. I do have a picture of when, this is already when the bombing from the, our American boys were flying over the camps and I wished they would have bombed the crematoriums but they took aerial pictures and I found this one many, many years ago in the *Life Magazine* and I could see exactly which barrack I stayed.

Oh, my goodness!

Yes. I have it here with me, I believe. I hope I didn't put it in... So now when you watch all of this on television and they, this, last week I think they had something about Mr. Klein, remember? And they were taking about it, "Why didn't we bomb the crematoriums?"

Still a good question, isn't it?

A good question and they knew exactly because they had this on the, on the aerial picture. It's a very sad story about it.

This is about where, we're about the, the point where I would expect most, I think we break. Why don't we call this pre-war.

Yes.

[Interviewer Discussion. Answers pick back up mid-stream.]

It's true but it's impossible to get away from it too. I'll tell you why. For example, when I speak about a *shul*. It was the most gorgeous *shul*. We had an artist, the painting still, you know, standing out. It was something that you don't see it. In this *shul*, when you and I mentioned, we had this beautiful *shul*, you had to mention this *shul* is not existing and they burned it with the people. They packed it up full with the people and they burned it. So how, you cannot really escape completely not to mention those things. We had, you know I want to mention that people don't know. We, we had incidents. Heroism, a lot of heroism in each city of ours. Of course, Warsaw Ghetto was, I mean, this was the biggest. But please don't forget we had a lot of heroism among our people, the young people, that they killed the SS men before they killed, you know, he got killed and so on. There a lot of incidents happen. It happened in our ghetto that one was an informer, a policeman, among us and our young people killed him.

Killed by the Jewish people?

Yes that's right. So you know, incidents like this, of course, is specifying also the antisemitism. How many of our Jewish survivors, boys and girls, lost their lives through the AK? Do you know the AK? You never heard of it because they never talk about it. This was in Polish *Armia Krajowa*. This was an organization that they, their aim was to finish off any Jew who survived to come back to Poland. I just talked, you know, this week to one of my friends that she came to Mezerich, to our hometown by train and with another girl, from which she was liberated. And she went to Biała Podlaska, which is another city not too far from my hometown, to look for maybe for her family or her brother. Walking down from the train, they killed her, because they took our homes. They took our, everything from us. They didn't want us to come back. They were afraid that you may, you may, want to go back.

This was recently they killed...?

This was after the, right after the war. They took our Jewish men and, and women and throw out through the trains, from the train. My sister, when she survived in the forest, when she was, already when they knew that the Russians were already in our hometown, she walked with eight young men. She was just one little girl, small little girl, and they came out from the, from the forest, and they just surround them. And my little sister she noticed what is going on. She went into a little, it was like a, a ravine, you call it. I don't know. A ditch. It was a ditch. And in the ditch, and she heard *tra, tra, tra*. Those boys didn't make it.

Did she make it?

They made it. The part is that, they made it to the hiding in the forest. On the way from the liberation going home, they got killed. All of them. She came home by herself to our hometown. You cannot tell the world about it. It's, listen if you would see a thousand films, I want you to know, no one, no one can grasp this because I, myself, if I wouldn't be there and went through what I have seen, I wouldn't be able to believe it.

Can I ask how you got shot when you got liberated?

I beg your pardon?

How you got shot?

Oh, how I got shot? This is also, this will be too long to tell you. But the, as far as you know Bergen-Belsen, I don't know if anybody watched this last week. They were showing from, did you watch it, in Bergen-Belsen? The English, when they liberated that camp? Then you would understand because they did not have there gas chambers. They did not need a gas chamber because the starvation was so great, so terrible that they had only the... they burned the people in the, because they had the crematorium but not a gas chamber. So when finally, I was working in one of the kitchen, in the peeling. You know,

we peeled not potatoes but rutabagas or whatever. When we already knew that something is going on because in this particular day, not all the Nazi, they were in charge of us, they didn't come. And finally I went out to the latrine and I stared, from far I could see tanks coming, and I was so excited I wanted to come back and tell the girls what I'm seeing. And meanwhile, across from us was the men's camp and they just start running because in front of this kitchen we had piles with those rutabagas and everyone wanted to just grab the rutabagas with the dirt and, because when somebody, you don't know what hunger can do - what was taking place there. And this what happened. And the guards were still standing there and they start shooting. As soon as, I was stand like this, want to go back to my place to sit, you know, in that corner, and the bullet came through and there is another girl was, you know, the same bullet was from such a short distance. That the same bullet...

They were shooting because they were taking the rutabagas?

Yeah. They were shooting just in the crowd because the men would start running for the, that's right. And that's what happened.

They could see the tanks coming too? They knew, they knew...

Yes, they already, sure. You could hear the tanks coming. It's over and they were still, you know, shooting. Yes.

[Interviewer Discussion]

I hope I, I really have probably more to say in them. What I would really like to say among us, that I would like to, in the teaching of our younger generation, to give them more the history of our people. To have the pride. You know like mentioning about Trumpeldor. The last moment when he, he was already shot and, and he was still shooting and, and this is in the, the *halutzim*, you know, when they [unclear] in the, oh, what was the name of the... the Hula Swamps.

This isn't something that we've talked about, is it?

No, we didn't talk about it. And his last words were in Hebrew which is, let's see. How did he say it? *Tov lamut be'ad arzenu*. That means "it's good to die for your own land." And right there those people get this feeling what it means, you know, for your land to die. He, this was his last words. And this was very, among us, very, you know, strong. Or, then we had Sarah Aaronsohn. A lot of people don't know who was Sarah Aaronsohn. Sarah Aaronsohn was a spy for the, when the English were dominating the Palestine when Turkey was there. Yes. Turkey was the, at that time, you know, before English. And she was giving out secrets to the English by hanging all kind of different underwear. Yes, after washing. And they would fly and know exactly what she meant to give them the information. And then she was caught and she was, they did terrible things to her but she never gave it out. She never gave it out. Then we had a very hero, Shlomo Ben-Yosef. I never heard of my kids to know who was Shlomo Ben-Yosef. This was when the English,

when we were fighting the *Irgun* for our independence and they hung him. And he sang before he died on the, you know, the...

The English hung him?

Yes, the English hung him. Then we had Yakov Ross and we had songs about them. You know, this is what idealism was, you know, for us.

This was before the war?

This was before the war. Yeah, just before the war because... this was taking place when the English occupation already. And we were, you had already the *Irgun* fighting.

The English occupation of Palestine?

Yeah. Uh-huh.

[Interviewer Discussion]

[End of Tape 1, Begin Tape 2]

You know because you cannot, you see how old it is? And, matter fact, it's a long story how she [referring to her younger sister] survived because one day she was in the forest, after the farmer, you know, just was running her out from the... so she was hiding just by herself. At night, she used to go and just, you know, to one of the farmer's door and knock on the door for a little piece of bread. Anything what they would give it to her. And, and that's the way she stayed.. This was winter. You can imagine. It's an unbelievable story, in the forest by herself. One day she was knocking on a door to a farmer and she, he let her in and that moment she hears lot of, you know, footsteps, boots, you know, and knock, knock very, very loud to the door. So she thought this is her end. This is her end. She thought it's the Gestapo. But this was her liberation. This was from the... from the ones, how do you call it? Partisans, from the Partisans. What they came to those farmers for food. And the farmers were very afraid of them because they were strong. If they did not, you know, obey, they would burn their, their house. Their whole, you know the barn and everything. Among those boys were two men from my hometown and when they asked my little sister, you know, who from where she, who she is, he happened to be from my hometown and he's, and my brother was his very close friend. So you can imagine. And they could not take her with her because she was all frostbitten and so on. So they told the farmer's wife that they would leave her here behind and she have to tend to her and give her some medication and, and they will send someone every night to check on that if she is following the orders. And that's the way it was. So she was telling me, she had more little pictures in the *shul* and the, she hid her in the barn under the hay. She was hiding my sister. And then what happened, the SS knew that there were a lot of partisans in this, you know, forest. So they were planning to surrender and do something. So the underground gave them the news to our partisans in that forest. So they moved away from there because we had a lot a long big, big forest. And they moved away from there. As soon the farmer

knew that they are not there, they threw her out again. So this time she met with a big partisan already from the Russian front, you know, where they escaped and they had already, Stalingrad was going bad for them and they had to already even helped... not helicopters but the regular planes used to gave them, you know, even horses and ammunition. And they had everything, and food, because they knew where they, in the forest, yeah. This was the end already for the war, yeah. But, so it's a long story about that, yeah. This was already after the liberation where we were in Bad Nauheim and this is where they had a big, you know, you can see people, the Jewish, the Jewish star. It's very interesting. This one was in Germany. And you know, this would be interesting for you. This was the first one, April the 21st, 1960 when we had the first... for the honor memory of Hitler's victims. It was in the Kehilath Israel Synagogue. Not the new one, yeah, the old one, yeah.

Which one is you?

This here, yeah. Two of us is already gone. This was the first one here in Kansas City taken. You see Bronia Roslawowski?

I was going to say, was that Bronia?

Yeah. There's still, you know like I say, a lot of poems and a lot of, you know, writings what people left even in our ghetto too. And I wrote a poem. I got several still. I never really read about it. I didn't translate it. But this is one, I think you, you know about it. This was a poem...

Was this what you read at the end of your interview?

Yeah that's right at the interview, yes. This was taken by Bergen-Belsen from, I have the original small little picture. You have seen it, you know, on the television, you know, last week. And this is all the SS women. What I gave it, you know.

What are these pictures?

Yeah. This is, the English soldiers took it. And we, and this is, I made them. Enlarged them. One, I think, you have one. I gave it to the... you remember? You know there is a ... I gave it Jack, and he had framed it. Yeah, this is all you see...all the victims, you know. They're looking on. This is the English soldiers looking on. I had the little originals, you know, very small but this I made them enlarge it.

Bergen-Belsen was, became a DP camp?

Yes, became a DP camp but actually Belsen itself was burned. The English burned it because of the typhus. It was a terrible epidemic. Luckily this saved me too, to survive because I, I had typhus already before the ghetto, you see, at home. You can only, you get immune. You cannot, only once in your lifetime. So that helped me a lot. [trainee interviewers talking in the background.]

[UNCLEAR – Interviewers talking amongst themselves.]

Yeah. So that helped a lot.

[UNCLEAR – Interviewers talking amongst themselves.]

Yeah, I don't know if all of you have seen the book. This is about my hometown. When I was in Israel, and, I don't know if you ever you read the book the Ordinary Men? Ordinary Men? No, you didn't? Because there are a lot of pictures from my hometown too, where they, you could place the resettlings and they had it here in the book too. And they have all the, it was a very, very, high intellectual Jewish population. [trainee interviewers talking in the background.]

You were close to Warsaw?

Not so close. We're, I don't know if you know Brest-Litovsk, Brzerśc in Polish. It's now in the Russians hands. Warsaw is a few hundred kilometers from us. Yeah. [trainee interviewers talking in the background.]

[UNCLEAR – Interviewers talking amongst themselves.]

The only thing what about, about the book is it's written in Hebrew and Yiddish. And the one what he was really instrumental to make this book, they did not have any children and he insisted to have it in Yiddish and Hebrew. He felt that each one of us should learn that our kids, our children should know at least one of these languages. But now maybe they would have to learn themselves here in the United States. It was done in Israel, I think, the book. But they, and I hear from others it's, it's the same thing. Not English but Yiddish and Hebrew. I do read Yiddish but I'm real rusty in it. But it is really a tremendous thing for me, this book.

That's neat. My mother read it too.

Really? That's right. I didn't want to say. Yeah.

I remember the picture.

You remember? Yeah. Yeah. We were the first ones, yes, to...

[UNCLEAR – Interviewers talking amongst themselves.]

That one's Greenburg. She's gone too.

[Interviewers talking amongst themselves about interviewing, editing, publishing interviews.]

Refresh my memory. Where ... the last camp you were in before liberation.

It was Auschwitz-Birkenau.

That was in Auschwitz? Okay. This is not...

It's really big now. Auschwitz is big now. It's important because you have Auschwitz-Birkenau, which is almost connected but not too close. It's in a walking really distance. I don't know how many miles.

Okay. So can you describe what this ... within say a week or so, what were the circumstances leading up ... in the camp, leading up to the liberation? How did you know that liberation might be in the offing? What was happening?

Well, you could feel always in the camp, for example, in Auschwitz-Birkenau that they start the gas chambers. And what they did also, they took out a lot of those ... especially this other commander who worked in this crematorium, they really revolt in the last minute.

They revolted?

It was a revolt. Yes.

The prisoners?

Not the prisoners but the ... this under commander was ... this is when you came to the camp and they were selecting the people which to go to death. They usually pulled out some men where they are very strong and tall to do the job and they had to be right there where the people were going to the gas chamber and they were there working in the crematorium. And they were really isolated because ... one thing they knew for sure is that they would never survive because the Germans did not want to leave any witnesses. So they knew that their lives are really, you know ... they will never survive. So probably when they ... the last minute, you know, they did have a very...

A revolt?

Yeah. A revolt. Yes. And, of course, you know, the Germans were still stronger and had more of them. Some of them got killed and some of them they deported on a train but they knew they were going to their deaths. How do I know it happens? It's very interesting because, as you know, this was the biggest, I think, camp from all the camps was Auschwitz-Birkenau and the most gas chambers were there. So when they were ready ... the men's camp was separated from the women's camp and it happens though they brought all of those men to this particular field and they were just calling names from which towns they are, from hometowns. It happened that one fellow from my hometown and I was standing there and he was telling me we were going to our deaths. They were going to finish us off.

You were called out ... you were just called down into this big ...

Well, there wasn't ... you know this was the fields were ... you know where the barbed wire, the electric wires, were separating each field. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, I don't know how many fields were there. It was just like a little city. Yes, and you have five gas chambers there.

So you were called ... everybody was called out of the barracks when ...

No, no, no. It's not the barracks. They were already outside and they were just by calling anybody from the women's field if anyone is from their hometown. And I have remembered this particular fellow calling off that, "Who is from Miedzyrzec?" which, you know, is my hometown. And he was telling me ... he had something in his hand, I'll never forget it. It was a little piece of bread and margarine and he threw it over for me. And then we all ... this was ... you probably ... I don't know. We talked about this famous march. What they did, they took out all the people while they still were able to walk and they gave us ... you know this was in January, don't forget. We knew the Russians were coming and no matter how ... there are always some kind of news coming in to the camp because there are a lot of outside from Polish people. They used to come in, engineers, you know, working just ... and then they were going out. They didn't stay. They were not in the camp. But they used to bring news. Yes, from one another, political news. It was always something. And then you could feel ... you see the airplanes. You could hear bombings already close. They flew over the camp but they never bombed the camp, as you know. And they never bombed ... until today I always think why they didn't bomb even where the trains were running. It was really not to grasp the ... when you look back what really took place. And I think you do ... if you remember the last time, I didn't bring anything this time because I knew you were going to ask me what happened after the war. But do you remember one from the *Life Magazine* I brought? And actually they were showing ... I saw this in the *Life Magazine* many, many years ago and I just couldn't believe it. This was just the field ... one of the fields where I was and I could see ... recognize my barrack even close to the crematorium, you know, where I was just ... and that's the reason I could ... when I wrote this poem, you probably remember, this was all because I was so close from the crematorium. And then across was another crematorium and they had every barrack in every field on this picture. They were taking...

They could have easily ...

Yes.

...fight it. Sure.

Yes. But, you know, when you talk to people, some would say, "Well, they didn't want to bomb because they didn't want to kill the inmates," but I don't think that this was any excuse. They knew exactly what everything is.

Right.

So this is something for everyone to debate with themselves. And then they took us on this march, which you probably most of the people heard about it. This is what we call a death march, even though they knew the Russians were already coming. They are already close. And we walked, you know, for many days and this was really a killing march because constantly the bullets were over your head and they were running us faster and faster. There was a column of men behind us, I think, and this was all women. And you can imagine we didn't have the adequate shoes. I had wooden shoes and they gave us half a bread it was, or a whole bread, I don't recall, and one can of some kind of meat. This was for the march. And we were walking at least, I think I remember, three days. We walked in the snow and, I don't remember if I mentioned to you at that time, that it will never go out of my mind – this particular young lady, she was much older than I was because she was already from my hometown. She was studying in Paris to become, I think, to be a physician, as I remember. And I was walking with her and we walked like five in a row. Okay? I didn't know ... I did not want to be on the end. I always wanted to be marching either in the middle or forward because my sixth-sense was always telling me what to do. As I mentioned to you at that time, if I will have this sixth sense and using it, I wouldn't be here today. Okay?

Uh-huh.

And she was really dragging her feet. She was really giving up but I was pulling her and pulling her. Finally we came to ... what the Germans did, they always used some kind of tricky ways how to ... even, as you know, in the beginning, people were gone to their death to a gas chamber and they told them they're just going to give them a bath. Okay? And this was different since it was ... they had sleds with horses and he was announcing, you know, to announcement, "Who cannot walk and he feels, you know, not so strong, we'll give you the [unclear]." And I knew right away what was there behind it and I ... and she said, "Sonia, I don't care." She knew what is waiting for. She said, "I cannot walk on anymore." So this is always in my mind. What they did, they took all those girls that couldn't walk any farther and they took them, you know ... when we walked it was a road between ... here was the ... what do you call it when the trees ... a lot of trees?

Forest?

A forest. Yes. Thank you. I get so excited I forget. Okay. So we walked between one forest and one forest here. Okay? And after we were just running up, we hear those shots, *tra, tra, tra*, and we knew that they were all shot and that's what was taking place. So after we walked, you know, for many days, like I say, at least three days I remember, they put us finally on those open ... and don't forget, this was winter, snowing and January is a very, very cold month in Europe.

January is cold.

Especially in Poland. This was already going into Germany really because Auschwitz was in the Polish land.

Right.

Yes. Okay. So they finally took us on those open, you know, trains, cattle trains. I'm going to tell you, on those trains, I don't know how many girls died because of the cold and hunger. We all stood one to each other body to keep warm. The snow was snowing, you know, constantly. I don't know how long. I cannot tell you. They took us ... we were probably all over Germany. We go to here. One, I remember, place they were bombing so strong and we didn't care. We really didn't care anymore.

Was it in open cars or was it closed?

It was open. Yes. Cattle cars.

But not like a ...

Sometimes cattle cars are closed. You're right. You asked the right question. This was open - completely opened.

Open and exposed to the ...

Yes.

... cold?

Yes, that's right. And it was snowing and we had little ... just one blanket they gave us before we marched. So what can I tell you? The feeling when we were just traveling, whatever you call it, with this train all around. I don't know. Going through so many different terrain in Germany and every time I'm to give you an idea when you see those little houses and you could see a little light in them and you ask yourself, "God, why? Why are we in this situation? What did we do in this world that we are so punished?" You don't know the feeling. You see that some people still have their normal life. You know what I mean? And finally they took us in front of Dachau. The whole train was in Dachau. In front of Dachau ... they did not select us but just counted like half went to Bergen-Belsen and half went to, I think, Gross Rosen. Okay? And I fell into Bergen-Belsen. But I want you to know this was already evening, night, almost and when they took us on those trucks ... and at night you really don't see anything. You don't know where they are taking us. All our thoughts were they're just going to finish us off. They're going to kill us. They took us to Bergen-Belsen. This was the destination. Bergen-Belsen, of course like I say, I don't know if this is the newest ... I mean I have to tell you because you may want to go farther than that, but I want to tell you how ... to the liberation. Okay? So Bergen-Belsen, as far I'm sure everyone probably knows by reading about this camp, this camp did not have any gas chambers but it did have, you know, crematoriums. They did not need any gas chambers. This was a starvation camp that people just piles and piles everyday were dying of hunger. And this was the camp that ... of course, you know, comparing to Auschwitz-Birkenau, it was completely different camp. Most of the people did not even go out to work like we worked in the fields and so on, in the Auschwitz-Birkenau, but this was

really strictly to finish you off. Even in the barracks in the beginning, we were all lying on the floors. At night when you had to go to the bathroom, there was just buckets standing [unclear] sides. You had to go over people walking. And the epidemic of typhoid was unbelievable, mostly, I would say in Bergen-Belsen. We had in the Auschwitz-Birkenau also a lot of typhoid victims. But Bergen-Belsen was even ... I don't know.

Is this where Anne Frank was at the end? To have with typhus?

I think ... yes. Yes. But you see I was the lucky ones. Probably I would not have survived if I had had typhoid in the camp. As you know, I don't know if you know, that you can only have this once in your lifetime. You get immune. Yes. This is a type of typhus you can only get in the war and this is a louse. You probably know when you get [unclear] ... tremendous high fever. But luckily I had typhus just before the ghetto at home, and I want you to know the first ... when the typhus epidemic came, the first ones did not make it. They died like flies. I remember a lot of students and friends from my school. First of all, keep in mind, there was no any medication. We didn't have any Penicillin. We didn't have anything. You just had to ... either you survive or die. So in my family, I happen to fall ... you know, got this disease and my brother. We were three children at home but in the same time he had it and I did have it and you go into very high fevers. But we did not have a regular hospital. It was just like ... they call it a hospital. And my mother would do anything not for us to go to this hospital, but the Germans were very scared of the disease because it's very contagious. So they were giving out in the newsletter that anyone who has typhus and they will not admit that someone in the house has typhus and they'll keep them at home, the whole family will be shot. So we had to go to this, you know, it was called hospital or whatever you call it, me and my brother. And I'll never forget this. My mother had very beautiful hair when I was a young girl and my mother for her was devastating that they will have to shave off my hair. I'll never forget this. And she gave something, I don't know, jewelry or what to this particular nurse fellow, a man nurse, not to shave off my hair but just cut it a little shorter.

Was it a ghetto hospital? Like a ghetto hospital?

Yeah. Yes, that's right. It was not yet this closed ghetto. This was during the time where before the ghetto that they gathered certain streets where the Jews had to live, because they did it all gradually. The Germans did all of the ... the machinery was just going exquisite. You know everything they knew, what next step to do and what to do. It's like a machinery. You see everything goes and falls in place. This were the Germans. So this was just before the ghetto. We call it in Polish [unclear]. It means it's not closed in. It's open almost to ghetto. But still, you know, there were good streets.

So this is why you survived because you had typhus before the war?

Yeah. I would say that thanks to this immune ... be immune after you have this. Only once in your lifetime you can have it.

How long were you in Bergen-Belsen before you were liberated?

In Bergen-Belsen I came in January and we got liberated in April 15, 1945.

So how did you know ... what was happening a few days before the liberation?

A few days before the liberation is like this. I was working, oh, so luckily, in the kitchen where we cooked for the inmates. I was in the peeling. It was a barn and we peeled not potatoes but, potatoes was maybe like if they had a special holiday, you could get a potato. Mostly it was the rutabagas. How do you call it?

Rutabagas.

Yeah. I can't pronounce it. Yes. There were piles and piles of them and this is ... and sometimes they used to bring in some kind of plants, like green plants. I don't know what they were, and this is what we cooked. But I, myself since I was not a strong, big young woman, I was working with others in the peeling barn. It was a barn and it was the kitchen and the [unclear] girls were in the kitchen. So I was lucky having this job in Bergen-Belsen and I could probably sometimes bring something a little extra but we were always ... you know they checked us before walking into the camp if we have something. So this helped me to survive too.

Were there planes flying overhead? Were there soldiers ... I mean what happened on the day of liberation?

The day of liberation it happened ... I was shocked, you see, on the day of liberation. I was working in this barn. The day ... this particular day we knew something was going on because all of the SS women were there who were in charge of us did not ... maybe like from ten you could see maybe three. So we knew something is not, you know, normal, and the men's camp, by the way this was the kitchen here, and the men's camp was across. You could see all those caravans of, you know, the skeletons of the man in charge to take them to the crematorium constantly. Well, I'm mixing up everything together. As we noticed that something is going on, why were we sitting in this, you know, and peeling the rutabagas? In the front also was a whole big pile of those rutabagas. Okay? So I was kind of very, very curious. Something was telling me ... I could feel that something was going on and we knew it too. So I said, "I'm going to latrine." The latrine was outside. I was walking out to the latrine and I could see far away, through the fences, coming some already ... you could hear the roar of the ground of some tanks that are coming. And I got so excited. Instead of stay on there and wait over, I wanted to tell the girls ... to share my ... what I was seeing. So until I was coming back, all the men from the men's camp tore up all of the opening and they came ... and they were running [unclear] hungry to get those rutabagas, even though with dirt and every...

Chaos kind was [unclear].

The chaos, yes. That's right. And on top of that they still had two SS men watching. Guards, two guards watching the kitchen around and they start shooting. As soon as I was coming in, all the girls were already standing up because we knew there is something going

on and I was pushing myself back to my place to sit where I usually was sitting there on the bench. I could not do it because they were old, you know, like a wall. All the girls were standing and he was shooting.

Where did you get shot?

Right there. See. The bullet came in here and the bullet came out here. It's in the middle of my heart and it's in the middle of my lungs. When the bullet goes in into your body, you really don't feel it until something like, "Oh, I see blood is coming out of my mouth." And the second bullet hit another girl in her arm, because it was such a close, you know, distance. Suddenly I see the blood. I said, "My God." I said, "I'm dying." And I was still swallowing the blood like I would say maybe I will live still a little longer swallowing the blood and I was beside myself. I said, "I went through already the hell and here in the day of liberation, I have to die." It's something I couldn't accept this. Meanwhile, already the tanks were in front of the kitchen and the ... and I'll never forget this Russian, because we also had Russian men in the men's camp where they escaped from the ... they got caught by the Germans, let's put it this way. And they put them also in the camp. This Russian fellow picked me up and he took me to the window to see ... he said to Russian to me, "Look out and you see." And on the platform of a big truck was an old SS, you know, three men and the men they were standing up with their hands up and also the one who was in charge of Bergen-Belsen and gosh, I forgot his name. You probably would know the name of the one who was ... he was first in Auschwitz and then ... most of the ... later because I have a picture of it too. I believe I gave it to you. No? Oh, I gave it to Jack and you had a whole portrait of those women because the English liberated us in Bergen-Belsen and they took a lot of pictures of those, you know, SS women.

How did you get medical care?

The English. Right away they put me out in the front on the ground, and this was April and it was still cold and he gave me the First Aid, the English doctor, and I was all night lying just in a barrack on the floor because it was still a chaos. They didn't have, you know, a chance to organize.

Did they give you First Aid? I mean did they put any bandages on you or anything like that?

Just bandages. That's all they did. Yes. So I was lying, I'll never forget, on this barrack on the floor and the next day, finally, they took me to the hospital. Again it was in Bergen-Belsen and it was like bunk beds. You know one and then on top another one.

Bunk beds?

Yes. Bunk beds. And I wasn't the first one and usually in ... I was lying ... let's see in this direction in this other direction there was another girl which she had died through the night and I'll never know who it was. She died. And here I am with this wound and the English finally ... as you know, I don't know for sure if you know, the Bergen-Belsen, the camp, was burned to the ground on account of this typhus and all of this dead people, that

the English themselves were also concerned about spreading the epidemic. So they were ... each one of us was first gone through a disinfecting before they took us to Bergen-Belsen, you know. Bergen-Belsen was the ... it's like here, Leavenworth. Okay? Normally the German Army, the German, they stayed in ... how would you call it in English? Like Leavenworth.

Penitentiary?

No. It's not a prison. No, no. They lived there.

[unclear].

Barracks. The Army barracks. Those Army barracks were converted to a hospital and the English run it.

So they took the survivors ... they burned Bergen-Belsen?

Yes. And they us ...

And they took the survivors to ...

They took us ... and I don't know if you watched this. This was, I think, the second time they were showing for the first two times that they actually watched the pictures they took in Bergen-Belsen in the English, and it was in the archives for 50 years. They didn't show it. You can see there the real thing and I can almost say, "My gosh! Probably I was in this." Because they took us in the Red Cross car. How do you say it?

Trucks?

Trucks. Yes. Thank you. In the Red Cross trucks and from the trucks then they transferred us after the disinfecting. We were only put in a blanket and straight to this hospital, whoever was already injured or sick.

How long were you there?

I don't know how exactly. You know it's a good question. How long you get, you know, lost in the ... how long I was in the hospital? That's a good question. I don't know. Maybe I was a month there. I don't know for sure. We were like four girls, I remember, in this particular room and when they gave me the First Aid, I caught a very bad cold and I was coughing constantly. So, yes, they took a x-ray but I did not have any ... what you call it with the lungs?

[unclear].

Yes. And the girls, what they did have they sent them to Sweden, as you know. A lot of our girls went - and men, young men. Sweden took in the ones where they were more already advanced in with along the...

Pneumonia?

...illness. Yeah. We stayed there until we were...

Healthy enough?

... healthy enough and I will never forget when I took my first walk outside, just to take my first walk, suddenly I hear from one window a very ... you know a cry almost. "Sonia! Sonia! Sonia! You're alive!" Because when this happened, the girls did not know. They thought I was dead when I was shot and they didn't know that I am alive. When she saw me walking, she could not believe it. So this was such a reunion and we were very close with each other for a long time because ... then they assigned us to special barracks when you were ready ... you know, doing better.

Doing great.

Yes. And we stayed in those barracks there and we got like the DP, they call it, camps and we had duration. This particular friend, she had a friend, which was older, and she already spoke five languages. She was taking languages in Poland. She was in the university already. She spoke fluent English. So thanks to her because we had ... also for the officers a canteen. You know you could get fruit and they had cooks like they picked from Hungarian. I think some of them where they were also in camp and they were cooks. This canteen was also, for me, a very good thing because since she knew fluent ... she spoke fluent English, she was there in charge because she could interpret. She spoke Hungarian too right away. So thanks to her we kind of trio. We kept together and I worked in this canteen also and it helped me also. Before I go any farther, I want to mention to you, I don't know if you know that how many of us died after the liberation on account because when you ... after starvation, you have to eat very ... they have to feed you very, very...

Little bit at a time.

... little bit at a time. But, you know, some of us ... probably if I wasn't in the hospital I wouldn't realize because they didn't give us, you know, just a little [unclear] and that's the way ... they built you up. Some of them, of our, you know ... just died of overeating. It was not really overeating but, as you know, you cannot...

Couldn't handle it.

They couldn't handle it. No. They died. Yes.

So you were in this camp for about a month? Or you were in...

You mean after the liberation you're talking it?

Right.

Yeah. Yeah.

You were in the DP?

Yeah. Also I want to mention to you, I don't know if I mentioned it last time. That they ... in Bergen-Belsen it's ... they were preparing ... they prepared the bread, which was poisoned, and they were ... they suppose to give it to us before the English would come, whatever, before the liberation. But there was one German doctor who was really ... he was kind of postponing it. Postponing it.

And they were going to kill you?

They let him free ... yes, later. On account of him, we had survivors. Otherwise, we would all be dead.

From eating poison bread?

Yeah.

I don't remember that part.

Yeah. They put poison in the bread, yeah. And we didn't know but this was ... they would hold it...

So it was this doctor that was holding back?

Yeah, the doctor, yes, holding back. Let's see what else can I tell you? So this was the DP camp and there ... you know after the liberation every one of us was looking for someone from your hometown. So my friend, when I was with her, she happened to come from Poland, the same hometown with Isak, Isak Federman.

Wolbrom.

Yes. Wolbrom. And she was from Wolbrom. So we found through her, I got to know my future husband too. Yes. He was ... they worked together with Isak. So later on, after we were just really come to our ... we more healthier, we start ... you could go to visit the American Zone. As you know, you had the English Zone, American Zone and a French Zone, I believe, and a Russian Zone.

You were still in Ger- ... were you in Germany at the time?

Yeah. In Germany ... I was ... this was in ...

You were in a DP camp in Germany?

Yes. That's right.

Okay.

From the DP camp later, a lot of us got married in the camp. Mostly the marriages, I would tell you, were just not because ... normal times you fell in love and you think what you're doing. It wasn't that way. It was just because you were a survivor only and especially if you met somebody from our hometown, it was especially extra, and this was the marriages. So a lot ... if you read the book about a second generation and he was interviewing most of us that the marriages were not matched. How would you say it?

There wasn't like you went through a courtship and you decided that you were meant for each other?

Exactly. There wasn't ... yes. That's right. It wasn't that way.

It was like, "Well here we are and..."

It was a different feeling. Yes.

... you know, maybe we can make it like [unclear]?

Yes. That's right. Most of us. I mean not saying because it's always...

Was this how you met your husband, in the camp?

After liberation, yeah. My husband ... if the English would have come and liberate us and a couple of weeks at least a little later, he would not be alive. He had typhus and he was on his last strings. He made it thanks to the English.

So how were you introduced in the camp? Or how did you meet him in the camp?

Oh, no. This was already ... the DP camp was not like at camp. It was...

Right. But how did you meet?

Through ... I met him, because like mentioned before, everyone was looking for someone from their hometown and my friend, she met more people. From my hometown did not survive too many because, as you know, more farther than East Poland were a bigger slaughter. The majority of our Jewish people survived from the more from the western part.

Of Europe?

Yes, of Europe. Because ... and even in Poland itself. So mostly who I met was the ... from, you know ... through my friend I met my future husband. But also I have to mention before I went back to Poland because one day there was a fellow coming ... and this is before I think I was really thinking about any, you know ... to get married. It was just in the beginning. I was still hoping that at least my brother would be alive because my mother always predicted that he's from, probably from the family, will be the survivor. He did not have Jewish features if you, I mean want to accept this. What their Jewish features, but he had blue eyes and he really looked more Irish. He was a very special young man. I would say, if he would be alive, he would be a very great man in Israel. When he came, and he was looking for a sister, and now I remember.

When who came?

This fellow from my hometown was looking for a sister that he thought maybe she was in Bergen-Belsen. He found one who survived in Auschwitz-Birkenau. She was in my hometown and he wanted to go back to my hometown. He was telling me that my sister survived.

Oh.

Yes. When he told me my sister survived ... so the borders were still open at that time in the beginning. There were no borders yet closed. So I went with him and another young lady from my hometown, and what can I tell you? It was a very difficult journey because you did not have any means of transportation or normality yet because the trains were just going ... packed. People were on top of the train and the side of the trains. So you can imagine how we had to travel. I was crawling in through little windows. You know, of course, I was young. Somehow we made it and then we were really traveling with some Russian soldiers. Whatever means of transportation we could get. And on the finale, we finally got in to Warsaw and Warsaw, at that time, was completely demolition, as you know what took place. And from there we caught a truck, which took us to my hometown. Coming to my hometown, it was a ghost town. I think I mentioned before about it, but my sister was alive.

In your hometown?

Yes. Yes, hometown. And there was one building, especially in the middle of our city, that who survived and came back from the Russia, you know, a lot of survived. Whoever survived and came back stayed in this building, not only from especially from my hometown but even as a little smaller towns. So this specifically ... this building were only for survivors and this was just not a permanent place. Everyone was planning to settle some place. We knew that there would be an open window to go to the United States but still not from Poland. So everyone was planning to go one day to American Zone or the English Zone, that you will have the opportunity to go to other countries. So when I came there and I just ... it was very difficult on me. And my sister, at that time already, was in a relationship with a fellow from my hometown who survived in hiding. It's a long story about that. And they ... he already started with a little black marketing, going to Warsaw,

back and forth. It was just a normal thing. And we still had some few homes from the family. They hoped that maybe they could sell it. I didn't care. If you would put in front of me a whole big ... amount of brilliant diamonds, of money [unclear] I didn't care. I want to go back. I want to go back.

You want to go ... get out of there?

Get out of there. Yes. And they were not ready because they were not married yet at that time. He had still something going. They had a little factory from brushes. They had and so on. So I said, "I'm going on with this thought that they will come later and we will get, you know ... reunite us." So I went back to Bergen-Belsen and, meanwhile, I was probably in the last transport with the coming with the Russian Jews that I got connected and then the borders closed.

The border between Poland and German?

The border between Poland and Germany. Yes. Closed.

Okay.

And then, you see, it wasn't easy to get out.

She got back into Germany just before the border?

No. No. She stayed on in Poland.

You got back?

I get back. Yeah, I got back. When we came to Warsaw before they were going with me on this, I said to my sister, "I feel a responsibility as an older sister." I said, "Before I leave, I want you to get married." Yeah, I felt like this was my responsibility. So when we were in Warsaw, it was really, you know ... it was very difficult even to fetch a rabbi. And so finally we got a rabbi and then we had a little restaurant, you want to call it. A restaurant, we had a little, whatever it was. Yes. At least I felt at peace that they are not just, you know, that...

What was your sister's name? Or is your sister...

Mania. She is now in Israel. Yes, yes. This is the one where she survived in the forest. I think I told the story about her.

Yeah.

Yes. So coming back to Bergen-Belsen, I knew from there we would be able to ... okay, to make this story short, because we will probably have hours and hours. After I met my future husband ... oh, in the meanwhile, my husband survived and another brother and

two sisters. Okay? In the meanwhile, they went to America. Everybody wanted to go the American Zone for some reason because they knew they will be able to...

To come to America.

... to come to the United States. So they moved to the American Zone and I stayed on in the English Zone and I worked there also. Later from the canteen was closed, I worked in a kitchen there. What we gave out food a ration to our people in the DP camp. So I worked there. In the meanwhile, my husband got the news that I came back from Poland. He came very systematically to see me and finally I went also, because his family came to the United States earlier. In a matter of fact, the visa was for him also to go and he refused. He said that he had to wait for me. We stayed in Bad Nauheim.

And what's his name?

John. Yes. Chaim was his Yiddish name.

Okay.

We married in Zeilsheim. I don't know if you heard about Zeilsheim because there was a bigger Jewish DP camp.

How would you spell that?

DP you mean?

Zeilsheim.

Zeilsheim. It's Z-A-L-Z-H-E-I-M (sic). Zeilsheim. And there was a lot of boys and girls in this specific camp. To there we found a rabbi and, of course, of course, I had to go to the *mikveh* and things like this.

How soon after this ... where are we in time? You were liberated in April. When is this happening?

This happened already in 1946, a year later.

So this is the spring of the following year?

Yes, yes, yes.

So you've been in the DP camp, you made the trip to Poland and...

Yes. Then coming back.

...now you're coming back?

Yeah. Now I'm coming with ... I went with my husband through Bad Nauheim. This was really a cooler place. That all over the world, even Ghandi and all of those big people that I don't remember anymore, used to come for cures, like heart condition or sinus and it was a natural water coming from the ground.

Like a spa?

Yes. It was really unbelievable. Yes. So we took baths there and they had those bathhouses which was a beautiful place. A beautiful place. From there we came ... so his family already was here in the States and we came here in 1948.

That's two years later.

Yeah, two years later.

How did you spend the past ... the two ... you were married for two years before you came to the States?

You know, let me be specific. Because when I came, my son was nine-months-old so I am finally think ... yeah. We had to married in 1946 because he was born 1947. Okay. When we came here he was nine-months-old. I have to kind of go back. You know you're getting confused too. I hope you're not making fun of me.

No. Huh-uh.

Because it's difficult to think.

You didn't have a calendar with you.

Yeah. I should have wrote it down. Yes. I had it. I know one thing that we came here in 1948. He was nine-months-old so I had to maybe got married in 1947. No, no. It's impossible. 1946 I think. Yeah, 1946.

That's interesting that you're not exactly sure when you got married.

Yes. I'm not sure. Yes, isn't that something? I will have to straighten this up and give it to Regina because I have it at home. We got an *ksube*, of course.

You got what?

***Ketubah*, you call it?**

Oh, the *Ketubah*. Uh-huh.

Yeah. And in Yiddish we said *ksube*. When we came to Bad Nauheim, we had a little reception. At that time, we had already ... German who baked a few things for us and my

husband had some friends already there. This was our wedding. [Laughing] Yes. In Bad Nauheim, my son was born there and, like I say, we came here when he was nine-months-old and I was expecting Regina. Yeah, I was expecting Regina.

What were you ... just briefly, what kind of ... did you work in Bad Nauheim?

Bad Nauheim? No. I didn't work. You see we were on the ration too because the American ... this was a place which ... oh, how to say to you? It was a magazine. How do you call it when you keep all the food ...

Warehouse?

Warehouse. Yes. Thank you. In this warehouse, the Americans were giving us all kind of food product and you were rationed. Every week, I believe. I don't remember how often. You went there and you had your ration. Yes.

How did you get to come to America? Did you just have to...

Oh, you had to register. Yes. We had to register and it took some time to get a visa. And then you had to go to the Frankfurt, which is a bigger city where the Embassy was. And we traveled several times because you had to go through all of the ... they check you to see if you had any illness or so and so. But it was difficult for me with a little baby always going back and forth and standing. So many people were waiting for hours.

Were you healthy at this point? I mean you were getting pregnant. You had a baby. Did you feel strong?

Yeah. I tell you sometimes it's really unbelievable to realize how strong we really are. We are stronger than steel, I would say, because when I go back and think what I ... what I went through and what I saw, what I ... but don't think this doesn't leave you any damage. There is a damage in everyone one of us, even if they don't realize there is.

What was your frame of mind at this point? What were you thinking?

You mean coming here?

No. But your in the youth bit, you've been living...

Yeah. I have to mention to you because it doesn't go out of my too. When I was ... after liberation we were all so, like I mentioned to you, we had barracks and we stayed and one day I looked out of the window and I saw one of our girls just going bizarre, completely bizarre. After liberation, some really went bizarre. They couldn't take it. Something switched their mind. I don't know how to explain it. I'm not a doctor. But I saw how she went bizarre. It's always in my mind. So things like this, don't think they don't affect you. You are ... it's ... I don't know how to explain to you. It depends. Every one of us may be in a different way got affected. You know what I mean?

How were...

But basically we were strong. If I wasn't strong, I probably wouldn't have survived. Okay?

So you're ... out of your frame of mind, your attitude at that point was that you needed to go forward? That you ... how did you ... did you have nightmares? I mean what was going on in your mind?

Of course, the nightmares. Yes. Also you ... I mean I don't know about others. I couldn't talk about it. I felt always a guilt whenever something was funny, if I was laughing, if ... of course, when the English liberated us, there were all kind of dentists they had. The first time in my life I have seen men. You know this was from the Irish with the short skirts and I'll never forget the first song what I heard over the radio after the liberation was [humming tune] ... this was about the journey. The songs...

The Sentimental Journey.

The Sentimental Journey and then The Yellow Rose of Texas. I'll never forget this in my life. This was the first two songs that I heard over the radio. And then they had dances outside that everybody could participate. So you did those things, not right away, not thinking too much, but later on I could not talk about it and I was always thinking like feeling guilty. Even, "How can I laugh? How can I be happy?" It was a guilt of thinking of the others who didn't make it.

Sure.

It's not, God forbid, that you did something wrong, but it's something you cannot go out of your mind. Do you remember that I mentioned to you about seeing those girls hanging and I have witnessed all kinds of tortures and I witnessed hearing the people that have gone to their deaths. I have seen with where they are half-alive and half-dead running when at the last minute before the Russians came. They didn't have places to burn them in the crematoriums. They were really actually burning them outside in the crematorium quarters. And when we walked from the fields, I could see some people half dead, and during the day - they usually, they used to do it at night but it was so busy that they had to do it - and they had a lot of wood with oil and they burned those people. You have to remember that some people, while they had very strong hearts and they were going up on the ... I don't know how to explain to you. They were sometimes half-alive.

Are you saying you saw people burned alive?

Yes. Half-alive. Half a body burned and half their body was still, you know ... and they were just running out of the ... where they were burning them. Yes. So how can you forget things like this?

I don't ... I'm sorry. I don't understand exactly what you're saying. The people...

There was a pile ... they built outside of the crematorium with wood. A lot of wood.

Because there wasn't room to ... but these ...

There was not room.

But these people weren't dead to begin with?

They were ready from the gassing. After the gassing, they took them out and some of them...

Were still somewhat...

... not too many. They were half-alive still. You see?

I see.

Yes. They still had the ... you know, they were running with half body burned and half body, you know... So how can you forget this? Like I mentioned to you about the little babies that they brought from Lodz Ghetto and they burned them. We were just in the front of the crematorium. How can you forget when those little pieces of bones and they were ... we were as fertilizer. We put at, when we worked in the fields and you see these little bones. How can you ... what do you feel? What do you feel? No one can, in this world, understand and believe what really took place. Some of us had maybe a little easier. I'm going to tell you. Some of us survived in, they call it, *arbeits* camps. It means it as not a concentration camp, and they were the more luckier. But I happened to be in the worst three camps. I am not saying all of us. We all have stories to tell, everyone one of us. I'm telling you only my own story. Pointing out to all of you, even you'll see 100 movies, you'll see ... you'll go even to ... I haven't been to the museum myself yet. Believe me, no one can grasp what really took place. It's impossible because I wouldn't either. If I would be of a normal, like all of you, I would not be able to grasp this.

It's almost as when you tell it, even though you witnessed it, it's almost as if you don't grasp what you're telling me...

Yes, yes.

...that it actually took place. So certainly...

Yes. And I want to go back and the ladies, being the last time I talked. Why it gave me later strength ... suddenly came strength over me to talk about it, and I'll tell you why. When I finally saw the deniers, it never happened. And, you know, the antisemitism is still so great, I ask myself, "Sonia, what is the purpose of you surviving?" And when I stopped thinking I felt like a responsibility as a survivor to tell my story. When I think about those two girls, like I mentioned to you before, when they were hung and before they died on the guillotine [sic – means gallows] and only because they tried to escape, and their last words

were, "Do not forget - take revenge," in our language as they spoke on the SS woman who took away already for them ... this was their last breath. So how ... I started feeling guilty that I talked about it.

When did you start talking about it?

Oh, when my children started asking. Of course, I had to wait until they would understand. They saw me with this number and then finally came that I cannot tell you exactly, it took years.

What took...

Because, excuse me. You remember that not right away you had this normal life and already hearing about the skinheads and of the SS, and I'm going to tell you something. I don't know if you realize, because in Germany it was taboo. They couldn't have their freedom to do this. We started here and they came to Germany to spread this ... and give them the fire to be against the Jews and so on and denying that it never happened. So you cannot sit still. You know? And you know the story I told you how I survived if I wouldn't ... again I'm repeating myself. If I would have been ahead of them, what they're going to do next, I wouldn't be able to sit here and tell you my story.

How old were you when you were liberated?

I was not quite 18.

Okay. And you were married when you, I guess, 19?

Yes. I was ... yeah, 19, and then let's see. Now one moment. I have to think about it. We were married ... yes, because I did not ... I'm mixing up because I had from the Rabbi and then two years later so I was not even 21. We had to have, before we immigrate from the city, that we were married. So our marriage was a little ... the official was rabbi first and then we had to go ... where my little was already born, I think. I don't remember exactly. Anyway, we had to have the [unclear], they call it. The German with our ID that we are a couple.

So you kind of had a...

And I had to have a witness because, excuse me, you had to be 21 to get married in Germany and I think in was the rule at that time and I was not 21. I had to have a witness. I don't remember even who was the witness. Yes.

So you were married by the Rabbi while you were 19, but then a couple of years later before you left for America, you had an official...

Before ... yes.

...like a judge-type wedding?

Yes. That's right. Uh-huh.

And then what city did ... so how did you come to the United States?

Bad Nauheim. Bad Nauheim was the city where we stayed. Like I told you, it was a cooler place.

No. I mean the city ... where did you come to in America?

Oh, when we came to America we came ... okay. Since I mentioned to you that my husband's brother and two sisters came here in 1946. They came almost two years before, you know? And they were...

Your brother came in 1946?

No. I don't have ... my brother was killed and my father was killed.

Who did you say came in 1946?

My husband's brother...

Your husband's brother.

...and two sisters. Okay. And they came here before we did because, I mentioned to you before, he waited for me and we came later.

Right. Right.

Automatically, in that ... you said the Joint and the HIAS were the organizations that brought us here. You really never knew who were ... as you probably know we had to have visas. And they had to have people to sign for us visas. So until today I would give anything to know who was my sponsor. You see? Because this was ... how do you say it? It's a special word. Anon-...

Anonymous.

That I ... you wouldn't know who signed for us because actually they only signed because their organization really took over. They came, for example, to you and said, "Listen. Please, you know so-and-so, but you will not responsible. We will be responsible." So that's the real reason we never knew who was our sponsor.

Huh? And it couldn't have been your brother because he was, himself, an immigrant.

No. They couldn't be. You had to be an American citizen.

Okay.

You came...

We came, yeah ... we ... that's right. It was in May. You came in, in May here, 1948, and the ship was *Marine Flasher*. You could imagine I was expecting, with my beautiful Regina, and here was nine-months-old my little boy baby. It was very difficult on me and since this was really an Army ship ... *Marine Flasher* was the name. I think it was the second ... there were two very well-known ships and *Marine Flasher* is among them. This was just a ship who was just not ready for a ... it's an Army...

It wasn't a passenger ship.

Not, oh, exactly. It was not a passenger ship.

Was there lots of survivors onboard?

So we ... they had to separate. The men were on the ... down of the ship and the single people and the one's like expecting or with children, we were on the top floor. Whatever you call it. So it was very difficult because ... my, gosh! This was the first time in my life I have seen so much food, wonderful food, but you couldn't eat. You had the...

The sickness.

Yes. Sickness. And double bubble, here I am expecting. [Laughing] I really had a hard time.

How long were you...

But it was worth it, as you see.

How long were you on the ship?

You know I was searching this question to myself and I have to be honest with you, it's either a week or ten days. I could have dig farther and looked on the dates then I would know, if it was important.

It's not like today where you get on a plane and you're there in a few hours?

Later on, some people come by plane, but not in our times. No. We came all by ship.

You ended up ... you went to New York?

Ended up in New York. In New York we stayed in this hotel, Marcel on Broadway and I was maybe, I think, on the 11th floor. I was never ... you know I come from a small city and this was very frightening. I don't know if you can understand but to be so high... I

was always afraid, or maybe it was a fire. You know things like this. Where will I escape? Where will I go? I was afraid of those elevators. To make this story short, I came out with a very bad rash and I stayed much longer than some other people that had to go to a doctor and this was a time I was still expecting. So we stayed in New York almost two months, I believe.

Where were you headed from New York?

From New York, we had ... you see mostly they did not really ask you where you want to go unless they automatically sent you where your family is, if you had family.

Did you have HIAS in the Joint room?

That's right. So since my husband's brother and two sisters were already here in Kansas City, they automatically sent us here. If I would maybe put a resistant and say, "I don't want to go to Kansas City..." because I had, at that time, cousins from my ... this was my grandmother's sister and her children. You know, some of them were still alive. So we came here automatically. They tried to always put together family and a lot us didn't want to go out of New York. They want to stay in New York. It was very difficult to get this through because the Agency did not want to encourage any of us to stay on in New York.

Did you want to leave? Did you want to go to...

We wanted to leave automatically because, of course, John's brother and two sisters. We wanted to go. Yes.

Did you speak any English?

Well, I spoke a little. I had a tutor in Germany because I knew, before I come, to at least be able to converse a little to understand what somebody is, you know. So I had a little bit. I wouldn't say it is really because I did not have the lessons too long.

While you are in the DP camp in Germany, is that when you studied English?

No. It was in Bad Nauheim when I moved into American Zone where my husband was, yes.

Is that frightening to come to this country not speaking the language?

It was not really the language was frightening because you always had your own people that you could speak Yiddish. It wasn't what frightened me, but the culture, the change. It's a tremendous change from ... very simple, don't forget. We did not come from normal conditions like let's say the Russian *aliyah* came now. They came with education. They came with their family, mothers and fathers and so on. They all learned. They all went to school because especially the Communism is one thing but they had a good thing is free education. They are the almost of them very educated. And it's different completely from

the way we came. We came without anything. We came just to start up a new life. It was difficult because the Agency, the Jewish Agency, helped us. It was a big help for us.

How did they help you?

They provide us, you know, like you see an old funny [unclear] like they do now for the Russians and they provide us with a place where to leave. And I want to point it out to you, it was just after the war and it was very difficult of housing because after the war, the guys came home and they start themselves, you know, start building. So we ... it was a very frightening thing for me. When we came here they put us on the ... it was on Thursday I remember. It was ... they call it a little, I don't know, a hotel, motel. I'm not sure. I don't think it was just ... but it was a room and I couldn't understand this because just across was a wall. I mean I was not used to at home with something like this. Here is the room and there you don't see anything but another wall. It was very depressing for me and to then, I have you know, let's see Regina was still not born. No, not yet. It was very hot when we came. I remember in May when the family waited for us on the ... by the train on the station, I said, "God, where do they come?" And it was so humid and hot in May. I'll never forget this. I almost said to my husband, "Why did we come here?" [Laughing] So it was very tough in the beginning, especially if I would have just maybe a nicer place, you know where they put us. From this place, they took us ... the next one was a basement, you can imagine, and this was very difficult on me. There was ... Regina was born. And this basement, I'll never forget, I really was crying everyday, standing with my little boy and my little baby and looking out. You didn't ... you know it's a shock, a culture shock, because I didn't see any people during the day. I said, "Where are the people?" You know in Europe mothers with the little buggies and always, you know you see people. Here you go and I said, "Where are the people?" They're sitting inside of their houses. It was a tremendous shock to us. Every one of us, if they remember, they'll tell you the same thing. Here especially a basement, even in Poland at home, I don't know how Warsaw and those big cities probably, people maybe were living in the basement but not in our hometown. We had a very nice place where we were living in a basement. Sometimes you could hear someone who was ... how do you call it when somebody takes care of a house?

A janitor.

A janitor. Bless your heart. The janitor would live with, some Polish janitors in a basement, and this was very devastating to me, very devastating.

Why did they move you from one place to the next?

Well, because probably the Jewish Agency could not maybe ... maybe this was on their own expense. If I cannot tell you.

Who told you that you needed to move and they put you ... where would...

They didn't ask us. It just ... the basement, the place was bigger, now I remember, because there was only one room and a little tiny kitchen. And here in the basement we had a bedroom.

Was this also on Troost?

No. This was on Admiral, 1201 Admiral. I'll never forget it. Okay? And then Independence Avenue ... was not too far was a little school there. It was a different...

But you ...it sounds like you were used to be in a sort of a village kind of atmosphere where you lived in the...

Togetherness. Here I could not grasp. Here I am living in this basement and I had a neighbor. No one opened the door for you, even going before when I was living on Troost there. I said, "A neighbor ... you know at home, oh, in the evening we're sitting outside, we visit and here everyone is almost like afraid of you and don't open the door." This was a very big shock to us. It's a different ... European life, I don't know ... I'm sure probably in the small towns here they're probably still like European, and it was different. So this was very difficult. Very hard for us to accept. And again, like I say, I really cried lots of times. And my husband had to go to work right away because we were not people just living on charity. Because really it's charity what the Jewish Agency gave us for food every week. They did everything they could. My husband went right away to work and it was difficult on me - very difficult. Especially it was a hot summer and here we didn't know about polio ever at home and this was the...

And this was the summer of '48?

This was '48. Yeah. And it was very hot summers. It was very difficult. The only thing, of course, help ... we had other families moving in in the same building, all the survivors. So we spend on Admiral there, I don't know if you are familiar, there is a boulevard and it has a big place like green grass and we were sitting late at night in this grass. I have a little picture still. [Laughing] And there was Regina born into this little basement.

So she was born in Troost ... when you were still on Troost?

No. No. She was born when I was already in the basement.

Oh, okay.

No, wait a minute. Let me ... let me. Yeah. Yes, in the basement because I remember why I do remember because there was a lady, a survivor, and she did not have children. She was a little bit older and she was so admiring. She was such a beautiful baby that every time she looked in through the window, because sometimes I had to step out to grab something from the store and I used to take my little boy with me, and she looked in and always ... she kind of ... I usually used to ask her to kind of watch her and she was always so ... oh, she was a wonderful baby.

So you were in the basement when she born?

Yes, yes. In the basement, I remember.

What was your...

In a matter of fact, I'm going to tell you something because it will be funny to all of you. When I was ready ... already I had the pains to go to the hospital, my husband didn't drive. We didn't have a car. But his brother, my brother-in-law, they came early and he was ... already they had a car. So my husband had to call him to take me to the hospital because it was time for me to go. He had to stay with my little boy. When I finally ... when Regina was born, the doctor or the nurse, I don't know, they brought the child out to the father so they talked to my brother-in-law is the father. He always talks about it. [Laughing] Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

What kind of work did your husband do when he started working here?

Okay. My husband ... he had two professions really. At home he, as a young man, he worked with luggage. Later, I think, in the war or so he learned also tailoring. He had an uncle who was a very prominent tailor. So since there when you come here they ask you what profession, what to do so he worked in the factories in the beginning as a tailor. Then later on he ... my husband in another ... our neighbor, it was the Penner's. Do you know the Penner's? Do you know anybody on the downtown? It was 1327. You see some things I do remember. They had I think two brothers and one passed away and his wife, they owned the whole building there, and she was selling the business. He worked the business because, I don't know as you know probably because you all are too young, they tell me this too that in the war you did not have stores to go in and buy new clothes. A lot of people were buying secondhand clothes. So this was in shoes, wore new shoes. So somehow my ... before that, I have to ... I'm sorry. I have to go back. First my husband ... where we lived, not too far on the ... what was the street? It will come to me. Next to Admiral Boulevard, he got a little cleaning shop. The man was selling and he was getting attiring and he also did a little tailoring. So my husband ... it wasn't, you know ... he paid them out so much every month and he took this place because this man couldn't run it anymore. This was our first ...

Business.

...experience in business. Okay. And the second step was this ... after I don't know how many years, he stayed in this little cleaning shop. He went with my neighbor and bought this from the Penners and they ... yes. But it was not a good move because after the war, still people were buying those type of clothes but it started going down and down because the new stores with new clothes ... suit mainly, men suits, it wasn't any ladies. But they still were selling shoes.

It was a secondhand shops? It was still secondhand clothes?

Yeah. The secondhand ... but they had new shoes also, you know, selling. So anyway after this, the next step was that my husband had to take another little place after the ... you know, they split and the business didn't go. You know those things happen.

Were you still living on Admiral?

We're still living on Admiral, yes. Then he buy through someone we knew that one fellow, who also was retiring, it was on Broadway. Let's see we were already on Virginia. Virginia we leaved already. Yeah. We moved, after later, from Admiral. I don't know which year. It was close to a school. Beth Shalom was there on Linwood Boulevard and we were living on Virginia. Yes, on Virginia close from the school. So Regina went there to Hebrew school and my son was there too. We had this ... yeah. My husband had this little tailor shop already on Broadway.

Oh, okay.

Yes. What can I tell you? He stayed for many, many years and the next step was when his health was going down. We moved to Metcalf - Metcalf South, which is my little place now. His health was deteriorating more and more.

When did you move to Metcalf?

It's probably about 18 years ago. Uh-huh. Yeah. But this was already when he was ... he had Parkinson's. He was stricken with Parkinson's, my husband, when he was in his early 40s.

Early 40s?

You could imagine, yes.

How old when...

So I had a tough time, yes.

When did you...

And I worked in ... I did work all myself for many years in ladies wear. Many years, I don't know if anyone remembers of you, that was a store without a name. I worked there for quite a few years. Do you? Yeah.

Oh, yes.

And, yes, I was managing the store and then I worked for Mr. Lizman.

So what kind of work? Was this like managing...

Sales. Yeah. I was a sales lady. I started in sales but the store without a name. On the last few years I was managing for them a store which was on ... I was on Troost. Then they had a bigger one on Truman Road. The biggest one after he closed this one. It's a long story. After my husband ... when his health starting deteriorating, and Broadway started going down the hill also. He was there in the hotel. What was the hotel's name?

Ambassador?

Ambassador. Bless your heart, yes. Ambassador. So I took a job ... I worked for the Lizman's and then ...

Worked for who?

Lizman's there. Here, quite a few stores. Yes, quite a few stores. And then when my husband's health was going down, Lizman's was closing up their stores. I decided that I have to be with my husband. This was already the time we moved into Metcalf South. The last five years was very tough. It was down, and I had to have people at home, and I took over the shop completely, and then for six months he was in a nursing home and this was the end. Yeah.

When did he pass away?

Yeah, 1989 in April. Just before his birthday. His birthday was supposed to be the next. Just an hour before midnight he passed. It would be exactly on his birthday he would have passed.

How old would he have been?

Now?

On his birthday. No, on his birthday.

7-, uh, let's ... 69. Yeah, 69.

He was turning 70?

Turning 70, yes. Turning 70, yeah.

Did you do anything when you first came here? Did you go to any schools or...

That's a good question. Since my husband went to the evening classes so it was not possible for me. I had to stay with my baby and he went to bed.

English classes?

English classes, yes. He took ... yes. And he was very sharp. He was really ... when I look back, you make mistakes. Of course, I was very naive too at that time. He was very good math. He probably was a wizard in math. So somebody was encouraging him to take real estate. This was before the tailor shop. So he was going to those courses taking in real estate and the man who was in charge, the fellow, the teacher, was really amazed with him. He really liked him and he was doing very well, but fate was different. Sometimes, I don't know, you have to believe in faith. Friends of ours suggested about this tailoring on Broadway so he left that but now when I go back, if you would have stuck into the real estate, he could have been really very well with it.

So he was studying for the real estate but then the opportunity came from Broadway...

Yes.

... and he figured he'll take that?

Yes. And now if I look back and I see how really I was very naïve. Encouraged him, go still at night and keep up with it.

[unclear].

I mean it's very silly to talk about it but we're all ... I'm sure everyone who is sitting here had made mistakes in their life. I mean there is no such thing. We are human. But it's meant to be, I guess, like this.

So you learned whatever you want...

Oh, you ask me? Okay. I really mainly learned by reading. I love to read a lot. And a matter of fact, even in school at home I was really a great reader. To me this was the most wonderful...

Pastime?

Yes, pastime. That's right. And my mama many times worried about me. That she was much ahead of her times because she worried of my posture, and I was so sensitive if I had read a book about very sad story, I could cry with it. And she noticed this and she worried about me. But, as you know, we had wonderful writers - you cannot take this away - in Poland, Polish writers. Of course, I read a lot of also American-made. Gone with the Wind and all of those classics you have, you know, languages like, you know, Victor Hugo's and so on. So when my children were in high school, I already had this in the public school, already all those books. So our education...

Kind of....

...was a much higher level than here. I want you to know.

When you were here, the people that you became...

Because I was still in, excuse me, in public school I learned. Okay.

I'm sorry. When you were here, the people that you became friends with, were they primarily also survivors?

Yes.

Why do you think it worked out that way?

The only, excuse me, the only ... we had social workers. They gave us, you know, which group. The social worker used to come once in awhile to my ... in the basement where we lived, and I remember that it was not, how should I say, a close understanding.

A social worker didn't understand...

You know when I go back and I think about it, they did not use good judgment on that because there should have been someone could more, you know, get closer with you. So she was very stiff and I'm sure she's probably understanding but I didn't gain anything from the social worker except that she sometimes would bring her box of chocolate, or something like this, for the children. But basically this ... of course, you have to keep it in mind at that time, after the war, and now we are much more organized. The Jewish organizations, if they would be organized at that time like now would have been a lot of things different. A lot of things different.

Who sent the social worker?

The Jewish Agency.

The Jewish Agency?

Yes. That's right.

So how did it come that your friends were primarily survivors?

Automatically this comes to you. First of all, we were living there. There were a lot coming in. Yes, survivors too. And this is people who can communicate and this is people that understand you and you're always happy to be together with survivors. It's automatically. Even now, in those ages, you can see why the Polish with the Polish, the Italians with Italians. The second generation's different. But the older, when you look back, even until today, there is something in us. "Oh, you're from Poland?" You right away feel ... first of all, we have a language to speak. It brings us togetherness. And also, even until today, I have to admit, when I meet a survivor, I have right away contact with him or she because of the past. It's right a way you feel free. You are not tense or anything. It's different, and it's very difficult, maybe for you all young people, to understand this but this is the way it

is and I'm telling you the truth. Even until today, of course of must say, I have a lot of American-born friends. You know real American. But still no matter how close I am with them, it's not the same thing like another survivor. This is not to say they are wonderful. I one especially a wonderful close friend and we're really ... but still there is missing something that she or he ... they really cannot feel what I feel. What I would ... you know what I mean? And I want you to know, interestingly it is, when you come in the company with survivors, you all ... what suggest it is that you are talking, the end will end up about the camps.

End always ends...

Always ended up with the camps. It's interesting for you to know about it. Yeah.

So even though you weren't talking about it very much to anybody else, when you were with survivors, it was like you could let down your guard and...

Yeah.

...and talk about those things?

Yes, yes. And don't take me wrong to say that you can be friends with every survivor because he's a survivor.

Sure.

I want to point it out to you it's not that way because even here, in any society even before the war or after the war, you couldn't be friends with everybody. It depends, sometimes, from your statutes and your culture. What shall I tell you? This is typical. So don't take me wrong when I say survivor. It doesn't mean that I have to be already a very close, close friend with him. But there is right a way contact, you see, when you meet another survivor.

You have a lot in common?

Yes.

Yeah.

And especially if the background, more or less, you have to keep in my... It's like this country and every country, you have the eastern Jew culture, the western and the south and the north. Even the dialect of the Yiddish is completely different. You know what I mean? Yes. And, as a matter of fact, I'm really thrilled to see that you some times, you cannot ... when we came to this country, I have to point out something to you. When my children, we spoke on the Yiddish. My son did not have any problems but little Regina had problems. When she started school, she did not speak good English and the teacher, you know, wrote me a note that said she would have to stay after school to tutor her the English. So we decided, with my husband, to speak to the children in English but we spoke

Yiddish, you know, among ourselves. When I look back I see that I should have maybe ... because some families, the second generation, not too many, speak Yiddish. But my children did still. To today they understand, especially Regina, maybe more than my other. But they cannot speak Yiddish. So what is happening now is she went to Israel, my daughter, and she could not commute to my sister because she speaks only Yiddish and Polish. So she said, "You know, mama, now I see why I'm missing the Yiddish." She really would like to go into learning Yiddish and she bought a tape and she would like to have other young, maybe women, the second generation, whoever, to form a class. It would be very interesting. I want to point it out that Yiddish is very now much revived in Israel, because don't forget we have wonderful writers, very famous writers in Yiddish - composers and we have ... they write, oh, kind of poems. How do you call it?

Poets.

Yes. And so it really should not have been. If we lose this language, you can call all gone. Of course, it's not. But this language has background. A very rich background, and even songs what we have in the Jewish. I really would like to encourage what's her name who's in charge, to have tapes about the Jewish songs, which are vanishing. They'll never ... as a matter of fact, what I did when Regina went now to Israel? I sent to my sister because she has a beautiful singing and my father and my brother were over in ghetto, especially, this kept us going because we couldn't go out in the evenings and we were sitting always singing songs. Okay?

Uh-huh.

And the songs are just ... you cannot imagine. They're really very deeply ... all the Jewish songs are mostly very sad background. So I feel that this should be also pursued and have it on tapes if anyone, you know ... yes. Because that will be vanishing before long.

So basically after Regina was five, you heard Yiddish in the home up to that point?

Yes.

But then you really went to...

And then ... yes.

...English?

You know you go to school ... they start going to school and they used constantly the English. At that time, like I say, if she wouldn't had problems, probably we would have spoke Yiddish and then, you know, we'd also want to learn to speak ourselves the English language. That's the way it went. But I have only one friend that had all three children - she has three children, where they do speak Yiddish. And I really ... I must say thanks to her husband. Yes.

Raising your children, coming from what you had been through...

Yes.

...did that present any difficulties? I know Regina probably start or ... and what was your other child ... what was your ... what's your brother's name?

I have three children.

Oh.

Yeah. I still have my youngest one. She was a news report for CBS and now she's freelancing. She's the youngest and she's...

And her name?

...43. Debbie. And she's not married. Never was.

And then there's Regina.

Regina and then...

The first was?

The first, my son, yes. And he's a writer. He wrote a book called Shaking the Money Tree and he's specializing in video and film, which Regina can you tell you a little more about it. He's also an Endowment of Arts in the Washington...

He lives in Washington?

...[unclear]. No, they live now in St. Louis, believe it or not.

In where?

St. Louis.

Oh, he came up.

Yes, on account because my daughter-in-law has ... she's the manager/director of the theater in the Washington University there. So he made a big sacrifice because they were in San Francisco before. Yes.

So he's a writer?

They lived in Washington also for quite a few years.

So he's a writer and his name is?

Morrie Warshawski. He's not a...

Morrie?

Morrie. And he's also, what you call it, Regina?

Consultant.

A consultant, and also when it comes out about a new book?

Reviews.

Yeah, reviews. He does a lot of reviews. Yeah.

Okay. The question, though, is when they started asking questions, how did you deal with that?

Well, I used my judgment because when they start asking me as a little tot "what is the number?" and we had to ... we couldn't just tell them what was it. We just ... I remember I used to say, "Well, because this..." I don't even recall exactly what I used to tell them about the number. Yes. I used to tell them, "When you grow up, I will tell ... explain to you exactly what this number means." They were just ... I think patient. They understood. They never asked me, "Why you cannot tell me now," because they were not really ready to grasp what is the number.

When did they start ... when did you start to explain to them what...

I really when they start going to school.

Six or seven?

I would say ... yeah, I would say around that, you know public school when they started.

Was this difficult to do?

Well, you see, they were asking questions too because it was very hard on our children why they didn't have any grandparents. They were going to school and see, you know, like other children - they have grandparents. "Where are our grandparents?" It's difficult for children like this. They grow without grandparents and probably maybe it is something affect them too because you have a lot of ... well, second generation what they have ... they have psychological problems. Yes. It's in the country. I mean it's in the books. It's understandable.

Do you feel you raised them in anyway differently than you might have if you hadn't gone through what you went through?

Probably, yes.

How so?

Because I tell you, I feel, for some reason, the children are ... they feel the pain of what we went through, not even telling them, because no matter how later when they realize. I think there is something that they are part of it. This is my opinion. I may be wrong. It depends also on what child. If the child is more sensitive and more deeper, I would say they suffer too in a way. In a different way because they see what their parents went through. And also it's difficult on them. Later on I found out it was difficult for maybe other survivors' children too, even in school. That there is something a little different than the one who was born here. Am I right with what I am saying? Yes. It was ... I didn't know at that time. Later on I would get out with the children. It was different. They felt different.

If your children ... if they were born here versus if they were born...

Yes.

... in Europe?

Yes.

Was it better to have been born here?

Not Europe especially. No. No. You're misunderstanding me. Because a survivor, parents' survivors. That makes the difference on the children.

If your children...

Children of the survivors.

Just being a child of survivors?

It's the second generation. What do you call it now? Anyone you can speak to. Anyone who the parents were there. Isn't that something? Of course.

Made them feel different?

Yes. Yes. Because they are feelings ... maybe, I don't know. You have to talk to those second generation what they feel because I believe they feel the sadness in those parents and maybe I was too sad all those years, maybe too early for my age to be taking things ... seeing different. I don't know. Children are feeling it.

Right. Right.

It's like you take ... when parents divorce you don't have to say anything. The child is, you know. This is the same thing with us, I think. They feel. Yes.

Did you experience any antisemitism in this country?

Yes.

How so?

I remember, you know, one of my husband's tailor shop, he came one morning and there was swastika...

Which one of...

...on his door.

The one on Admiral or the one on...

No. This was on Broadway.

On Broadway?

When he had the shop on Broadway. But this was not only one incident. You have to be really stupid to tell yourself that you don't have antisemitism in this country. It's a very big antisemitism. The only thing what is saving us ... I don't if you realize that to hear it's a melting pot. You have the [unclear] to the black one, the Mexican, Italian. It's a melting pot. This what saves the Jew. If here would be the same thing like in Poland, the Jew and the Polack, you know?

It's just...

You understand?

Yeah. Uh-huh.

Then we were the victims and they could do everything. Okay? But here they are not as powerful because of this melting pot. Otherwise, you would feel antisemitism in every part in your life. That's all what I can tell you. Because many times I deal with the public, even a small way, and sometimes they don't know you are Jewish. You catch out this Jew thing, you know?

Uh-huh.

Oh, absolutely. Don't kid yourself. Every one of you would have to be on the guard that something like this will never happened - will happen because this is from the hate. The hate in this world brings to all this Holocaust. Because if you really want to think what is

going on even now, this is the hate, because when a baby's born, first of all, we are not asked what religion you want to take over. You are born right there to your parents, grandparents, you know, fate. Okay? And the second is like this - if you're giving love to this baby all the way, it will love. But if you'll sit and talk about the other one and the hate, you put in the hate in the child and I'll tell you why because it's so difficult for me to grasp. When I was dreaming if I survive, you know ... sometimes I used to watch a little bird going through. I said, "God, why don't you turn me into a little bird and to be free." That's all you wanted. You thought about free. You thought about freedom. If you'll survive, it will be such a different ... the world time I mean is the same. It never changes. But the people in the world will be different. I was visualizing unity - that people will not hate each other. I mean I was naïve, of course. And then you step out and you see the same thing. Another thing is difficult for me, maybe I shouldn't say this, to see Germany so powerful and so wealthy as a might and just because of the dirty politics. They didn't deserve to have a country again like this. I know I'm talking maybe politics but I have to. It would be something interesting to people what they don't realize. When I see this country to be again what they did, and we, the United States...

How could you come back?

...you know helped them because why? Because of Stalin. They were afraid that will to not democratic. You see now what is happening with Switzerland. The antisemitism what was. If Switzerland wouldn't help the Germans with the gold and they had the factories because it was a free country, you know a neutral country, and they all those ammunition factories and everything, and the booty came gold from our teeth and from the camps to them, and they supported the Germans. If they wouldn't help the Germans, the war could have ended much, much earlier. They say maybe one or two years. The Germans could not have the ... won the war without Switzerland.

Have you ever gone back to Europe, to Poland since that time you went to visit your sister?

No.

No?

No. I tell you, many times I feel like this. If my children would say to me, like, you know, many of our families, that they want to go and see the roots from where I come and so on and see ... I would go. It would be difficult, but I would go. First of all, it's one thing, which is in my mind. Auschwitz-Birkenau I wouldn't even want to go because why should I go and see it. Why? I am sure that really the way it was, the gas chambers and everything, they destroyed a lot of things. But when I remember seeing my mother walking to her death to the gas chamber in Majdanek before they sent me to Auschwitz-Birkenau, I went through a selection with my mother and Mengele made the selection and it was left and right, I have even still a poem about it. It's still in Polish and I never translated. So whoever went to left was to the gas chamber. To the right you still stayed on and they ... this same night, the same day, they took us on the other field to all of those where they will go to Auschwitz-Birkenau. All our women. And, you see, when you were in camp they

have *blocksperr*. *Blocksperr* means in German you cannot walk out from the barrack, you cannot go in. It has to be all closed. And this was just ... you know you could hear the whistles. We knew it was a *blocksperr*. Anytime when they had the *blocksperr*, we knew something is going on. Okay? So I had the feeling that something I was curious, "What is going outside?" So the doors, the gates from the barrack, was a little opening and I looked out and I saw a big column of three men and I looked over and saw my mama [crying].

That was the last time you saw her?

That's the last time, yes. She walked with another lady from my hometown. As long as I live, I'll never forget this. And I broke down the same night. [Crying] Not because she ... I mean our brothers and sisters, all of them perished and the column was going I'm sure. But when you were inside of the camp, you knew where you were going. [Crying] In just that thought...

Did she...

...okay. That she knew she was going to her death because a lot of our people went not knowing, because the Germans tried to come of large and tell them, you know, they're going just to this, and to take a bath, and they still didn't know in the beginning. Later on, everybody knew - not everybody, most of us. This I only talk because it's killing.

That's the most horrible memory you have was feeling...?

Yeah. I mean as far as my mother, because my dad and my brother were shot. They took them out from ... they were hidden in the attic and they got them out, the Polish people, and they killed them right on the spot. This is ... my sister knew about it after, you know ... she survived. She went back to her hometown. I mean like I say I can sit ... I'm sorry that ... but I'm only human.

Anything that, aside from an experience like this, do these thoughts, do these images, do they come to you everyday? Are they part of your everyday experience even now?

Even unaware they are there. Of course, in your dreams you still have them. My husband used to dream all the time. We had to have a king-size bed because he used to fall out of the bed like somebody is running him constantly. He was running. Many times he fell off of the bed. When I go back and think about it, men are different. Their dreams are different than women. When I was expecting, I had to lie always on one side because I was afraid because he was kicking like he's fighting always with somebody. So, of course, it's in your ... even unaware it is with you. You know?

Yeah. Do certain experiences bring it to the front?

I want to point it out to all of you that you are really, in a way, different. I mean I see whole life differently than a normal person. It's difficult sometimes. I'm not saying that I am always strong. I wouldn't tell you that I am always strong because life is a struggle

sometimes. But when it comes to those things, those moments, I tell myself, "Sonia, you made it at the camps. You will make it." You know what I mean? I went through a lot with my husband. This was a nightmare too. [Crying] And I had people in my house and they always prayed to God that he would finish his life in his own house. But it didn't work out like this. I had three women all the time, you know.

[Inaudible].

Yes. But the last six months he had to be in hospitalized, I mean to go to the nursing home, because they had to put a fitting, you know. So you go on, and you are strong, and you tell yourself ... of course when I was younger, it gives you a lot of strength to go on and do things on account of your children. I always felt a special strength of my children and that kept you going.

So no matter how ... are you saying that no matter how much you might feel inclined to be depressed, to be...

Oh, yeah.

...wrapped up in the past, you knew the children were the most important thing and...

Yes.

...you had...

Yes. I used to think ... this gave me power and energy for the children. I put my life for my children because that's all what we've had.

Uh-huh.

Yeah.

Did the war affect your feelings about Judaism? God?

That's a very interesting question you asked me because I'm going to tell you. When they took us out ... we're in hiding. We had a hiding place under a bed. You know, we only had one room in the ghetto. When they took us out on this hiding place and we were just ... we thought we were going to be shot. We had to kneel in front of a wall and questions come to you and then what you kept seeing and you ask yourself a question ... I hope that no one will be ... if anybody is very religious, whatever, you have the right. I still believe because there is something in us to believe. And you ask yourself, "Where is God?" I want to point it out to you. When I was working, I think I mentioned with Lodz, little babies came on the truck. They're all sitting like little, you see, white little geese because they were all wearing white little shirts and it happened to be just this crematorium we worked very close in the meadow. Then we had SS men who was, you know, guarding us and I'll tell you something. I'll never forget what he said because we understand from Yiddish it's

very ... not difficult to speak German. And he said to the other lady who was in charge. Lady, I call lady, the German SS woman. She said, "I can understand when I see those old people, you know, the elderly, going to the chimney. But those little babies, children," I don't know how old they were, two years, one year, don't ask me. They're just dying and when you look from afar they probably took them out in ... Lodz was the last destination where they really settled in Poland and they took them out from ... how do you call it when you keep just the babies, children?

Orphanage?

Orphanage, yes. Yeah, I'm sorry. They took them out to the orphanage, 100 percent, yes. And he said, "What those little angels? What did they seem?" He himself...

The Germans?

I'll never forget this. So then you asked me if I questioned about God. Yes. And I question even now too. But it is in us, even though all those things what I am saying and ask were because ... I don't know if you heard about it and this happened in Lodz too. They took out the most pious Jews and they said they are going to put them against the wall. I don't know how many. I cannot tell you. Now everyone was shooting one and they are holding there, you know the ammunition. How do you call it?

Gun?

Rifle. The rifle. He said listen, "If he is a pious and you believe in your God, let him now show a miracle that my hand will be cut off or something. Then I will believe in your God." So where was God? When you read our Bible of all the miracles of what happened on Sinai and here and there, I feel ... I hope God will not punish me for saying this, "Where was God?" Just to show a miracle. A miracle that they will see right there. Even in the gas chambers. Where was the miracle? All right because you say the miracle was to survive, some of the survivors, and then when you question the rabbi he'll say, "We shouldn't question." But we question. It's human nature and I'm not going, God forbid tell you there is no God. I don't know. I believe because this is a natural thing born in us to believe in something. If you go in the old ages, they believed in the sun, they believed in the water. There is something natural in us to believe in something. I still believe. I believe and believe but to ask me how God looks and what is God, none of us can say this.

Right.

Yeah. So you want to believe and you go on. You want to keep your faith. This I would say. You want to keep your faith. Okay?

Uh-huh.

It was born into Judaism and you go on, but to question, yes. I still question.

Was your faith helpful to you, do you think, at all? Was that ... you know, people talk about their faith means.

Yes. It was because ... I don't know even how to put it. It's a very interesting question. Really it's the hope, I think, is above everything of what you have. You hoped that maybe you will be surviving because you really was let down by God. You still to ... oh, God. I was with girls where they come from very orthodox families and it was very ... I mean don't take me wrong, very helpful. Especially when it came ... if they knew ... you knew them more or less when it was Yom Kippur. What is Yom Kippur? We were hungry all day. Duration was just one ... I'm sorry I'm raising my voice. It was just one slice of bread. Okay? About that thick. And if you are lucky, sometimes they gave you a tiny little piece of margarine and this was your daily ration. And then one cup of soup which was mostly, you know - you don't know ... water, you know, and something. Like I say again, if it came ... you know the big holiday where they have the...

Christmas?

Christmas, yes. You could find a piece of potato and maybe luckily a little piece from a horse, you know, meat and you were very lucky. So the question is I questioned. I don't ... I'm not disappointed that some of our people, survivors, really lost say their faith.

But did it help you at all? Or was it more just...

Yes. It helped me, I'll tell. The tradition what you were given, I think, is above everything. The most important thing of each one to remember is tradition. That my parents were not old orthodox but they were modern Judaism and my father didn't wear a beard or my mother didn't wear a, you know, *sheitel* but this ... we were more religious than some here what they call themselves, you know, even religious. It was a different kind of life.

Right.

And the *Shabbat*, the Friday night, you will never forget in your life. I'll always ... even the aroma. I even baked some *jagedes* we call it. It's blueberries and a little ... how would you say it? Little cakes? Yes. And why? Because it reminds me of home when the blueberry here is different. Our blueberries was from the forest and here the blueberries are cultured. It's a cultured blueberry. But after you bake it and you cook it, it has the aroma from there. So I bake it, and I smell, and you go home. See that's the reason I say to the young people that not much maybe, of course, you know, like the [unclear], the *Shabbat*. The Friday night was something that stays with you all your life and those aromas and tradition is ... or the holidays, especially. This all stays very much with you. Like, you know, remembering when my father was going to *shul* and he blessed each one of us. Nothing like this stays with you and this is probably, doesn't have anything to do with God really.

Did you ... how did you raise your children religiously? Did you ... would you affiliate...

We'd try ... yeah. Oh, yes, yes. All the time.

Which one?

We were ... the first one was Beth Shalom and then later was Kehilath Israel. Yeah.

And you would consider yourself conservative or...

Yeah.

Yeah?

I would say so. Now listen, I go to *shul* maybe once a year, three times a year. I beg your pardon. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur or on some happy occasions or something, you know, that's going on in the *shul*. But I cannot tell you ... First of all, I'm working and I know a lot of women, what I know, they go every Saturday, *Shabbat* to *shul*. And don't think that this means you are religious. But listen, what else do they do. It's wonderful. If I would have the time, that's what I would probably do too - go to *shul*. This was a very question of you and very smart asking because all this, what we went through, and asking what about God.

Did you keep kosher or...

Yes. And this is also - not because, you know ... it is something in you. I do eat out. I will not eat ham. I will not eat those things or the fish what we don't suppose to. But it may be crazy, may be silly, but at home I have kosher all those years. Yeah. I hope it's interesting to you. I don't know. I'm just ... yeah.

It is. Is there any one thing that you would attribute ... you obviously you adjusted. You made it. You survived. Not only survived, you lived a life after.

Yeah, and struggling very much in a new country.

What was your ... attribute...

It was a big struggle.

...to your ability to do that? How are you able to do that? What made it possible?

I mentioned to you before. Our children gave us the strength and the motivation to go on and do things. And, as you know, among our ... when we came to this country, I must tell you, we brought in the Hebrew schools and all of the ... how do you say it? Reva-...

Revitalize?

Revitalize, yes. And everyone will tell you...

[Tape ends and begins again.]

Okay. We will just go on this because apparently there is something not so great about this tape. Okay, where were we?

About religion, yeah.

Um..

Although, like I am saying about to believe, some of our people turned very religious. And, as a matter of fact, I would say the, especially the Hungarian Jews. They survived, yes. And so it is very difficult to debate about it.

What does being, does being an American mean to you? Is there something... do you feel American?

That's interesting too. To a certain extent, of course, you know, I got my citizen papers.

When did you become a citizen?

Let's see, after five years being here.

Pretty early.

Yeah. This is the rule. After five years you can get, you know, you have the green card, then after five years you get the citizen paper. I'm very strong Zionistic because my whole family was very Zionistic. We were more, I don't know if you know, I think we talked about it, Jabotinsky, you know, yes. Let's see, what was the question again?

How do feel about being an American?

Oh, yes, yes. I would say that inside I don't feel American. I associate myself still very much with Zionism. This is my county what I, you know, I became American. But to say to feel all American, I will be completely honest with you, I am not. And why? Because it's typical. I was born and raised, of course, Poland I cannot call... I was, of course, my *shtetl* is still everything, the memories. But I feel, if Israel would have been a peaceful, you know, and why you can ask me the same question, so Zionistic and I didn't go to Israel because my sister did.

Right.

The reason is like this. When we were liberated it was just the time you remember when the English, what, you know, happen and the days into Cyprus. You know, we were really illegal going into Israel. And this was the only way from, you know, from Bergen-Belsen

after the liberation, whoever wanted to go the underground, from, the Israeli underground helped us to, to, to go, you know?

You could have gone by the underground?

You know the story. Yeah. But I gave myself this question, “Sonia, after I was shot and I went through, I felt I am not as strong anymore to go to a country which is turbulent.” And it made me sad because, like I say, I was so Zionist inside all those years, you know, my home, and my parents, my brother especially, and... So I felt, in a way, that I am, how shall I say it? Deserting if you may say so. But realistically - I was realistic. I said, “What kind of... I am not strong anymore for this country to, to go to war again.” In war and we knew what was going on. So this is the reason I went to the United States...

Do you think...

...for a better future, of course, you know, and a more normal life. We did have family, I think I mentioned to you before, from my grandmother’s side in Chicago. And I thought, Well, that will maybe, and then, you know, my, my husband’s family. So I automatically came to the United States. Not only the United States took you in, you know, you could go to England, you can go to Australia, you can go to Canada also.

Could have gone to all those places?

Yeah, all those place. If you really...

Do you feel like you made the right choice coming here? Do you like it here?

After so many years, I mean let’s face it, you know, you have your roots already here.

Uh-huh

And I never got to like the climate but it’s ... [laughing] Yeah. But whenever I talk to my customers, some of them telling me that Kansas City is not the worst, you know, climate, as far as the humidity especially. Then it made me feel better, like...

It was the heat you didn’t like?

Yeah, the humidity. Yes, humidity, yeah. But you get, you know, used to where your roots are, you know. A lot of our people when we came, and I go back in thinking, a big percentage went to, on their own later, to the West Coast, to the East Coast, you know. So we were just already free people. We could do anything, you know, if you want to. And a lot of us became very, very, you know, successful and I’m proud of each one who succeed because they succeed on their own really. Yeah.

Okay, last question. What should we learn from the Holocaust? What are the most important lessons?

The most important lesson, like I mentioned before and I'm specifying again and again - hate. Some religions even are really proclaiming hate. As you know, I don't have to mention to you because every one of us know that if you can call a Holy world, war, Holy War, right there is wrong. Or if you don't believe in my belief, you are not going to heaven. You're going to hell. Those things are the most dangerous things in this, you know, universe. Religion against religion because if any one of us can say, "My religion is the best," I think we would be foolish. Because if you stop thinking of how many religion in this world, who knows? Who knows really?

Right.

We think that our religion is the, you know, the prime and this is the truth. But I will never say this. This is what I came to and that's what I believe. And if we would have respect, look at here what is going on in our own country in Israel. Religion is doing, really creating a chaos. It's really a shameful thing, you know, sometimes even to talk about it. And I still cannot understand. If you are religious and you want really, you are a deep believer, what... let's say begin at another angle. Let's say I'm committing a sin. I sinned. Who is answering? It's me. Me. I am the one who sinned. Correct? Okay, against, you know, if you want to say you're afraid of God and so on. First of all, religion puts in a lot, a lot of, you know... how shall I say? *Moyre*, you know. Fear! Puts, puts in fear. I don't know if anyone saw the, I'm jumping from one thing to another, the movie what we have seen, *This is My Father*? I would suggest for you to see this movie. It's a tremendous, it's still playing in the fine arts. And even there is the Catholic, you know, religion and you can see how people are really so... you know, how shall I say, they fall for those, you know, things. The religion puts in some, "Oh, you're afraid. God will, will punish you." This is right, they're wrong? It's wrong! And it puts some people really in a very bad position because if there is a God, you should be loving Him. You shouldn't be afraid. If I will do something, I'm not doing because, you know, oh! God will punish me for that. No this is not right. You have to be, you know, responsible and not to say, "Oh, not going to do this." That mean you are afraid. And this right there is not right. So I feel that... I don't know now I want to bring out. I'm getting lost. Religion is, can sometimes really, really be not a good thing, especially... oh, yes! About hate.

What is the most important lesson we need to learn, we should learn from the Holocaust?

To really, how to live at peace with each other and respect each religion. If your neighbor is a *goy*, respect him for what he is [laughing]. If he is a *mensch*. That's what I want to say. A *mensch*, this is the most important thing. And if this would happen, I don't think it will ever happen, this would be a better world. Because let's say if you go into even a religion, you know, the Bible starts already with we had wars and wars and inquisitions later and so on, you know, the Spanish Inquisition. And you ask yourself, we're supposed to be the *wybrany narod*, that means the chosen people, chosen.

Uh-huh.

Oh, my gosh. I would rather be a *goy* than to be chosen like this. And all, you know, and suffering. We are really brought for the suffering. If you see our history, I don't think that any other nation this world has so much suffering that we did. Of course the Christians had too in the Romans times, you know, they had, they suffered as a religion prosecuted. But the greatest persecutions in this, you know, history is the Jew and it still is. So what can I say to you? Politic is really the main in religion, and religion is very disturbing sometimes putting against, you know like I say, Jew against Jew. So, you know, I'm going back now what I want to bring out. Let's say if I am in Israel and the pious Jew wants to live, you know, his, you know, way, sure. I will respect him for that. This is your belief. But don't throw a stone at me because, you know, Saturday don't do this and don't do that. I am responsible for my sin. That's what I was trying to bring it out. If this would be solved in Israel we would really solve it. And I cannot still comprehend the intelligence of the people to see that we are ruining ourselves. You want to live in this, you know, ghetto and do whatever you want to. Don't... When you throw the stone, you are the sinner! Not me but the one who does it. Because if you will really accept each one the way he wants to believe, then it would be a different world. It really would make a different world. You wouldn't have any Holocaust either because this is the hate. Hate. Hate. What you have right now would scare me. Religion against religion you see in Africa. What we have, there are many thousands and thousands innocent children. Religion. And still people don't realize what's going on in this world. And that [tape cuts out] still from our survivors cannot, they never talked about it. They never talked to their children. They never gave their story. They just cannot. And I tried to encourage them the way it was with me. I couldn't either. But I had to draw something that gave me the strength. Sometimes I would speak even in, in the classrooms in school. One school was hundreds of, you know, students and, this is what gave me strength to do it. When I talk about it sometimes, sure, I break down on certain things. But basically I'm strong because I know my mission. I know I'm not speaking for myself. I'm speaking for the ones that didn't make it, and this should not be in vain. You know you have my poem, don't you? Yeah. And this should not be in vain. The only thing what I really see maybe now the second generation but I don't know how we cannot think about it, what will be part of... At least I have to give credit to Spielberg for doing this, and you know, I don't know if you know, Spielberg was never really very interested in his roots until he made this movie, when he went to Kraków and he kind of identified himself with his roots and he see, he saw what is it. That's the reason he did the movie. Do you know how long it took us to persuade him to want, about this book, what he wrote a book to do this? It took a lot of persuasion. Why? Because Spielberg knew maybe people would not go to see a lot of the, yes, for antisemitic reasons. And then it will not be a moneymaker. He didn't have a backing at that time, really, a strong backing. But since he was already established, you know, moviemaker, filmmaker. So he had finally the help to do it. And, in turn, he's completely a different, you know, person, and you know what he did? He's doing.

The whole foundation.

Yeah. Well, anyway it was nice meeting you.