

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Nesse Godin
May 8, 1989
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Marty Glickman, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on May 8, 1989 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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NESSE GODIN

May 8, 1989

Q: Nesse, would you, for the record, identify yourself? Give us your name, your full name, and where you were born, please.

A: Yes, my name is Nesse Godin. I live in the Silver Spring area. I was born in Šiauliai, Lithuania. My maiden name was Galperin, Nesse Galperin. I was born in 1928.

Q: Tell us about Šiauliai, and tell us about your family. What was it like for you growing up in Siaulai as a young child?

A: You see, when I grew up Lithuania was between the two wars-- First World War and Second World War. It was a democracy with a President, with a Cabinet; and all the people really lived nicely together with a little bit of anti-Semitism, but not to be beaten up or anything. Here and there, a Swastika on the house, on the cemetery. But in general, Jewish people in Lithuania lived pretty much comfortable. I had a pretty nice childhood up to the age of 13.

Q: That sounds good. What did your parents do? What about your brothers and sisters?

A: Well, I did not have any sisters. I had two brothers older than me--one five years older, one seven years older. My parents had a dairy business. My parents were, you know, what we call Balabatisha (ph) people--not wealthy rich people but comfortable. My parents were involved in the community work. Like my mother, especially; she was a person that believed that you have to be involved in helping other people. And part of the community work was to take care of the sick, of the orphans, of the widows. And that, my mother was involved with. Her name was Sarah Galperin. You had to raise money. You closed your door of your

own store, and you went to your neighbors. And when someone was in need, you went and asked them to contribute to help other people. And I grew up in that background, knowing that you have to be kind and good; and I really did not understand what hatred was, or indifference. I really did not. I was raised with love in my house.

Q: Tell me about school, for you as a girl.

A: Many people think that Europe was like way back years ago, when they came, in the turn of the century. Everybody has to understand that even in Europe progress was made. For instance, my city--30,000 people... You know, people laugh when I say "a city"; but Siauliai was the second largest city in Lithuania. It was Vilnius that was taken over--Vilna--by the Poles. But in that time, Kaunas was a larger city, was the capital of Lithuania; the next one was Siauliai--or as we Jewish people called it, Shavli. And in Hebrew, we referred to it as Shavli. We had a gymnasium, which was called Gymnasium Bialik. It was a (unclear word) type of school, what as you started through kindergarten through high school. There was a Beth Sefer Chevra for people who could not afford as much. There was a Yavner for very religious people who were ultra-orthodox. Even in Lithuania, although everybody was orthodox, we did not have a conservative or reform. We just had orthodox synagogue; but we were Misnagdim, not Hasidim. What it means is, our people did not believe in the Rebbe, did not wear curlicues and the black clothing and the fur hat. Our family looked pretty much like an American family. My father did not cover his head just to go to shul or to make a prayer. So we had the religious school Yavner, we had a Fortshuler (ph) for people that were Yiddishkeit--you know, Bundistin [NB: socialists] that didn't believe in Hebrew. Then we had many cheders where people just sent their children. They went to regular school, to Lithuanian school; and then they went to learn customs and prayers in a cheder.

Q: So you grew up this way. Tell us in growing up what happened then, what happened, how old were you when the Germans came and what happened?

A: Also, I would like to remark [that] for a small--at this time--city which is not so big, we had quite a few synagogues. We had all the time Yiddish Theater come; we had a Jewish paper, newspaper; we had Maccabee, which was a sport organization. We have every type of Zionist organization from the right to the left existing in a small city. When I grew up, as I said, I went to the gymnasium; I happened to go to the Gymnasia Bialik from kindergarten to the age of 12. At the age of 12, in 1940... You know, many people skipped that year. Even when I go out to speak to a school and I'm giving just a half hour, I cannot go into detail about history. But in 1940, Lithuania was occupied by the Soviets. And that's when we were not allowed to study Hebrew anymore. All the schools had to study Yiddish. At that point, the very wealthy of the community--the Burjui, as they called them--were deported to Siberia. But ironically, these people lived through cold and hunger but nobody killed them. They survived, and many of them came now to Israel. My family, as I told you before, were Balabatish--which is comfortable, but not very rich. So we were allowed to stay. And in our business, the Communists put in like an overseer; but my parents were still running the business. Now, 1941, we heard before that in Poland already things are being bad for the Jews--Jews are made to leave their homes and go away. I, as a child at the age of 12, had firsthand information about it; because in my home came what we called Platim--runaways--people that escaped from Poland. My mother's first cousin, her name was Regina Vlafsia (ph); I can't recall her husband's first name--they were children of a family by the name of Fabilisski. They were manufacturers for cloth in the city of _ód_, Poland. They had a lot of money, and somehow they bought their way out to come to Lithuania. And they came to our

home; and they told us that they were all made to leave their homes and relocate their particular family to warsaw. This young couple did not know exactly what happened during that time, but we had gotten in Lithuania--my aunt also in the United States--some letters from Warsaw, assuming they were from Warsaw ghetto, from this great uncle of my aunt. So we knew what was happening in Poland. But you don't think it will happen to you. I'm telling you the truth. You know, I make a smile with it, and I'm saying it because people don't realize that it can happen anywhere. If we don't learn from this part of history how it happened, it can happen anywhere. We lived so nice in Lithuania--Jewish people, non-Jewish people. The children played together, our parents did business together. We didn't think that our own neighbors are not going to stand by us and help us at the time of need. In 1941, the Germans occupied Lithuania in three days. You will see documentation shows it. I was 13 years old--a little girl--but I remember it. I remember it well. My city, they marched through in one night. Siauliai is a city that stands from the main road of Lithuania. In every war, the armies had to pass through it; because the main road from Germany to Russia had to pass this road. So that's why we saw the war going through. But we were not affected by this military occupation. The military went through that night; no bombs fell, no people were killed. They went on farther to fight the war. But they left behind the (unclear word) the Gestapo, the Nazi party, the special unit that were called...I don't even know exactly. Einsatzgruppen, or whatever they were called at the time--to take care of the Jewish affairs. And their aim right away started like in any other place with different laws for Jewish people. Jewish people are not allowed to have businesses. Jewish children cannot go to school. Jewish people are not allowed to go to buy food in the grocery store but at certain hours. By the time we got to that store to get the food, there was no food there. You know, they didn't have freezers or refrigerators like here. Small store. Every day the farmer brought the food. So right away, we suffered hunger already, too. The law came out [that] Jewish

women were not allowed to be pregnant, they had to have abortions. No future for the Jewish people. Every Jew had to wear a Star of David in front and in back of the garment. Many people say to me, "Why did you have to wear it?" Two reasons. One, a symbol of shame. But the most important: why did they want us to wear it? An ID. They wanted to make sure they know exactly where the Jew is. The punishment for not wearing this... Specific[ally], we called it the "yellow letter." We didn't even call it a star. It was a Star of David; but the "patch of yellow," that's what we called it in the ghetto. We didn't say Magen David, or yellow Magen David. The "yellow letter," we called it. It was a "yellow letter," we called it; it was a patch that was the ID. If you didn't wear it, the punishment was death. Now, you think about it. Children many times say, "Why did you have to put it on? You could go around the city; they would think you are Christian." But unfortunately, not too many friends around us. The same people that were our neighbors deceived us, reported on us, showed where a Jew was. If you didn't put on, they would say, "This is a Jew." They killed you for not wearing that patch, that star. The next process was, they started to grab Jewish men off the homes, out of the homes, out of the streets. Allegedly, they have to clean the city of war damage. The Rabbis, the scholars--a thousand men were put into the city jails. We had two jails; a white jail and a red jail. That's how it was called. The red Deturmen and the white Deturmen. Because one was painted white, the other was red bricks. They put them into those jails, the most terrible Lithuanian sadists taking care of them. Who were they? The same policemen of the home town that walked around. We didn't have even traffic. They just walked around to make sure everything is in order. They joined the evil cause. They put on arm bands, they helped to get rid of the Jewish people. They had 1,000 men in that jail, with promises they are going to take them to labor. And we believed it. You don't think you don't believe it. You believe it. Well, some people ran and they tried to get people out of that jail. But nobody succeeded. These thousand men were taken out to a forest near

our city by the name of Kuzhi, where they were made to dig their own graves, they were made to get undressed naked, they were shot and they were covered with earth. How did we know exactly what happened there? The farmers in the area. They came back to the city and told us exactly. I, as a child, remember those farmers that used to bring milk to our grocery store, to our dairy store, doing like this (motioning), telling the earth shook over the so-called graves. Why did it shake? Many, many people fell into that hole and were not even shot to death. They covered them with earth, and they suffocated. There are many incidents. I know a young man who lives in Cleveland who ran away from a small city by the name of Aniksht. In this particular place, the Germans and the Lithuanians were so drunk that they didn't cover the hole that night. The only time when people tell you they run away from those holes was if you were injured and they didn't cover the hole that night -- they were too tired or didn't want to bother -- then they had a chance to escape. And also, many times, when I talk about escaping you have to understand to escape you need a place to escape to. Everybody wanted to escape. But if your neighbor doesn't let you in, or if you try to run to the forest and while you are running somebody points a finger--"Here is a Jew"--and you are killed. So you wonder does it pay to escape, or maybe I should wait in the community for a week, a month. The war will end, and I will live. So after we heard what happened to this thousand men, we knew the Holocaust was happening to us. This is when in my city our own Jewish Community Council, marvelous leaders, marvelous men. And as I told you before, my mother was connected. Because she was on this committee of helping the poor and the widows, and so she knew firsthand from the leaders what was happening. They decided to go to the Christian clergy to beg them to help to save our community. Those Priests, Roman Catholic, they were marvelous men; but when our community council came to beg them to save our people they said "We are afraid to get involved. We will help you. By helping you, they will kill us." Can you imagine, human beings were afraid to help other human beings?

You know, many times we hear all these beautiful statements made by Pastor Niemöller, and other statements, how sorry they are. Yes, you are sorry. But isn't it easier to be there for other human beings when they need you, than after the fact to say you are sorry? Now at that point -- I know if I could sit with you, Linda, and talk with you for weeks of what went through in this short period of time. Because they said they are going to transfer all the Jews of our city to a little city by the name of Jagga (ph), Jagerod (ph). They said, you know, there we will be able to stay and we will be able to live there. But our Council felt if they are going to move us from our home town...we are not going to move us from our home town, we are not going to be in such good shape. We will be better off if we can stay in the community. At that point, you know, there were different rumors. Some people said that our Jewish Community Council persuaded some Lithuanians to help us to convince that we could be in the city. I heard from my mother that she said and I saw that we gave gold and silver and diamonds to give actually to the (unclear word)_ and the Gestapo to bribe them so we could stay in the community, they wouldn't take us away right away. We will make shoes and boots for the army. We had many shoe and leather factories, Siauliai was famous for it. People that know about that area, Lithuanian was famous about beef and cattle, so we had a lot of leather. So I don't know exactly what was the persuasion, the good people that intervened with the money, maybe everything together, that they decided yes, they are not going to take us to Jagga, Jaggerod (ph), they are going to let us stay in the city but not in our homes. A ghetto was formed. At the beginning was formed two ghettos. Many times when I go out to talk I don't go into detail because a half hour, today we have time. There was two ghettos, one ghetto on one side was across from the factory of Frenklfabrik, a leather factory,¹ was called the Kaukazas ghetto. Then, on the other side near the red jail, was the

¹ After Chaim Frenkl. Founded by him in 1879.

Trakai ghetto. There was two ghettos in our city--four square blocks each, or five; small area--and that's where the Jews were supposed to relocate. Now, you couldn't take your bundles and move into the ghetto. It was a special commission that came to every home. The commission consisted of Germans and Lithuanians, because the Lithuanians showed them where is the Jewish home and the little secretaries. Now, I will share with you what happened in my house--firsthand information. My two brothers--one older five years than me, one seven years older than me--so one was 18, one was 20. I was 13. And my parents, my mother was at that point 43 and my father was maybe 45...yes, 45. And they came with commission, they looked around our apartment; and they told my parents how many beds, how many pillows, how many clothing we can take to the ghetto, and how many people. They issued four certificates. The ghetto was originally for people to work--not for children, not for sick, not for elderly. I was 13. They didn't need me. I remember it very well, how I felt when I saw I was going to be separated from my family at that point. My mother succeeded to bribe the Lithuanian Secretary. How did it happen? As a child, I had a ceramic cat where I used to save my money that I got for Chanukah, for my birthday--silver money. And my mother said to the secretary, quietly, "This is full of silver money. If you will ask for it and I will have to give it to you, please leave a blank certificate--the fifth one--on the table." And as they were walking out, this commission...the Secretary said, "I want this little cat." My mother said, "That's my little girl's. She loves it." The German said "Give it to her." You understand, how she could bribe -- it's important to know this little fact -- and he walked out with a lot of money. But I remember my mother counting those certificates. Four were there with names filled in; a fifth blank certificate. My parents filled it in. Now, to go into the ghetto you just had to show the certificate. If you had the certificate, they let you in through the gate. So about 5,000 people got into the ghetto. We had 10,000 Jewish people in the two ghettos. The people that did not get this yellow certificate, I believe it's about 3,500.

The orphanage, the elderly, the sick, the children from many families, and many, many people that came to their home last and there was no more room in the ghetto--they were put into the city synagogues, in the shulen, as we called it, within the shul. With hunger, no water; they were begging for food, they were begging for them to be saved. People were trying -- our Jewish Community Council, who were wonderful people, they tried so hard to save. They were saying already, "Okay, take them to this little city of Jagga." They thought at least they will live; because we had already the 1,000 men experience. These people were killed just like the thousand men in another forest, 3,500 of them. So by the time the ghetto was formed, I don't know exactly whether it was August or September, I don't remember; but I know [by the] High Holidays, we were already--my family--in the ghetto. Half of our population was killed. So, that's how the ghetto was formed in our city. You know, feel free to interject or whatever. Now, in the ghetto... I will tell you how it was when I was in the ghetto. All the working people went to work in the morning. Girls like me--at the age of 13, you see, I had a certificate to go in. But I wasn't on the master list, you understand? The same way, I was smuggled in. People succeeded to smuggle in some sick, some elderly, some children even younger than me. But you were not on the master list, master list or whatever, you didn't get food. You didn't get the rations. So your family shared with you. Let's say we got X amount of bread, or...I don't remember how much it was at that time. Five people ate of the ration of four; and some people, four people ate of the ration of two. So this is... People have to understand that even as little as the ration was, if you were lucky enough to have your child or your elderly with you at that point, they didn't get food. Your ration of food became smaller. In the ghetto, girls like me had to take care of little children. Many families right away tried to make some little hiding place, whether it was a cellar, under the bed or in a wall; because we saw that things look bad. In the ghetto, selection upon selection, they came for no reason whatever to take people because they heard the rumor there are

children in the ghetto, there are sick in the ghetto. How did they get in? We don't want to feed them. So they came to take them away. I lived through two years in the ghetto like this. I don't know how I survived. How I have hidden. One time I remember -- the Jewish police in my city were wonderful, they ran through and warned us that the SS is coming to take people so quickly hide, do whatever. So I was supposed to get out my door and go into the little shed where you keep wood, that's where my hiding place was. As I was pulling the door to open up I felt pressure on the door from the other side and I remember not breathing but I could hear my heart pound and the German opened the door, the SS man, and he looked in and he said to his friend or whatever, his associate, "This room is empty." And he closed the door behind him. I tell you many incidents like this that I was saved at that time, really by the grace of God. Two years like this. When I was 15, I was allowed to go to work. Now, there were many ways of people being put on a list. Let's say they took a selection of people, they took -- sometime they didn't even know how many they took -- they took 120, and the list was 100. 20 people, kids that got a little older or the sick that got a little healthier could go out to work instead. So this is when I was 15, I went out to work instead. So this is when I was 15, I went out to work. At that time, in 1943, they did not need two ghettos. We were living already spacey so many people were killed. They combined both ghettos together, just the one on Trakai. The Kaukazas ghetto was closed completely. We were transferred to the other ghetto. A little bit people, there were too many of them, they took out some men and women. And we thought they were going to kill them. But no, they took them to a small place--I really don't remember the name--to work, to make turf. I don't know what turf is. It is a material that comes from the earth, and you press it for burn purposes, for heating purposes. I don't really know what you call that composite of earth and weeds. We used it a lot for heating purposes. So they took them there. We came in 1943 into the other ghetto. We were nine people in one room: two uncles and aunts and our family [of] five. We

were still together, that many of the family. And I recall that time, many times to my friends, I would say, "I remember it as a better time." And they say, "Why was it a better time?" And I said, "I still was surrounded with my family, which was pretty lot. Many uncles, many aunts, many cousins, grandparents, were dead at that time--that lived in villages around our area, and in the city of Vilna. But my immediate family was still there." I tell you, really, I'm sitting here and trying to think of certain things to share with you. I think I forgot to tell you like in 1942 we had a hanging in the ghetto. A man was hung because he was caught at the gate with some bread and a few eggs. Somebody said he had a few cigarettes on him, somebody said he didn't. But documented incident, because as you went out to work all through the year there were kind Lithuanian people, too. I really wants to share that and admire these people that wanted to give you a little bread for you to eat and wanted to give a little type of other food also to take back to the ghetto for your family. But it's worthwhile talking about it because as you come back from work they frisked you bodily to make sure you are not smuggling in ammunition or food. Many guards were bribed. Many, many guards, you know especially Lithuanian guards, you would bribe them with a fur coat or whatever so if nobody was around they looked the other way and let you bring in that food, so we had a little more food to eat. But if let's say German Commission or another guard came that wasn't bribed, they came quickly and they grabbed the people, they beat them terrible. But that one incident this man's name was Mussevitsky, Batsalom Mussevitsky, he was a young man, he had a wife and a child in the ghetto. He was caught with that few eggs or half a loaf of bread but very little, maybe he had a few cigarettes, I really don't know. He was taken to the Gestapo jail. The Jewish Community Council was called and they were told they are holding a big criminal, the Jews have to learn a lesson, no food is in the ghetto. The following Sunday a gallow was to be built in the ghetto. What was a gallow in the ghetto? A table, some stick hammered to the table going this way like an L, upside-down L, a cord

hanging there. Two men sitting there, they were supposed to be the henchmen, Jewish men. How they were picked, I don't know. They ordered that we have to provide these henchmen. We all had to gather in this place and I remember very well a dozen SS men with guns outstretched like this went in with this one criminal that wanted to bring a little food for his child, you know. People say why didn't he run away, many times people say why didn't he run away. I said three hijackers hijack a plane or a boat with hundreds of people, three guns against hundreds of people and they are in control. Imagine dozens of guns in control of one prisoner. Well, this man was marched in like this. He walked over to the table. He said to the two men "Thou shalt not kill," you know in Yiddish, "I will do it myself." He hopped on the table, on the chair, they did not even have a chance like you know in some places they tie their hands back or they put a cover on their face. Nothing. He hopped, he put a string of his own, the loop you know over his, the noose, whatever it's called, over his neck, and to the assassin, the Gestapo, he said you are not going to win a war by killing me" and somebody pushed or he pushed a chair from under his feet and I remember his body dangling like this. I remember it so. Linda, it was terrible times. You know, I always try to control myself, not to be too emotional because otherwise if I get too emotional, I cannot bring the message. You know, you know, this what people have to think about. I say over, I say this man resisted the Germans, I always say there is a spiritual resistance. If you didn't fight back, if you didn't punch it or whatever, I say we live the extra day we resisted them. They wanted us dead. In the ghettos there was sign, "Yiden"--Jews--"Don't despair. Live an extra day. We will overcome it." The hope we gave each other all through, that's all I remember as a child saying (unclear phrase), in spite of the enemy, we will overcome it, we will live, we will be free. So you can imagine this punishment. Now go back to 1943 where I was before. When we got into that ghetto when they condensed the ghettos, we got a little more food. Things looked kind of better. Everybody thought, said gee, they start to treat us a little better. I was

working at that time in the war hospital. My job was to put wood into stoves so the German soldiers would keep warm. You know we had a job, we had to do our job. That morning when I came to my commander to go to work -- it was exactly November 5, 1942, when I went with my group to go out to work -- we saw outside of the ghetto trucks, trucks covered with canvas, we were told we cannot go to work. I remember running back to my room. My mother put two dresses on me one dress on top of another. You see people said maybe they don't let you take along a bundle. To be safe, a little bread in the pocket, a coin in the pocket, we were prepared to be deported. A half hour or whatever, I don't remember exactly, maybe 20 minutes, it was a short time, the Jewish police were running through the ghettos saying a mistake was made in the order, all the working people should leave the ghetto. Chaos. People did not know what's better. Some people said it's better to hide in that Malina, in the hiding place -- Malina was called the hiding place during those times, a Malina -- some people said it's better to go to work. The Jewish police ran through and said whoever can go out to work -- we had marvelous people that were Jewish police in my city. You won't hear not one had word about the leadership and the Jewish police in Šiauliai after a certain point because after a certain point them to cover other people that the Germans appointed, they brought them from the outside, it was different. But as long as we had our own people from our home town it was good. So they said it's better to go to work. I remember leaving that day for work but all day long we wondered. What were the trucks doing near the ghetto. At one point in that hospital we worked with a german, he was from a building commander that was called Ortek (ph) and he was a civilian and he was pretty nice man, he gave us sometime a little bread but he had nothing to do with the security or taking care of the Jews. His job was building whatever. So we asked this man to go near the ghetto and see what's happening. When he came back he said nothing happened but we saw he was pale, we saw he was bothered. But he said nothing, there was nothing there. That evening when we were

coming back from work, blocks and blocks away from the ghetto, Linda, we heard cries, such cries I hope nobody will hear. What happened in the ghetto of Siauliai, Lithuania on November 5, 1943, SS and Gestapo with the help of Ukrainians, Ukrainians that left the Russians and joined the evil cause so many of them just came -- so many of them just came and joined to kill Jewish people, it was terrible time -- they went into the ghetto, they found every hiding place, they went in, they broke every dish, every pillow, made every single person come to the gate near that place where you gathered for work, all the children, all the elderly, all the sick, all the babies that were born illegally in the ghetto. You see, they told us we were not allowed to be pregnant but women got pregnant. They stayed in their little room in the Ghetto. If they were caught in the selection, then they were caught, but if they were not caught they had their baby in the ghetto. But on that day not one child was spared. At the gate a selection to the right and to the left, a thousand children. Five hundred elderly and sick and a few hundred healthy and strong, including two men from our Jewish Community Council because these two men said to them "Where are you taking these children?" They said "To a better camp, you are welcome to come and check it out" and they put them on the trucks too. We did not know then where they were taken to. We honestly believed that they were taken to another camp where they have children. They said these children need supervision, you all go to work, we will take care of them. After the war we found out they were taken to Auschwitz where they were gassed and cremated, they did not even keep them there one day. The Rabbis told me that I have to keep Yartzzeit on that day that my father was taken. My father was taken with that truck. My father was 47 years old. He was among the nice Healthy, strong, tall people. Can you imagine how I feel even sharing with you? You know, Linda, I am talking about Siauliai, Lithuania. I am giving you just my own but by now, 1989, we know what happened all over Europe. The life in the ghetto after the children selection was terrible. No laughter, no crying. My mother used to say to me, "Nessele, don't

go outside after you come from work. The neighbor lost a child one year younger than you. She will hurt." Can you imagine -- you know European people had a lot of children -- can you imagine in one day from a mother six children, eight children, you came home. We were a lucky family, just my father was taken. Can you me saying a lucky family after they killed my father but we were a lucky family because on that day every family lost dear ones. Not just one, two, four, six, eight people of a family went on that terrible day. So the life was terrible after that, it was just terrible. They were trying -- I don't remember exactly details -- they were trying, I mean the Germans, the SS, the Gestapo, make some internment camps where they thought the workers could work separately. They thought they would get rid of the ghetto completely. Then they thought they still need some people that should stay. There was a factory that was making the shoes, a factory that was making some brushes. So they left some people in those workshops for a little bit longer but us in June of 1944, they took us to a railroad station for deportation to Germany. We had to walk about 10 kilometers to this specific railroad because in our city bombs fell already. The last few days that we were in the ghetto Russian bombs fell in our city of Siaulai. We were so glad to see the bombs but quite a few fell in the ghetto too and quite a few people died and at that point we said already maybe they are luckier that they died of a Russian bomb than what was happening. So we were taken to this railroad by foot, we had to walk. I remember that walk very well because my mother at that time had an injury in her leg and she walked on the railroad and she had injured her knees and she couldn't walk to well and they said whoever cannot walk, whoever is sick or weak should stay and some trucks will bring them to the railroad station, and my mother, like a pool, stood in that group saying -- they couldn't see the injury, it was so tight, it was covered -- she said "I cannot walk, I would like to go on this truck" and a German said to her, "What do you think, run, you are still young, go to work," you know he saved her life because we never saw the rest of the people that were on the trucks. We were told after the

war that they were put into the ghetto in one of the buildings and you know like in every city, they dynamited the area, dynamited them. Us, they put into cattle cars for a journey to concentration camp by the name of Stutthof. I'm going to tell you exactly about the ride. We were in there -- they didn't count you know. As we came to the train, it said capacity, how many cows or horses you can have in that train, but they didn't say capacity, how many people. They shoved you in like pushed you and pushed you. They said stoop down, they didn't say stretch out, you know like this and with your knees just up and you try to take a little bit more room and people say "Let me in, if I stay outside they will shoot me." So people really squeezed in to let other people in. It was so crowded. I remember having my feet over my mother, my brother on top to stretch out. A bucket in the corner for sanitation purposes. We each have a little package. They said take along your valuables and a little food that you had still in your ghetto room and some water. In my ghetto we had plenty water because we were on the outskirts of the city where there were wells so we had no problem with water. In the ghetto, the only good part that was in our ghetto of Siaulai we could keep clean because there was plenty of water and we had enough water to drink. So as we went to those railroad station, you know nobody had thermoses like here, you had an open dish or some dish you used to go to the store to buy some milk in a little container that you filled with water and you took. Let's say you were a family -- we were, thank God, four of a family still alive, my two brothers, my mother and myself, but in that railroad was just one brother, my mother and myself. As we were getting on the train we saw my brother said to us, "Don't get excited, your brother is not dead, he escaped." He told my mother that some nice Lithuanian man that we knew said to him, "If you have opportunity somehow to escape, do so, and don't come to my house, come in the forest, there is a smokehouse and go into that smokehouse. Every night I will put out some food for you and you go let's say 10 feet or 15 feet and get that food but if they catch you, you snuck in, don't tell them I let you in." How

my brother had this opportunity to escape we did not know for many years but afterwards we found out that as we were being taken from the ghetto, instead of going out to the ghetto, he went back into the factory where he worked and since it was a Saturday he crawled in one of the machinery and on Sunday when the factory was closed, that's when he got out. But we did not know at that point, just he told my mother. He didn't want even me to know or my brother to know that he has this opportunity. Look, in that train, in that thing we were three already of the family, we were left three, and it was just the most terrible thing that happened. You cannot imagine. Everybody is really looking out for themselves because you want to stretch your foot out, your foot falls asleep. You try to put it on somebody else. The person doesn't like it. You know their foot is asleep too. Some People were kind and said okay, put your foot and you told them put your feet. Some were not. It was a terrible journey. We traveled three or four days. The few survivors of my home town, when I see them and I ask them, "Do you remember how many days we traveled?" They say no, three or four days. And this is why many times I tell you the I say the truth. By the time we arrived to Stutthof, we were a mess, we were dirty, we couldn't reach that bucket to make. Many people had to make under and even if you could hold it until you went to the bucket, the person next to you, if they made, the train moved, it moves. The stench was impossible. Some people told me in some of those wagons people suffocated. I did not see so I don't share it with you. I remember when they opened those doors we thought it was heaven but we came to hell, we came to Stutthof. You know, I as a survivor feel so bad when I see books or even memorials that say Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka, Sobibor, where is others and others and others. You know the last memorial in Yom Ha'Shoah I saw Herman Taube read the Kaddish. Where is others and others and others? You know the last memorial in Yom Ha'Shoah I saw that they included Herman Taube read Kaddish, the service for the dead -- they include more and more places. You as a historian know, over 200 killing places. Stutthof, many people lost

their life. As soon as we arrived, divided, men this way, women that way. Our packages, the little bundles taken away. I remember my mother saying to me -- I wore a watch at that time -- she said "My kind, my child, take off the watch and put it in the sand so the Germans wouldn't have it." The little we knew that the next day they go with a plow and they take out all the gold. So everybody like whispered, take off your jewelry and stick it in the sand so they wouldn't get it, you know a form of resistance, a form of fighting back. And then a little bit later they said you go here and you go here to me and my mother, because she was 46 and I was 16. She was considered old. I didn't see her for a long time. You know, she was taken to another side which I wasn't too sure whether she was taken to be killed or to another side of the camp. My group of women from the age of 16 to 25, we were taken into a very large room, group by group, I don't know 200 or whatever, I really don't know exactly the count. We were told to get completely undressed naked, the guards standing around and around. You know when I think of that moment I still remember how I did not know which part to hide. Should I cover the top, should I cover the bottom. (unclear word) bending over and they laughing and singing songs and making fun of us. We were in that room for the longest time. Big room. Still I understand we were lucky because many, many people stood outside. We were in a room. Then they said to us, "Go in there." It said shower room. Shower room. They gave us a piece of soap, white soap, thin soap. I seldom like to talk about it but today I feel I must say it. We went in that room, water came, we soaped ourselves, we rinsed ourselves, we walked out the door. After the war, documentation shows Reef (ph). Soap was produced in Stutthof -- I have a book at home where it gives even the formula -- and I keep on thinking was that piece of soap that I bathed with, was a drop of human fat in there². How do we survivors feel? I was lucky, I got out the other door. How

² See Hilberg, The Destruction of European Jews, p. 67.

many of our people went into those showers rooms and never walked out?³ It said bathroom, shower room. They were gassed. We went out the other door, we were told for medical examination, oral, internal, rectal examination. It's time for us top have a discussion but you want to ask me different things at the end.

³**Gas chambers at Stutthof?

Tape #2

Q: Nesse, you were telling us about coming out of the showers.

A: Yes, we came out from the shower. Also don't forget we didn't get a towel. Sometimes people think you got into a shower, you got a towel. We were standing there and shivering and it was cold and they pushed us with the guns you know. It wasn't just walking slowly or whatever, you constantly had to run. You know they didn't say walk, you ran from one place to the other. Run, run, run. I remember the water was dripping and you walked into that other room and there were like in a gynecologist tables like this and everybody had to hop on this table. And can you imagine, I was 16, I never had an examination, internal examination, I didn't know what it was. So they checked you. I don't even think that people were doctors it looked. What were they looking for? Nazi. They were looking for a diamond, a piece of gold, you know. Some people hid it there. You know many people thought they will need a piece of gold, they will swallow it and a few days later they had it. You know many times you may wonder when somebody says I had a gold coin with me and the people don't really would like to tell you exactly how they brought it. But many people did it that way. But in Stutthof you came, they gave you this medical examination, opened your mouth, they looked in your rectum, they looked in your front to make sure you don't have -- in the mouth if you had gold caps they didn't even (unclear word). Some came, they took your number. There they had a man that pulled it out. You stood there, if they were in the mood, they pulled it out right there. A bucket full of gold caps. They took it from the dead, they took it from the living. Then you went into another like outside -- this was already almost outside like with a little cover and they threw a bundle of clothing to you. What was in a bundle? A dress, a pair of underwear, and they gave you a pair of shoes. Another question. Did they say you

wear size 7 or 8 or 5 or 10? Do you know that even in our group by some mistake we all got the shoes, our own shoes, and that was very unusual. Somebody made a mistake somewhere because I didn't get my shoes but you know they threw to us the shoes and all of a sudden people said "Give me, those are my shoes, give me, those are my shoes" and people started to exchange until you found your shoes. But let's say somebody -- I had a pair of boots and it was summer, nobody wanted those boots but I wanted them and I got them back so I was lucky I had these boots. So you had a dress, a pair of underpants and a pair of shoes. Now the family is taken away. Me, 16 years old, standing there surrounded with some women from my home town but alone, all alone, very different than this nine people in the ghetto room surrounded with electric wires, guards going around and around, you are scared, people are whispering from one side and another what's happening there. The next thing what they do, they take us into a big room to register. You know you think they took your family, they took your clothing, one more thing, your gorgeous name. 16 years old I was prisoner 54015 in the concentration camp of Stutthof. Why was I prisoner there? Why? and still I'm lucky, I bring out always I'm lucky. They didn't tattoo it on my arm, they gave it on a piece of shmata [**Yidd:** "rag"], on a piece of rag on my clothing. In Auschwitz, all my friends that survived, the few of them have it on their arm. I had in on a piece of cloth. From there, they assigned you in barracks. The particular barrack I was assigned to had no bins. The Stutthof was being rebuilt. When we came, at some point they had old barracks that had bunks. They were doing some new barracks, a new section when I got into that side, between each camp was two rows of electric wires--not one, but two rows, like this, between the men's camp...between the new camp and the old camp. And from there, across these wires, I saw my mother. So I knew she was alive. That's when I found out she was still alive. But she was...like people that in case they don't need you no more, you are next to be killed, on that side. In the morning, they woke us up 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock. They called it "appell"--roll call.

When they said, "Roll call!", you had to be outside like this (snapping fingers), and lined up in a specific row behind a specific people. And if you didn't know these people, too bad. You had to recognize them, and be there at the right place. Let's say, if you are in the 20th row in the middle, you had to find your row and stand there. Many a time I sat half of the night on the window of the barrack, when they say roll call, to jump out and be outside because they running with whips and with guns and hit us so hard, we should go out quick. You stood there for hours and hours. Why you stood there, I don't know. They counted and they counted and they counted. They wanted to make sure nobody escaped. You couldn't escape from concentration camp. You know very well very few recorded -- the only way you could escape is maybe you were sent out for a labor or you had some connection somehow, but very few. The only people that were missing were people that died in the barrack or somebody decided to commit suicide and jumped on the wires. They counted and finally maybe 6:00 o'clock they said, line up, we will give you black coffee, it was some black drink -- and a piece of bread. The piece of bread was very tiny, I don't know, believe me you could eat it now, it's like half a sandwich, you know, just the bread. Then you were assigned something to do. In my particular area in Stutthof they said today you go clean the bathroom, tomorrow let's say you sweep the street. Every day if they needed 50 woman, 100 women to do certain chores, sweep the barracks. I will share with you one of these labors. One day we were taken out, about 50 women, and with about a dozen SS men with the guns outstretched and we had to walk out of the sight of the camp and there is an empty space with a pile of shoes, mountain of shoes, big shoes, little shoes, tall shoes, tall, old shoes, new shoes. We were told to sort them. This was a special command to sort shoes. We had to sort them, tie them in pairs, put them in bundles, ladies' shoes separate, men's shoes separate, children's shoes separate, and we were working, and on the other side was a polish prisoner of war camp and he said to us "Jewish lady, Jiduvkas (ph), you know what the shoes are? Those are

the shoes from the people that perished, your people in this camp." Can you imagine you touch a shoe and somebody tells you the people were killed and you wonder is that your aunt's shoe, your cousin's shoe, your baby. They become people, not shoes. I tell you from my heart the next day when they didn't tell me to go to the shoes, I was so lucky, I was so happy to go to clean the latrines, I was happier not to have to go to that job. Can you imagine after our people were dead we had to sort shoes, we had to sort clothing. Many people had to drag bodies from one place to another all through those years, all through those years. In the evening they gave us some kind of a vegetable peel soup and you had to be in the barrack. When you were in the barrack you had an opportunity to talk to each other. The Germans did not go into the barracks just like this. The person in charge was a polish women. In Stutthof mostly Polish people were in charge, they were the Kapos, nobody else. They were prisoners or criminals or whatever, they were in charge of this section and if they came in, if they were in a good mood they didn't say nothing if you were chatting. But otherwise you couldn't chat, you know, you had to be very careful, and that's when you found out from other people what was going on. Let's say if I came back from that day from the shoe sorting, I could tell what happened. Many times people came back that sorted clothing in the clothing and they found little notes that people said we came from this and this country, we were here, we don't know where we are being taken. Many people from Stutthof were brought from Latvia, from Estonia. Most of the baltic countries came to Stutthof. So we knew indirect information. In the barracks on the walls or in the barracks that you went in, if there was a bunk you saw inscribed everywhere the word Gedenk (ph), remember. You know, I live now with the ringing in my ears of remember. Everybody, when we sat down the only discussion was if ever somebody survives, please tell the world what happened here. If somebody succeeds to go in a camp or be among the free world or go out for labor, please tell what happened, please tell the world what was happening. We kept on thinking that nobody knows in the

whole world what was happening to us because you know first we said "oh, we will wear the yellow star, a star, two three days, a week, a month, the war will end" but here I am talking already 1944, three years already. By that point I was already skinny, 16 year old girl, looked horrible, I looked maybe like 40. In Stutthof, when I was there by myself you know with many nice Jewish women but no family, nobody, I didn't have a cousin, no one there with me, a few women from my home town, a woman came over to me and said to me they don't really keep children in concentration camps. Why did she say that? Every day when we were given the food, if there was a little food left in that big bucket that they carried the food to us, the Polish Capo used to say children under 16 can get double food but under 16 were not allowed to be there. So everybody was afraid to march out. You were hungry but I didn't say I want more food. You didn't have a birth certificate, it's your word against theirs. He used to come schlep me out, drag me out and another maybe dozen kids that were already 16, maybe some were, saying you can get more food, why don't you come out -- maybe some were not -- saying you can get more food, why don't you come out, you are under 16, and if I said I'm 16, he beat me up. So this woman said to me, "it's bad, it's bad, you know, they won't keep you alive here" and I looked at her with my eyes open, you know I was so scared, and she said to me "Maidela, little girls, try to go out for labor, they do take people out for labor. If you could get out for labor, maybe you would survive, little girl Meidela (ph), little girl," you know like this. She didn't know my name, I never knew her name. One night I saw women lining up in the corner of the camp, they were given a blanket and dish for food and with my smart -- you know, what do you know at 16 in a camp from the age of 13 to 16? -- I said they are given a blanket and a dish for food, it must be for work. You know how many Jewish people went to death with a blanket and a dish for food. So I stood in this line. The woman said stand on your tip toes to look taller, pinch your cheeks to look osier, and you know I succeeded to leave Stutthof. That night we left, 5,000 women. I

remember they took us over a little river -- I don't know the name of the river -- by boat. Somebody said that many people were drowned in that river but I don't know, you know how people talk. Maybe there is documentation on it. I think it was the elbe maybe. And they divided us a thousand in a camp, a thousand pass by, they divide it, thousand, they divide it. So all the women from my home town were divided like 10 before me so I found myself in the labor camp just with 10 people from my home town. Other wonderful people, Jewish women, nice, but not even a friend from my home town. All of a sudden I found myself no family, no neighbors, no people that you know, not even a familiar face. Now, the first camp that I was in was called Malken [Pol: Ma_ki].⁴ The camp that I worked and many people worked as I did from that period that were taken from Stutthof; we were put into canvas tents, that was our house. We slept on straw. The job was to dig giant trenches, holes for Russian tanks to fall in. We were so weak. The food, again, so little. In the morning, the same procedure like in the concentration camp: Up early, they counted you, they gave you the black coffee with a little bit of bread. In the morning -- evening a little bit of soup. Sometime they switched it off and they didn't give nothing in the morning, they just gave the black coffee and at night you got your ration of bread and the soup. So imagine if you got in the evening your ration of bread and the soup, you think you are going to save your little bread for the next day. I especially used to think I'm so hungry all day, just a little black coffee, I'm going to eat that soup, that water, and eat one bite of the bread, and the next bite I will tear off a little piece of my blanket and I wrapped it and I put it in the straw that I slept on. In the morning my bread was gone. And I cried, I cried. A woman next to me said "Nessele, why are you crying, Nessele?" -- She knew my name -- I said I had a little bit of bread, I put it in the straw underneath my head and a mouse must have come. You there were

⁴ Subcamp of Stutthof. Women only. Opened April 1944 and closed January 28, 1945.

plenty of mice and rats. She knew there were hungry people that ate the bread. She said "Child, give me your little bread, I will put in my bosom and I will give it to you in the morning." You know whenever we got the bread at night and I didn't eat it, I gave it to Mrs. Feivish (ph), may she rest in peace -- that was her name -- and as she handed that piece of bread to me in the morning, she saved my life maybe. You know, I'm telling you these things today because people don't understand how human we stayed in this inhumane situation. I want to bring out this little things that people don't understand, people cannot understand. As much as we survivors talk, you know we tried to tell the fact, this one killed, this one did, but I want to bring this out Linda, you know it's very important you know. So in this camp we dug those holes, we finished one area. They kept on moving us, that's why we stayed in those canvas tents. It was convenient for them. They had barracks made out of veneer you know for food and also that were prefabricated that you could quickly unscrew and move on. Like this we went into two camps, Malken and Dörbeck.⁵ In those camps, they did not have to kill us. We started to die...die of starvation and diseases. In the morning, we got up, our hair was frozen to the ground on that straw. Many people said oh, they cut their hair in the camps, it was terrible. In Stutthof, they didn't cut our hair. It was more terrible, because we didn't have water to wash with. And when you have hair on you, it gets infested with lice; and with lice brings diseases. By the time came October, November of 1944, it was a mess--walking skeletons with wounds. We looked horrible. At one point, at that time, they brought certain kinds of barracks. Not barracks. It was like to hold horses--a round wooden thing that they put up for us to be in. Not in the tents, because we were doing work so they felt that we are still useful. So they gave us this wooden barracks; and wherever one horse had to stand was five women lying there on the straw--no bunks, not a change of clothes. You know, Linda, I

⁵ Also a subcamp of Stutthof, for women only.

think that about six months I had not taken off my clothes. There was no reason to take it off. There was no water to wash with, there was no change of clothing. And then you were afraid to take it off, because maybe some person that doesn't have a dress is going to take it, or your blanket or whatever. You know people in need, you have to understand that. We stayed there until January 1945, in those camps...in those areas, Malken and Dörbeck. There was another place that we were moved, but I don't remember the name.⁶ It was three separate places. Then one morning, we were woken up very early, maybe 3:00 o'clock at night, we were told to line up and take everything that we have in that little tent with us. We were leaving the area. We looked, we looked for trucks, there was nothing outside. March, a march. It was called the Death March. You know, we marched day and night this way. During the day we walked. You had to stop one time, let's say you had to go the bathroom, you had to go at that time to the bathroom. Now, if you wanted to go another time to the bathroom, too bad. If you stopped to stay in the back, you were dead. Whoever stayed behind was shot. We heard all the time shots. Also as we walked we saw many, many human beings face down with a bullet in the back in the snow and we saw that they were inmates like us because they were skinny, they wore prisoner garb, we could see it was Jewish people with their stars and with their numbers. Now, you know, we went through it was the Danzig area--you know, exactly where Stutthof was, where we worked in that area--Poland, Germans, roads, villages, towns... We saw people, they say now they didn't see us. You know, I put out...in the winter, I put out a little crumbs for the birds. They didn't have to hand us food. If they would just put a little crumbs or a potato peel on the street where we had to walk, we wouldn't have been so hungry. They didn't do it. They didn't do it, Linda. I remember on that march -- me, I'm sharing it with you, I never share it, I will tell you that, just once I think I talked about it -- I

⁶ Nesse identifies this place elsewhere as Praust--another women's subcamp of Stutthof, located in the immediate area of Danzig.

remember sleeping, they told us to rest a little bit, and in the snow there was manure of a horse or a cow all dried out and straw with it and undigested grain. I remember taking that grain, washing it in the snow, taking out the kernel and eating it. I tell you the truth, as I look back, I think I fulfilled a big commandment to save a human life. And I say it again, I saved my life by doing... I think sometimes I shouldn't tell about it. It's a horrible thing to tell. But I feel today I really want to tell you as much as I can. On that march, it was terrible. They were beating us with the underside of a gun. They didn't want to waste the bullets, they wanted to clobber us dead. See, I have this scar on my face. One night, we were put up in a barn to sleep. Sometime they put us in a church, in a school, in a barn. That night the women saw cows that had milk in the udder; and the women started to milk the cows and drink the milk in their mouths. I didn't do it, but I was there. I didn't even know. I was sleeping, maybe. All of a sudden, we heard noise: the farmer yelling, "I let you let in these dirty women in my barn, and they are drinking the milk that I am supposed to sell tomorrow in the market!" Instead of saying, "I'm so happy that they can have one night a little milk." The guard, the SS, ran into the barn and it was stampede in the middle of the night. They made us go out of that barn. They were hitting us with the underside of the guns and with clubs. And I was hit on the head on this side; and I swear to you, fire came out from my eyes. I had like a slight concussion-- I couldn't...no open wound, but I couldn't move. Two women quickly grabbed me and held me in their arms. "Maidl--girl, go, walk, walk, gae, gae." I didn't know these women. They could have left me behind. Many, many people were left that night behind there. Later, an infection set inside, and a few weeks later it opened up. But this is the history of my scar. So this is just a little incident about beating up on your back, on your shoulders, scars all over. We arrived in the middle of February in a place by the name of Chrinow (ph) in a little place in a barn. They put us into this barn, and it was so crowded. I don't know how many of the thousand women were left at that point. I really don't know a

count, maybe 600, maybe 500, maybe 700. I don't know how many were left behind. I forgot to tell you something. While we were walking on the march we had stopped in another camp: it was called Praust. There we stayed two days. The healthier were made to march alone and we left some behind and there some people from another camp joined us. So when we walked already... When we came to the barn, we were not our original thousand women, we were already from a few camps a combination. They took out a bunch of women, they told them to dig two long holes in front of the barn. We thought they are lining us up to shoot us. But they had different plans. In one hole they put two sticks, a latrine, a bathroom -- people need a latrine -- the other hole, we found out soon enough, would be a grave. They knew in that barn we are going to die. People looked walking skeletons, bones covered with skin. Every day you looked around, somebody was dead. Every morning, you had to take out the dead and dump it in the hole. Sometimes you had to do it, sometimes I had to do it, sometimes this one. They said you have next to you dead, take it out. And then it was you know very cold and many people thought gee, I will take that blanket or the dress of the dead and put it over me so I will keep warm. So many, many of these bodies were already naked. That's why you see sometime pictures near the barracks that are naked because we figure, "They are dead. They don't need that garment. Maybe I will save my life." As I walked to that barn, I will tell you, every day we said to each other, "Live another day, I told you, in spite of the enemy." But in that barn, I didn't want to live no more. Food was given to us maybe once in three days. A little bit of water. Some people did not even have the strength to go out to get that little food. Many times, you know, I myself said, "I'm not going to go out." There were women that said, "If you don't want to eat, go out for me. Give me that piece of bread." You know, they called you and helped you go out. We were there three weeks. The sight of these three weeks in that Chrinow barn is indescribable. I tell you I wanted to die but march 10 came and God's will was different the Russians liberated us. That

day of liberation, I just want to tell you that morning the people that said to take out the dead took out the dead and went outside and they came back and said "No guards, we don't see any guards." Some woman said "Let's run, the village is a mile away." We couldn't walk. How could we run? Some other woman said it's a trick, we will start walking to the village and the Germans will shoot us. All day long we sat in the barn not knowing that the guards had escaped. See, they knew that the Russians are coming but we didn't, we didn't know a thing. At night we hear boots. We said oh, they are coming, they are coming to murder us, and then we heard Russian language and this was the fighting unit. And they said, "Ladies, don't be afraid. We found what was going on here. We already saw other camps. And the ones that are alive are going to be helped." And they said that the next day the medics will come and help us out. A few hundred of us survived in that barn, what should I tell you, by miracle. I say it again and again and again. You know my scar here, I forget even it's there. I put makeup sometime, I make a joke to my grandchildren, I say it's a boo. My other scars are covered with my clothing; but my mental wounds I will carry to my grave. Six million Jewish people lost their life, 5 million non-Jewish people. Why? Why? Now you know why (unclear word) people like myself, survivors... You can see why it's not easy for me to sit here and talk to you. But I agreed to do this tape with the hope...with the hope that humanity will learn out of this horrible...out of this horrible to make a life of people more beautiful. It's true, we light a candle for our dead, we make a memorial--we do that in our synagogues, in our homes. But what you are doing in this museum, we the survivors feel... I know my group here in our area, we feel that everyone of us wants to tell the true story for humanity for the sake of generations to come, so it can never happen again to anybody...to anybody ever.

Q: Thank you very much. Tell me the rest. Will you tell me what after the war.?

A: I was liberated that night; and I remember I cried. I cried at night. And many times, as I sleep now or I am awakened by a nightmare, I think of that night of liberation and I wonder why did I cry. At one point, I felt guilty that I survived, Linda, as well as other survivors. Was I better than my friends and my cousins and my buddies and my uncles and my aunts and my father? Was I better? And then I was sitting there. And maybe I cried for me, because I was all alone. At that time I did not know how many of [my] family survived. You see, Linda, I was very lucky. My mother survived the Holocaust in a camp just like mine; my brother (unclear word) survived the Holocaust in Dachau concentration camp; my brother Menashe was liberated by the Russians in that village, in that smokehouse. So I was lucky. My two brothers are alive. My mother has died since, but nobody killed her. She died by illness. So that night, I cried. But I haven't cried since. You see, I choke up; you will see a tear in my eye, but it doesn't come out. I learn to laugh, I learn to live, but I forgot how to cry. The next day when the medics came, they started to carry all the women that couldn't walk from that barn to the village. You see, the Germans of that village took their horses and the wagons and ran away, they went with the Germans, they were retreating so there were not many horses left, maybe a few horses. That was a small village, Chrinow. I always wonder how big it was but I know now that it wasn't big. I remember small houses, it was like a small little town; and I don't remember really where they made the makeshift hospital, whether it was in a school or whether in some other public building because it wasn't a hospital. They quickly made some bunks, some wooden bunks that they put the people up. The only thing that I remember was that I was carried in one of the homes and I was told that I have to wait maybe a day or two until this makeshift hospital will be ready. I was put on a straw sack, not just straw but it was already a sack of straw. Next to me, when I opened my eyes, I saw a woman who I recognized as a teacher of one of the Yavneh, of the religious schools--from the girl's school, a teacher. She looked so horrible, she looked terrible. I don't think I

recognized -- I don't know how I recognized her. I don't remember. And I was so glad that she was next to me. But an hour later she was dead. You have to understand, many, many survivors died after liberation--the weak. Many that were even maybe a little stronger and could walk into the village, they started to eat and their stomach was shrunken, they died because they ate. Some died because they didn't eat. Typhoid, dysentery. The next day or a day after they came this Russian people with some help of the villagers that they recruited to do this work and they carried me to the hospital where my hair was shaven from all over my body and I was dunked in DDT to kill all the lice and whatever, insects, and then I was unconscious for three days. I don't remember naturally what happened but I remember when I opened my eyes I saw a big room with a lot of women laying there and some Russian doctor who happened to be Jewish talking to me and telling me that I was unconscious for three days. I must have had typhoid, high fever, maybe delirious, I don't know. My toes were black frozen. They were considering to cut it off but this particular doctor said to wait, not to cut it. He thought if it doesn't start to rot, maybe it will peel off. And it did, it peeled off. I weighed maybe 55 pounds. The first time I saw myself was in a reflection in a door in a little window of a door. When I looked at that door -- I wanted to see what's outside when I could stand on my feet already and look outside, maybe it was a week or ten days after liberation -- I saw the most horrible creature, a skeleton with eyes inside and I turned around to look who is behind me and nobody was behind me. And it took me time to realize that this was me. This happened right away after, you know... We got wonderful care from the Russian army, from the medics at that time. The women that were just little bit stronger among our own women started to be like nurses, carried a little bit of food to give us, make sure -- many, many of us went on hunger strikes after liberation. We said we don't want to live no more, many. You found many incidents, different incidents. And to make sure the little food we got, we ate it. The fill that was given, we swallowed, the people among ourselves. Six weeks

I was in that hospital. Then I was given by this committee or whoever was in charge a dress, a pair of underpants, pair of shoes, a pair of socks and I was told to go. Where? There was another woman at that time who was from Kovno, which is Lithuania. Now, I thought the best place to go is back home. Maybe somebody is alive. I didn't know [if] my mother survived or my brother survived. I had hoped that maybe my brother who escaped survived. So with this woman -- you didn't need a ticket, they gave you some kind of piece of paper that you are a survivor and you are traveling. So freight trains, you hopped on the freight train. I hopped. You couldn't walk, you had feet that were just frozen off, shoes that were man's shoes, you could hardly move. I was trying to get to _ód_. Somebody already that we start to talk on the train, we met other survivors from other camps and somebody said everybody says that in _ód_ there is a little bit of a community that helps you. So that's how I got to _ód_. In _ód_ -- when I came first to _ód_ there wasn't much organized there. But there was a space where there was a big room; and I remember like I don't know if there were billboards or just papers hanging. And it said "Lithuania" and "Latvia" and "Estonia" and "Poland" and "Ukraine." And people signed in where they are from, what their name is, where they are going. As I was looking on that billboard to see, you know, I said, "Wait a minute. Let me look. Maybe somebody [is] from my home town." A woman was standing there, and said to me, "You're Nesse Galperin from Šiauliai, Lithuania. You are from the dairy business." You know, you are always identified by what you did. And this woman said to me, "Your mother is alive. I saw her alive after liberation. I think she is in this and this village." Now, I don't even remember which village it was. I don't remember. Anyway, back I go with -- I couldn't move -- back -- people say "Where are you going backwards, crazy little girl, where are you going backwards?" I got to that village. Maybe it took me a week to get to that village, or two weeks--I don't remember. Begging for a little food -- you know, nobody still gave us food, you had to beg or call it or whatever. And still that one dress. You

know, you were not in very good shape at that point: a big wound here, pus going and smelling terrible, my head wrapped because my head was shaven off with a shmata, with a rag, to cover it. I got to that village; I found Jewish women, but no Mother. But women from my home town that reassured me that my mother was liberated with them, and they also heard that people are in _ód_. But they felt in this smaller village, they can have a little more food to eat and they will get a little stronger, then they will go to _ód_. Back I come to _ód_, maybe two weeks later or three weeks later--I don't know the time really at that point. At the railroad already there were women, our own women, waiting for us like a welcome committee saying where is a shelter, where you can go, who can help you... You know what that meant already. And that's how I was reunited with my mother. While we were in _ód_, the men from Dachau were liberated. The men in Dachau were liberated, actually, before, in May. But by the time messengers came -- many of them sent messengers, they sent two people come to Poland, tell the survivors not to go to Russia, try to come back, try to go to Israel. You know, we saw at that point that nobody cared for us, nobody helped us. If it's not going to -- at that point the urge to have a homeland was so big because we saw that the whole world wasn't with us. So at that point many, many survivors tried to come to the American Zone. You could travel still, go here, go there. When I came to the American zone--first to Berlin. In Berlin already my brother had a friend that worked with transferring people from one place to the other. It was already the Jewish (unclear word) agency work, the Sohnut (unclear word) and we were brought to Feldafing. Feldafing was a displaced persons camp near Munich where the people that were liberated from Dachau were taken from Dachau, put there in the hospitals. Feldafing was actually like a resort area where the Nazis, the SS, had their meetings. We came to Feldafing in 1945. My brother had written to my aunt, who lived at that point in New York. He remembered her address. He wrote her a letter we survived, would she bring us to America. That same year, we had cousins in

Washington, D.C. that had liquor store, grocery store. They got from them, you know, backing that they will take care of us, that we are not going to be -- at that point, my aunt already lived in Washington, but the mail was forwarded to where she got that letter--from New York to Washington. They secured that we are not going to be a burden to the American government. But because of bureaucracy, because we were from Lithuania, we had to come on the Lithuanian quota. I did not get here until December of 1950. Can you imagine? I'm talking about me--not everybody else, just my family. Five years I had to wait. Now, how do I feel when I open the [Washington] Post, and I see that all these years Nazis enjoy the freedom of the United States? And we had to sit there, because on a Lithuanian quota. There was no more Lithuania, it was already Soviet Union. So this quota system -- our beautiful United States, which I love dearly, did not open the gates for us so easily. And that's what happened. And now, as you know, I live in Silver Spring with my husband Jack, who is also a survivor of the Holocaust. He is the only person of his family. He does not talk about his past. It's hard for him to listen. And we have three lovely children, who are good human beings. Somehow we survivors, because we suffered, because we needed, because we were hungry, because we were naked, implanted in our children to be sensitive to those needs. And most of them really grew up to be involved in helping other human beings.

DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

- (1) As I told you, my aunt and my uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Jaffe, lived in New York -- they came here in 1928. And we had sent many pictures to them through the war -- before the war. Now, when I came to the United States my Tante... She was lovely, she was darling; I loved her dearly. I used to [say,] "Tante, you have pictures of my family." She said "When I will die, you will have them." A few of them she gave us to make a copy. You can see this is a copy of a picture that she gave us a long time ago. My father, my mother, my two brothers, me as a tiny little girl. But after she passed -- when she passed away a few years ago, her children were kind. They said to me, "Go to the album and take whatever of your family." So I do have -- I'm luckier than some other survivors.
- (2) This is a picture of my two brothers and myself. You know it helps to show especially children of the United States to see that we were normal-looking, nice... Look just like they do. We were not different. We were not abused because we looked different. We were abused because we were Jews and went to synagogue.
- (3) This is a picture of me just a year before, here I was 12.
- (4) This picture -- I'm going to show you two pictures. Not just the front of the picture means a lot to me. This my family in on the Pesach of 1941. This my grandmother, my father. My grandmother was 16 when my father was born. When I show this picture, people think it was his sister. She was killed in Vilna. My father was one of 16 children. Nine were alive before the war, and one is alive [after]. Imagine how many cousins and how many relatives! I didn't even know their names. And my uncles.

- (5) And this is the couple... A couple is here--a man and a woman--my mother's cousin. This is taken from _ód_, just before the Nazis came to us. They had some money, they bought their way out. And when they came, they told us they did not know that people were being killed but they knew that people were being taken from _ód_ and taken to Warsaw.
- (6) And to follow up this, after my aunt died and I looked through her things that the children were getting ready to throw away, I found an envelope that I'm going to present to the Museum. When I saw the Swastikas on this envelope, I knew that this is a piece of documentation. The letter inside was not there, whether my cousin did not realize it and threw it away. This letter was sent to my aunt to whom I sent all these pictures, Mr. Jaffe, to New York. And I feel terrible that I don't know what was in the letter, what they were asking for--whether they were saying the truth of what was happening. And I assume that they were taken 1940 from _ód_ to Warsaw. Maybe this is already from the Warsaw ghetto. The letter came from...it's my mother's uncle and aunt by the name of Hablinski.
- (7) Now I have one more picture that I would like to share with you. Well, this also...this also a picture I want to share with you, my father on Chanukah going from the synagogue with my two brothers.
- (8) But the most what I want to share with you, which is precious to me, the last thing I have from my father, his handwriting is the signed "Pinchas (unclear word)." So this is very valuable to me. But I always like to share it with people.
- (9) Now this particular picture was given to me by a friend of mine, that he received from Yad

Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Israel. This is a document, a copy of a document that we don't know whether the Lithuanians took or the Germans took. This is a picture of our Rabbis and the scholars before they were taken out to be shot--the thousand men that I was telling you about.

- (10) Now, I have one more thing that I want to show. I don't know who has it in print, who does not have it, where it could be obtained. But this book is called Pinkas Shavli. Here is a map of the two ghettos that I was talking about, where they were. In this book, a teacher of my school -- his name is Yerushalmi -- wrote a diary in the ghetto every day of what was happening. He was assigned to do so by the Jewish Community Council, and it was written originally in Yiddish. When I saw this book at a friend of mine['s] house, I was very anxious to get it. And with a lot of persuading, let's put it that way, I got this book. And I just wanted to make sure that my memories are right. And as I read this book, I see that this is exactly what I shared with you. All is written in this book; and it's called -- let me just put it here in the front and you will see what it is: Pinkas Shavli. It's a diary that was written, just as many diaries, by this gentleman who is not alive anymore. He has died. He dedicated it to his son who perished during that time.

- (11) Look at this picture and see the Rabbis that I remember. This is the cousin that came to us and told us the people were taken from _ód_ to Warsaw. This is me on the end, this is my older brother, my younger brother, one of my uncles, my grandmother who looked like a sister to my father at that point, and my mom.

- (12) This is me at the age of 12. And I always show it to children, and tell them that I looked just like any child in the United States.

- (13) I will turn this one around too. This picture, I was talking about my father's signature. It has the city on it and the date. This picture was sent in 1930s. I was 2 years old here. My two brothers, they are older than me. This my family on vacation, a copy of a picture. As you can see, somebody didn't give me the picture, it was just a copy. My family, my parents, myself as a baby, my brothers.