

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Gerda Weissmann Klein
October 11, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Gerda Weissmann Klein, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on October 11, 1990 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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

GERDA WEISSMANN KLEIN
October 11, 1990

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: My name is Gerda Klein.

Q: And what was your maiden name?

A: My maiden name was Weissmann so I still carry it as Gerda Weissmann Klein.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born on May 8th, 1924 in the most southern western part of Poland in a town called Beilitz in German and Bielsko in Polish. It went by both names and it was in the province of Salasia (ph) at the foothill of the ____ mountain range.

Q: Would you tell me about your parents and about your family as a young girl, as a child?

A: Well, in retrospect, my parents seem absolutely saintly and everything seems just marvelous. I know it couldn't possibly be that way. I know it must have rained at times but my memory is uh is very vivid and I cherish it very much and I don't see why I should change this perfection which I remember. Uh, I had one older brother. He was five years older than I. His name was Arthur. My parents name were Julius, Julius and Helena Weissman. Uh we lived in in in an old large home on outside of town with a hugh garden with many fruit trees and flowers, a wonderful thing for children to roam in. I had ten cats, all black. I knew all their names and uh now, you know, my children know, my grandchildren are used to me to recite the names of my cats. My brother had two dogs. Uh I used to love swimming in summer and skiing in winter and uh by and large I had a marvelous childhood.

Q: What about school?

A: Uh I went to public school first and then but only until the war broke out to Catholic school called Notre Dame. It was a private girls school. However we had the rabbi coming giving us Jewish instructions, so it was about uh I would say a quarter of of the girls in school, in my class, were Jewish. And that was the natural thing to do. I uh I really liked school very much even though I pretended I didn't. Uh and of course, you know, when the war came that was the end of my formal education.

Q: Tell us what happened when the war broke out?

A: Well, I guess the danger signals were flying very high in uh in the summer of 1939. Uh by and large I must say it was ignored by my family. Uh I was away with my mother in a

place called Krinitza (ph). Uh I even remember my my very first uh incident which inspired a great deal of fear. My mother and I went to a concert and I remember the setting quite vividly. Uh there were flowers around. I'm not very musical but uh that summer something caught on that day and I remember uh the crowd of people sitting there and and flowers and it was very warm, uh a day of...you know, one of the golden days of of summer, as I see it now, and suddenly a young man came running up to the podium and he pushed the conductor aside and he said, how can you all sit here listening to music when danger is coming from there, and he pointed to to the ___ which separated us from Czechoslovakia which already had been occupied by the Nazis and and he said monsters are coming from there. Why don't you go home and take up arms and join...I remember moving closer to my mother and and saying shouldn't we go home and uh but pretty soon police came and uh arrested the man because he was an agitator for disturbing the peace. I I I still remember that that sudden fear. That that really was my my first memory of uh of something impending but we stayed perhaps another week. I don't remember exactly how long. However, on our way home we saw at stations an awful lot of baggage which was labeled Warsaw. Apparently people were going to Warsaw and when we came home uh my father had his arm in a sling and my mother naturally was terribly concerned and uh apparently he had suffered a slight heart attack and uh unfortunately and since things were moving very fast, uh that must have been perhaps the third week in August...that we received a telegram from my uncle in Turkey. My mother had a brother...my mother only had one brother and he lived in Turkey and uh he sent us a telegram saying that we should get out, that we had visas which were in the Embassy in Warsaw, but my mother said uh we're not going to tell Poppa about the telegram. Poppa is ill (ph) and he should not be disturbed. And I guess that ___ my family, and I only hope and pray that my mother really didn't fully realize that.

Q: Tell us just what happened next. What did you do once you realized...

A: Well, uh it was Friday morning. I I I remember it very well. I was fifteen you see. It was Friday morning when we heard a lot of planes and people ran into the streets and uh and there were German planes and we ran out and saw planes with the swastika flying over. It was terribly exciting and and a lot of activities started then. They were building trenches and uh and you know, uh my mother tried to keep sort of the windows down, were closed so from my father's bedroom...my father was in bed. My father was quite ill and that night uh there were lots of of refugees on the streets. You know, people running away and and there was was shooting. I remember one one man was carrying a goat on his back. Apparently it was his only possession, a small goat and people with wheelbarrows and carts and everything and my brother had a girlfriend and apparently her uh family called and said that they are going to flee into the interior of Poland and suggested that they would take my brother and me along and my father insisted that should be my brother's decision. I was, you know, considered too young to make a decision. My brother was nineteen at the time and my brother said no, we we're not going to go. We will stay together. You you'll need us. My father was ill, and and that was a terrible shock because, you know, my father to me was sort of the center of my universe. I mean, you

know, when Poppa decreed something, he would do anything and that he should suddenly ask us, particularly my brother, to make a decision...such a momentous decision. I remember it was a terrible shock and uh it was very turbulent night and when it ceased in the morning and my father said to me that I I should go and apparently he wanted to talk to my mother and my brother that I should not be around and he said that I should call the family to see what everyone is doing, my father's brothers and there were uncles and aunts and so on, and I went downstairs and uh the ring of the telephone...there was no answer. No one answered anywhere and uh you know, I remember suddenly it was like like you were left in a world of the dead, you know, all those homes that I remembered and the phones were ringing and ringing and there was no answer whatsoever and uh when I came up my father said no one answers today, and I said no. And it was a wonderful Saturday. Everything was cut off. There was...we had no electricity, no light and it was a beautiful, calm September day, flowers outside and my parents were sort of joking. My father got dressed and came downstairs and we were all sitting together and it was really the the last beautiful day. And then in the evening they start with some shelling and my brother went out to let his dog in and when he came back he he had a hole in his trousers and he said they were shooting from the rooftops. The Germans were coming but we went to the basement with some other people, you know, and it was morning. Then I I don't remember those hours too well, but what I remember most vividly is uh that my mother called, said we should come. She had prepared some breakfast and we came upstairs and we sat down. Suddenly, this tremendous roar, the roar of motorcycles and it was the motorcycle with Nazis in it, two...one in the side car and on sitting up there, and my brother had just, he had a wristwatch, but he had just taken it out of his pocket because he carried it in his pocket, and I saw his, you know, his hand was down and it was 9:10 in the morning. And I remember everybody just sat there totally stunned and then we heard people uh running. There were more more cars and more motorcycles were coming and and people were shouting, heil Hitler, and we saw from from the house across the street the black swastika flag and I think that was the most enormous shock, that people were prepared, was our neighbors, you know, our friends, and they knew it in the very first hour and uh to me, and of course, you know, you can only see it in in retrospect and of course I lived it many times, but one of the things uh it sort of changed suddenly. I remember uh the coal fell out from the cradle of the fireplace and uh it went on the carpet and the carpet was sort of smoldering and and no one paid any attention to it and I remember it had once happened before...how upset my mother was and no one paid any attention. These were just tiny little vignettes which suddenly sort of you know changed everything. And uh shortly thereafter perhaps...you know, then more and more trucks of soldiers were coming and and the voices grew more hoarse, people shouting heil Hitler and I I saw a childhood friend of mine carrying white roses to to the soldiers and somebody was giving the soldiers schnapps and flowers for _____ and the whole sort of thing and I I remember starting to cry and my brother dragged me on the carpet and he said, keep quiet, you know, you you can't do that, and he took me up to bed and he said, you know, don't make a sound and it was in the after...it was in the morning...I mean, you know, uh the whole day was sort of uh melange (ph) of many many feelings which I try to remember over the years, but one of of the worst

things happened that afternoon. Uh the mother of the childhood friend of mine...she blessedly is alive and she lives in Israel...her name is Esther Bergman (ph). Her mother came and she asked where my father was and she said uh...but she knew that he was ill but she said, also to my brother that no man should go on the streets because they had rounded up all the men that they could find and they locked them in the temple and they set the temple aflame and then she sort of went out by the back door. And I think that was truly the first impact what happened.

Q: What happened over the next few days? How did uh things _____?

A: I couldn't you tell you day by day, you know. Uh people came. Our our neighbors came, our non-Jewish neighbors came...oh, one thing, yes...uh a neighbor who, you know...she...the home in which we lived in not only was I and my brother born there but my mother had been born there. It was a family home, you know, and our grandmother had lived with us. Fortunately, blessedly for her, she died the year before the war broke out. She, you know, never faced that. Uh a woman came and she asked where our flag was, the Polish flag, you know, which used to be red and white, and uh my mother said why, and she said we have to make a German flag out of it and my mother pretended to look for it in all places where she knew she wouldn't find it, you know, and then uh the woman left and she said she would be back later. Maybe my father can help look for it, and I think that became very clear that we better produce it because she really wanted it for our protection and she said all you have to do is, you know, keep the the red flag and cut a round circle from the white, put a black swastika on it and she came to collect it. She did it and then she said she wanted to look where Arthur was because he is very strong. He should hang it up and he apparently could not be found to do it, so the woman struggled to hang the flag up and she sort of said to my mother, you know, if uh if the flag is not displayed from here, it would be pretty obvious who you are. And uh I remember we couldn't look out of the window to see to see that flying. We had some other people you know living in in our home as well who uh who were not Jewish and some were sympathizers and of course they wanted that, because you know, this was the part which was German speaking. Bielitz before the war was Austria and later on it was also one of the first things that became uh it was they called it _____, you know, _____, uh where so we were unfortunately not too far from from Auschwitz, which was _____, and that became the perfect _____ which was allegedly self-ruled. Of course it wasn't, you know, but we immediately became uh under the symbols as as Germany. So uh the people who...I suppose most people were German-speaking people, you see, and people were shouting uh heil Hitler. Thank you for the liberation, and things like that because they thought that you're not an Austrian Empire was coming back with, you know, Franz Joseph and the beautiful Empress Elizabeth and so on, you know, was the part had been under Poland for only twenty years, so uh uh I think there was a lot of mis...perhaps misguided feeling on behalf of the people, maybe not so much pro-Nazi at that particular point, but of course all that changed.

Q: Over the next few months, what happened to you and your family and how did things

change?

A: What I can unfortunately tell you...uh fairly soon an order came that all young men between I think sixteen and fifty had to register. My father at that point was about fifty and since he was ill he did not have to register for a transport. My brother was nineteen and, of course, everyday you know, that we knew that England and France declared war, you know, that we knew right away. That happened Sunday. You know, we were occupied Sunday morning. Sunday afternoon uh England and and France declared war on Germany. Uh then you know, most of the family had fled, our family; however, my father's sister who had uh been separated from her husband and daughter in one of the trains which which were bombed, came back with her son David and she found her apartment occupied by uh by other people, and she came to stay with us. David was about my brother's age, and David and also my brother went to register to whatever they were going to do and they said that they they would be in uh in some sort of labor battalion to uh build up what was uh destroyed by the war. The date was the 19th of October on which my brother left. Anyway...I tell you one thing...my my mother refused to make his bed for for months. She wanted to keep the imprint of his head on the pillow. (Pause) All things got worse from day to day, you know. We didn't hear from my brother for a long, long long time and when we finally did, which I believe was months later, he was uh blessedly in the Russian occupied zone. He was in _____. And what apparently happened was that uh they were brought into the interior of Poland uh near the _____. I don't know exactly what location...pursued by bullets. Those who were good swimmers swam across. He was a very good swimmer and he was in in _____, which was uh occupied by the Russians and he worked there. Uh my brother was was trained in chemistry uh and he worked in some sort of a factory making germ (ph) or whatever. Uh that was one of the greatest, marvelous moments in the bleakness of our existence to hear that Arthur was alive. Uh I cannot...I really...I mean I was sort of refreshing my memory and looking at some of the things which I had written after the war which I have the most clear knowledge as far as dates are concerned but I know that uh it probably was a few months later that we were to move into the basement of our home. It was very wet there and there was no electricity there and uh my father's uh condition deteriorated quite a bit. He suddenly looked very old. Uh my mother uh who up to that point you see, because my grand...we had lived with my grandmother and so I was rather pampered and you know, uh given to be very easily discouraged and upset about uh little things like uh you know, table clothes didn't iron properly, or the lace was wrong or something...uh showed incredible strength and fortitude. As a matter of fact she was the one who did not cry when my brother left. And my father wept. The first time I saw my father crying. It was sort of reversal of of roles you see and I think to to me a very devastating thing to see my father helpless and and I never saw my father helpless before and uh so we lived in the basement. Uh I learned new skills. I saw my mother uh bringing an old...it was called petroleum lampiere (ph), you know...uh lamp....I learned to clean the chimney of the lamp and if we got some guests to to make illumination like that, because we had no light. Uh pretty soon of course, you know, uh we exhausted our funds because we we had no no money. You know, everything was frozen. My father didn't earn anything and all

those things were very hard to come by but where we lived, you know, there there were vegetables and things were obtainable and our our neighbors...I had a _____, you know, a nanny, who was wonderful to us and she lived diagonally across the street and she would go and get vegetables and bring things to us but uh my mother was always a wonderful needlewoman. She could do wonderful things with her hands, so we sort of through _____ that we would be knitting and I learned to...I learned to knit before the war but I wasn't particularly interested in that, you know. I was more of a tomboy running around with cats and climbing trees and and I settled down and we would start knitting sweaters for people. My mother really had a wonderful reputation. You know, she would embroider things on sweaters. She did some marvelous things and uh we would be able to get candles. We had quite a store of candles because uh we couldn't use the lamp too often because petroleum was available, you know, on only limited things and our ration card...we got ration card, you know, with the name Jew and and there was very little to eat and uh so uh my mother and I would would knit for as long as daylight would allow and my father would sit and read to us. And really this is how uh my father was wonderful..you see, I went to Polish schools. Even so, my first language was German...spoke German at home and when I would come home from school I would switch to German, but I couldn't read or write German, you know. I spoke it naturally. It was my first language. So my father unearthed my mother's books and he started teaching me to read and write German, and then my father would read to us, you know, and and we would let the candle go down. Then we would take take some wax and my mother made uh little wicks and we would put the candle on again and we would uh we would knit. We got...I remember it very clearly...for knitting a sweater, uh intricate sweater. You know, at first I would just knit the sleeves and things and my mother would do the intricate work. We would get uh thirty _____. Well, it was thirty _____ if you could buy food on ration it was fine, but we had to start buying food on the black market, so I would say uh roughly a loaf of bread would cost thirty marks so for knitting a sweater we would able to buy roughly a loaf of bread. And this is how things went. And then started the things of the _____, you know. It was uh to be sent away and every so often a little cart would come announcing that...as a matter of fact the first one came uh when we had not heard from Arthur, and I remember at that point my my mother sort of must have suffered a nervous breakdown, at least a momentary lapse because I remember she was she was totally out of things. She was calling for Arthur. She was in bed. And my father was up with her and my father told me to go and to pack. We we were supposed to leave with twenty pounds of our belongings. And uh my father bought for us sort of _____ little suitcases and he told me to to pack some things and and word got around to uh in the community that we were selling things. Everybody...I mean all the Jews..that was the way to do it, and people started to come. My father said whatever anybody gives you, take it, and he stayed with my mother, and then uh word got around that if...I don't remember the exact amount...let's say uh kilo gold...something like that...it might have been less, it might been more. I don't remember. If that would be given and then that would stay _____, so you know, everybody scurried to get whatever jewelry people had to bring it...of course that was another...was what the Germans did in order to to get the valuables which people were holding and _____. And apparently they got what uh

whatever was needed for for that purpose because uh then a note came to say we could stay. You know, _____, and that would happen roughly every six, seven months, and again I I don't know exactly that, but uh but _____ is after we got, you know, my mother seemed to bounce back and became her her strong self and and from that time on I would say until the very end, my mother was absolutely a tower of strength. You know, looking back now, my mother was a very young woman at that time. She was she was forty-one when the war broke out. Of course to me she was an old woman, you know, to a fifteen year old girl, you know. My father was ten years older than my mother. So the existence, you know, and worse and this is _____ how we survived. This was three years...1939 through the spring of 1942. The very very spring...it could have been March perhaps when the order came that we had to move to the Jewish ghetto which was the shabby, remote part of our town, quite far away from where we had lived, because it was actually in _____ you see. Uh Bielitz- _____ it's called now, two _____, twin cities and that we lived in Bielitz and that was _____ and way out _____, near a very old cemetery where we had to to move. And uh as I told you, my my garden hold held most of my wonderful childhood memories and uh fairly soon...I would say probably in early 1940, uh there was a sign on it that no Jews or dogs were permitted in the garden, so we naturally did not go but on the morning on which we were forced to leave our home, I jumped over the fence and went to the garden and I ran around. Uh I remember there were the first violets where we had a little brook... _____, the first violets were there, which I had picked and I remember sort of planting a branch of a tree where I used to sit and pretending what it would be like if if nothing had happened you know and I would go in and my parents would be at breakfast and my brother would be going to school, and so on, and uh you know, even so uh I always firmly believed that I'll go back home. That became the crutch through all the years. Looking back now I realize that I must have had a premonition because I remember in that _____ I sort of really started imagining what my garden would look in all seasons, and I knew that I would not see it. But I don't know any longer if I thought that I'll never see it for a period of time or if there would be finality in it. I I really don't know. But, you know, you sort of take memories out like uh like cameos and hold them and look at them. And that was it.

Q: Tell us about going into the ghetto.

A: Well, strange as it may seem, I guess I really was happier in the ghetto than at home because I had friends there, you know. At home I was uh...well, that isn't quite true. My my father, you know, there were several girls, particularly the one who became tremendously close to me, my friend Elsa (ph). There was Esther Bergman who lived not too far away and she used to come, but my father would teach us and that was still at home. You know, he would take books out and teach us a bit of history and all those things that he knew. He was very knowledgeable so, you know, in a very fragmented way, but I think uh in those first three years, almost three years at home, it was my father...I I think I I acquired quite a bit of knowledge. He taught me all...my father my father was supposed to be a rabbi and because you know he came from...you see my mother was born in Beilitz which was uh very Austrian and they prided themselves, you

know. My...as a matter of fact my my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, uh still celebrated Kaiser Franz Joseph, that's the Austrian Kaiser, uh birthday which is on the 18th of August which I still remember, you know and because uh and I think they all talked about the good old days, you know, the wars and you know, everybody has to think the good old days, but my father's family uh came from a place called _____ and _____ was the seat of the _____ which was he was very well know. As a matter of fact even now I read quite a bit...his name was Freidman (ph) and my father's family was related to him and I have some wonderful childhood memories as a child going to _____. Uh should I have continued with with what I talked before...do you wish me to...

Q: Let's let's...yeah...let's do this. Break it and then come...you're going into the ghetto. You started talking about....

A: Alright. But uh I don't remember why I wanted to to tell this particular story. In any event, uh my friends, you know, there was a number of girls and they...we all lived in proximity, you know. In the ghetto there was one large building and a number of my friends lived there, so it uh it really was in a way a bit nicer for me where, you know, because there was a very uh sharp cur...curfew that I could never see my friends like in the evenings or after five o'clock or what have you. Living in the same building was sort of...it was nice to see my friends, you know. And there was also some babies there, and I liked babies and I could go and play with the two babies, so for me in a way it was a bit easier. It wasn't for very long. As a matter of fact, looking back I realize how little time there was because uh very soon an order came that we had to go and work in uh in a shop, sort of factory thing sewing garments in a place called _____. Uh so my mother and I had to go _____. We went under guard to to a train. The train station was not too far away and uh we worked sewing garments there and and then my father had to go to fortify the river in Suka (ph) and that was very hard because my father could really not bend his his arm very well but he said...but he started looking a little better. You see that he was very pale because being home uh for so long so actively being out in the fresh air...it was deceiving but seemed to me that Poppa looked better. It was a very short time, really. Uh come to think of it, it probably was not more than than two months. And then I remember my uh in May eighteenth birthday. I was fifteen when the war broke out and I was three years...my eighteenth birthday. My mother decided that I'm going to have a party and uh I just had a wonderful thing. I just had a big birthday, my sixty-fifth, and a friend of mine who now lives in Detroit met my uh ____ children give me a party. She came to the party and she was in in Arizona now, and she was at that birthday party. The birthday party was rather grand because my mother had some oatmeal and she had made some wonderful cookies which we all swarmed. They were absolutely like uh tasted like uh nuts and I had a birthday party, which was crowned by an incredible thing. I got an orange. I always loved oranges. Only later did I find out that my mother had gone out of the ghetto, sold a diamond and pearl ring to get me an orange. That was the last birthday gift from my parents. (Pause) Uh a couple of my friends were there. One lives in New York and uh she reminded me of something not too terribly long ago because uh the orders came on the 28th of June...all the men had had to leave on a Sunday...my father

amongst them. (Pause) We went to the station. My father stood in the...it was just dreadful. He wore the yellow star. (Pause)

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. You had just finished. We're back on camera, and you had just finished telling me about the orange your mother gave you for your eighteenth...

A: Right. And then the order that my father's leaving. There is however one thing that I would like to mention as a tribute to my parents. Uh the last night before my father left...of course we all lived in one large room at that point...I heard my parents talking. I don't know if it was for them or for my benefit. They did not mention at all the parting in the morning, but they spoke about their years together. They were, you know, about about the happiness they had shared, about uh my brother's birth and mine, about the hopes they had for us, and I think in in death they have instilled something in me which which has been my legacy all this...uh the value of of the love, of the commitment, of the _____ of the family, and uh you know, when the going goes rough as it was in in subsequent times, it uh it was a very comforting thing and I shall always be grateful for that. I mentioned seeing my father for the last time and after that, my friend _____ who lives in New York now, uh and I went...we knew...see, they were taking all the men on Sunday and uh _____ took place on Monday morning. Uh we decided, uh _____ and I, that we should, we we knew what's going to happen to to all the books, probably prayer books and most of the books which were in Jewish families that were treasured and uh after my father was taken away, we went and collected all the books. I was afraid that the Germans are going to use it for unspeakable purposes and we dragged it to the Jewish cemetery which was really _____ the ghetto, and uh we buried them there. And I'm sorry for not understanding my mother's grief completely at that time. You know, I was really terribly close to my father and that I didn't comfort my mother. Today I think I sort of needed to be alone, to lick my own wounds, so to speak. Uh there's just one more thing that I want to mention. Before my father left, he asked me (pause)...

Q: It's OK. TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: And my father said that uh...I'll always remember that one does not carry one's calling card in one's pocket, engraved upon one's _____...(Pause) (Crying) _____ (Pause)...anyway I'm sure that many people have given you descriptions of of the leaving one uh of leaving and I guess our's was not too much different. Except that my mother decided to fast on that day. It was a Monday, and my mother fasted every Monday since my brother had left, and uh she had a bit of precious cocoa she had hoarded throughout the entire war for a special celebration and she made some cocoa for me that morning. I must say it did not taste very sweet. We were marched through the town under the whips of the SS uh to a certain collection...I had it happen to me many times during the war. Later on that one sees sort of in rapid succession the things which you see as a thing which is a hoax (ph), like uh they were putting a new name of a movie on the marquee,

uh watching by a shop which sold fabrics and uh remembering the type of fabric that my mother bought for a summer dress, but it wasn't colorfast. You know, it was such a...and yet it's very funny. I remember it in _____. I remember them now you know. Uh seeing some neighbor peering from behind the curtain, because you see we went in from from the ghetto, through through the town again to the other side of the town to which was called the _____ where we went. Uh I marched with my mother. I saw a man with a cane. He asked me how old I was. I said eighteen. He told me to go to the left. We were loaded on trucks sometime later and I would like to get this over with as fast as I can, OK? And I heard my mother's voice...I did. And she was calling be strong, _____. And I heard that. I was in the truck. I jumped off and I said I want to go to my mother. The little man in a raincoat came by. His name was _____. He was from _____. I don't know how he had this enormous strength. He was quite short. it was raining. He was wearing a raincoat and a hat. And he took me bodily and he threw me back on the truck and he said you are too young to die. So it was the man who probably sent my mother to her death decided I should not run back to her. We went to a place called _____. There was a _____ lager. It was transient camp and there was the 29th of June, 1942, a Monday. A long story _____. I'll just confine it to my own...I had the opportunity of leaving there, cause of _____, you know, a boy who liked me. His parents tried to get me out of the _____.

Q: Tell me, tell us a little bit about that...

A: _____. (Sigh) Anyway, in my naivete (ph) I made a decision that I did not want to go out of the _____ to go back to Beilitz. There was...there were two camps in Beilitz and uh I mean again there's a story about a young man there who apparently liked me very much. His name was _____. He was a very fine artist and uh his family suggested he _____ with his family that you see you could get out of the _____ if you uh had a place of work, if you had some working permit and uh that you can put, get out to...and uh he had two sisters and they had two sewing machines and they were willing to put one in a shop to secure a place for me, which was an incredible sacrifice. Uh however I knew that if I did that I would probably have to marry _____. I made the decision not to go. Uh maybe this is a good story to tell because I _____ that I uh I wanted to stay with my friends even though I knew I was going to camp. By strange, almost incredible coincidence, the man in the _____ who came and told me that I was able to go out...his name is Jacob Chancer (ph). He now lives in Buffalo, New York, where of course I lived for many years. That decision proved to be a decision which saved my life because unfortunately the Briggs (ph) family, all of them, were deported and killed about two months later. And you see uh Beilitz, my home town, was renown for its textiles. Uh it was called _____ of central Europe. And uh in the _____ they registered your name, your age, and the place you hail from (ph), and industrialists from all over Germany would come to buy slaves. A man by the name of Keller (ph)...I think it's good to use the names...his name was Director Keller from a firm called _____. _____ had several uh spinning uh weaving and uh textile-oriented and associated firms and they needed people to work in the factories. When he came and he saw that x number of girls from Beilitz were there, for some reason he thought we might have more ex _____ in weaving or whatever and anyway they were

always looking because you see that still fairly early. That was '42. They needed German speaking people to be trained, so he bought all of us for a place called Bolkenhein (ph) which was a new weaving camp in _____. And in fact this is where we went. In all fairness I must say that uh that camp was probably better than than most of certainly what followed because it was new. You see, we were only fifty girls there. And the person who became our lager fuhrer, at first sight she looked like a bulldog and I thought she's going to tear us limb from limb, and she was a very kind person. She was probably chosen for her looks but we all who were in captivity under her owe her a debt of gratitude. And I think by her very decency she pinned a lie to the lips of all who said they had no choices. I won't say she particularly loved us. She saved my life once for which I'll be eternally grateful and there was uh as far as I know and I do know, that as long as we were there and later in a place called Landeshutz (ph) where she also was, nobody was sent to Auschwitz from our camp, from those two camps. And uh she showed that people could help individually and she did. I only met during my entire years under the Nazis, for six years, I only met two who were really kind and I think that they should be singled out for that. Frau...her name was Frau Keegler (ph), with an umlaut, so uh and we first saw her and she barked and everything...I thought this is the end of it all. Well we...I was with my friend Yelda (ph) whom I really would like to mention and in the camp there we became as close as sisters. Yelda was a childhood friend only in the sense that her mother and my mother were friends, you know, but Yelda played the piano beautifully. She was exquisitely mannered. My mother always told me how how I should try to be more like Yelda, you know, and of course I hated to play with her. She seemed to be the paragon of all virtue, and uh we became quite close already in the ghetto when we used to go to the cemetery...it was the only place you could go, but uh in the camps, you see she had a little sister by the name of Kitty and of course Kitty was sent to Auschwitz. My other friend Gretle (ph) had a sister, so the two sisters...you know, everybody sort of had a buddy and Yelda and I became that to each other. She she showed great promises as a pianist. She was sent to Vienna uh two years before the war to study at the conservatory there and uh a great future was predicted for her. And Yelda sort of became my sister. As a matter of fact, we looked quite a bit alike and uh so it was and there was something else that uh perhaps would give you sort of an inkling what it was like. On the train to the camp, to Bolkhain, I met a wonderful girl, a vivid redhead, a wonderful, you know, called beautiful people, tall, wonderful girl. Her name was Suzie Kunz (ph). She was born in Vienna but her mother had died. Uh she was quite young and since she was sent to Czechoslovakia to live with her grandparents because you see uh in that particular transport were mostly girls from Beilitz and from Czechoslovakia and you know we were all German speaking and this is why we went to that camp. And I was standing next to Suzie on on the train. You know, the it's a train sort of uh...there was a certain freedom there you know. We were in...not confined at the _____. We were out of the _____ and going someplace and uh Suzie said we'll never ever get out of where we are going and I said yes we will. And I said I'm sure the war will be over in less than a year, and Suzie said no, we're not going to make it. And I said I'll bet you and she said OK. She said let's bet a quart of strawberries and a quart of whipped cream and we shook hands on that. And Suzie died on liberation morning. I found her dead. I don't know if she knew or if

she didn't...she won that bet. Anyway we came to Bolkenheim. Bolkenheim...you know uh it's a terrible thing to say but but I think because we are recording that sort of thing should be said...actually for me it it was easier then. Easier in terms that I didn't see my parents suffer. You know, I could sort of put things over there but I uh I was convinced that my parents will survive, that they are someplace which they are probably working. I pushed all thoughts aside and I was in a way liberated in fact but you know I wasn't worried that each of my action might spell danger to my parents. And you know, I know if somebody's going to beat me, they aren't going to see it. All the indignities that one has suffered and you know and vice versa, you know. But of course when you're eighteen years old you know, you have the ____ that you don't...anyway uh Bolkenheim was rough in terms until we mastered what was expected of us. There was somebody there by the name of Meister Zimmer (ph). He was dreadful. And uh I used to amuse myself when he told us all things, you know, that uh that we are going to be taught decency and all the things, you know, uh that I think that that we knew so well which obviously were were designed to break our resistance, you know, and said if we behave ourselves and do these things we can live there all our lives you know, and I used to sort of speculate what he would look like when he was dead and things like that, you know. Uh now I...I...you know, fortunately uh you know I I always wrote when I was a little girl and things like that and I I could lift myself from some of the things and do other things in my mind to remove that, and I think I did that in the very first weeks when we were there. But you know, he used to sit with, stand with a watch, with a stop watch, and you had to do _____ which are uh was very intricate uh...what do you call it...it's funny...I lapse into German now...uh to tie something, a knot, you know, a weaver's knot to be exact, and you had to do x number a minute and of course you can imagine when you have somebody standing with a stopwatch above you to do that uh your life ____ on that. But for some reason most of us were able to do it and those who were not were put in the spinner ____ or in other things, so nobody was sent to Auschwitz from the original fifty there. And it was by comparison of what came later, relatively easy in as much...I mean we were not that hungry. We we got some food because Mrs. Keegler was decent. Uh we uh we worked in the factory long hours and I think that was really the very best thing. We were so exhausted at the end of the day that you had to concentrate so much and to work, you know, that your mind couldn't absorb what...

Q: I think at this point we need to pause. We will change tapes and that will give you a chance to.....

End of tape #1

Tape #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. We are back on tape.

A: OK.

Q: OK. You were telling me about uh the camp and the weaving...

A: The weaving...(pause)...we were able to write letters and again in that uh Mrs. Keegler was quite generous because I don't remember exactly, you know, what the ratio was, how often you were permitted to, but of course you know there were...who could you write to, but I was fortunate that I had my father's address in ____ which way my father was allegedly working on the fortification of that river and uh I wrote to my father. Uh I did not hear. Of course I heard from _____ and I wrote to him and he started sending me letters as well as packages which again through the type of person that Mrs. Keegler was, those packages did arrive. Uh I wrote to my father and I waited to hear from my father and one day a most incredible thing happened. Mrs. Keegler was handing out mail and she called my name and I saw a letter and I jumped to get it, and then I realized it was the letter which I had wrote written to my father and on it it said, without forwarding address. Uh I think that we needn't go into that. No one think that I I lost my my speech for a day and a night. I I could not utter a sound. Anyway uh we worked there and uh the thing was uh, you see, the type of thing that I I don't know if it really comes across is the tremendous support system which existed in the camps. The love and the friendship and the sharing and caring and loyalties that people had for each other, the girls had for each other. Uh you know that was sort of the balance against the cruelty which we experienced and to me I feel that was probably one of the most important things that existed and I somehow wish that would filter down. I usually attempt to tell my children and now my grandchildren because in the very odd spiritual airs of those who did not survive to know that the legacy of the camps is not the legacy of the horror but of the greatness of our people, the very humanity which existed there in the face of such incredible inhumanity. Uh I particularly want to talk about my friend Yelda (ph) for a moment but that actually happened in in another camp. I'll give you the quick progression from camp to camp. We were in Waldenheim, if I remember correctly when you know we were working on looms and pretty soon uh the raw materials started to disappear. We we had to uh work on uh uh paper. There was paper that they were spinning and of course you know in the warm weather it became brittle and it would break and uh in cold weather it would disintegrate because it got soft, and uh _____ was, you know, those things tore the things which what happened to me. Uh for that you could you could be sent to Auschwitz but somehow Mrs. Keegler intervened that people were not, and I remember at one time which was what I wanted to talk about Frau Keegler. Uh it was shortly after I received the news about my father uh that I became very ill. I don't know exactly what I had but I know that all my fingernails started to have pus in it and I couldn't touch my hands and

and I was running a very high fever and we had sort of a little...it was called _____ in which people were sick for a day or two could stay, and I was there and all of a sudden Lindsay (ph), you know, I think he has quite a name in the SS, he came on a sudden inspection and Frau Keegler charged into the room. I omitted to say my father made me wear my skiing boots. When I left home...I last saw my father on the 28th of June and I left home the 29th and I was separated from my mother the following day. Before my father left, he said to me wear your skiing boots. We were all avid skiers, you know. We lived in the the ski mountains. A lot of skiing there. And I said why and my father said I want you to wear them and I said Poppa, skiing shoes in June...you know, I ought to wear a pair of sandals and my father said you have to wear them. You know, you didn't argue with your father in those days. I wore them and I blessed them every single day because I wore them for the entire three years that I was in camp and in the in the lining I had hidden the pictures which are now in my book. This is where the pictures were. At first I was able to keep them, at the first camp, but later on and on the death march I had concealed them there. So Mrs. Keegler charged in and she dragged me out of of the bunk and she said Lindsay is here. It's a matter of life and death. I'll take you to the factory. And she stooped down and she started to lace my boots and she dragged me to the factory. She used to work in the factory before and I worked on four looms and she set the looms in motion and she said to me, pull yourself together and I remember I still heard the beating of the loom, you know, and everything was sort of at different angles because I was running a very high temperature and he came for inspection. He went through and if he would have found me there, she could not have saved me and there was no question about it, so that was how Keegler...but pretty soon it became obvious that the uh that they needed us in another camp and uh our camp was disbanded and we went to uh I think three different ones, Matzdorf (ph), _____. I really don't remember the third one. I was sent to Matzdorf. Matzdorf was a horrible, horrible camp. Uh we were locked on the fifth or sixth floor and uh every morning they would wake us with whips. I worked in the flax detail which was a dreadful place. Uh they were doing linens there, and flax uh submerged in a swamp. You had to pull it out of the swamp, you know, and uh when you opened the things and retracted the flax. It was terribly hot. It was in summer and the mosquitos were all over us when we were working there and then I I was singled out to do something else, namely to unload coal at night. Allegedly I give fresh answer to uh to one of the supervisors. They are men, and for that I was banished to work the flax during the day and at the coal detail at night. Uh it was an incredible time. Then we...I also to load the flax uh into sort of silos which were I mean I think now that they were ten stories high. They probably were not. They probably were three or four, but you know you there was no balance because __ those things. I I remember that it was nothing but torture you know. As soon as we went back to camp, I was called to to go and went and unload coal and that was ___ the only time. You know my father had asked me earlier...I forgot to mention it...during the first _____ when my mother was so ill...I remember standing at the window and we heard that a family had committed suicide together. And I remember standing at that window looking out at the garden, my mother being so sick, my father with his hand in in the sling. I hadn't...we hadn't heard from Arthur, you know, and I wished that my parents would suggest that. My father and I were both very close

and he always knew what I was thinking, and I remember he came behind me and he said, without looking at me, he said, what you are thinking now is cowardly. He said promise that you are never going to do that. I didn't answer him and he took his hand and he turned my head towards him and he said I want your promise now. And I promised him. And I remembered it during the working in the coal trucks. There were trains going by. I didn't know if they were going to Auschwitz or whatever, and I remember sort of the tracks beckoning in the moonlight and I thought, you know, it would be over very quick. One jump and one pain and that's going to be it because it was so dreadful there. And at one moment I think I really came fairly close. I felt a very strange pain in my neck. Anyway, obviously I didn't do it. So...when things were really very very hard in Matzdorf we worked in the swamp one days and I think that was really one of my lowest hours, when...we had a lager fuhrer in there who was the exact opposite of Mrs. Keegler. She was maybe eighteen years old, sort of an over-blown thing and she was wearing rings on every finger and uh and her great joy was to have a little wagon, like a child's wagon, and she had us pull her around in that wagon. She was having a whip about it...I mean, you can't imagine the calibre of or the intelligence of that person. And all of a sudden she came with somebody else, with a man, and they said...they were calling numbers. You see we all had numbers, of course. And they were calling numbers and I was working next to Yelda and heard them call her number, and I sort of looked up. I must have been dazed, and she pointed and the lager fuhrer and said you idiots. Don't you even know your own numbers, and Yelda pointed to me and she said that is her number. I didn't understand what she was doing. She obviously wanted to get me out from whatever it was, so the lager came and naturally slapped me and she said don't you even know your own number, you idiot and so I...and since they called my real number and we didn't know what was happening or maybe Yelda...I'm I'm really not quite sure on that, but what happened was as we came to the camp, there was Director Keller from Waldenheim. Also I have an interesting thing to tell you about him. And Yelda fell to her knees and she said my sister, you don't have her number, something like that, and he looked at me and he says I know you. You worked on four looms. You're coming along. They needed more people for uh working on looms in another camp called Landeshutz (ph) and this is how I got out of Matzdorf and Yelda was on it too and we got loaded on a truck and we went to Landeshutz which was the other, the sister camp. You see ___ if they had crossbars behind the open Landeshutz to Matzdorf and one more ___ and when we got there, who would be there but Frau Keegler was in charge of that camp, so that was like a homecoming. So this is how...I had one incident with Keller. He called me into his office once and I just remember this most incredible thing. There was that hugh hugh room or at least to me it seemed hugh with a single carpet and a desk on it and he sat alone at the desk and what struck me is that probably in a room of that size, fifty of us slept. You know, I think that...and he had a letter in his hand and he said to me you have smuggled out a letter from the camp _____. I said I never smuggled a letter. I said I have written some letters and and when I glanced over it I saw...I had an uncle in Turkey who was in the textile business because, you know, most people from Beilitz were in the textile, and my unc...and I gathered that he knew my uncle because it was a letter later on my uncle told me he had written to him.

Q: Who had written to who?

A: My uncle had...when he found out in what camp I was, had written to my, to Keller about me because he had that thing in his...Keller looked at me and he asked me a number of questions. Interesting thing was that apparently my uncle had sent a package and they encouraged me to write for more packages. The packages apparently contained chocolate and things which were not obtainable, which I never saw. They said the package must have been ripped up but it looked in a very sturdy wooden box but I was only too happy to write to my uncle that I received the packages I was told in very good order because apparently they wanted those things but this way I knew that my uncle was...I mean I knew my uncle was safe. He was in Turkey but that he knew where I was. Anyway getting back to the thing...of course we came to Landeshutz which like heaven by comparison with Matzdorf. Uh only in Landeshutz we then faced an...another difficulty. And that difficulty was that we worked the night shift only. So you know, we didn't see any light of day except, you know, uh if you got up during the day you you could and we worked there from probably a year or maybe even longer, on the night shift, but you know Frau Keegler was there. Things got worse there because there was very little food but uh she she went on in the same vein that she was before, you know.

Q: Tell us a little bit more about Landeshutz and Frau Keegler...

A: Uh for instance, you know, if somebody was ill, if somebody got ill, you know, there were not the things which happened in other camps, sent to Auschwitz or beatings or things like that. Uh you got some sort of care or understanding or it was...things were covered for you a bit, you know, as far as work was concerned. Uh she tried to to get vegetables. I don't know what rations there were, you know, but it it whatever was so-called coming to us and believe me things were uh laughable but we got it. Uh I remember when this one thing that I always tell young people. Uh you know they knew of the Jewish holidays and there was one Yom Kippur when they marched us out and told us about the holidays and told uh that if anybody would be foolish enough to fast that that would be construed as sabotage and sabotage was punishable by death, and everybody fasted and uh we were given noodles and sugar and nobody touched it and I think you know those are the things that I think future generations should know and to me this was...and I remember then that night when we got our miserable smelling vegetables or whatever it was, there was such a feeling of sanctity, I think almost holiness, you know, and they really jumped. She tried to to see that we you know if if we didn't...everybody worked with uh uh you know al...almost with with such fervor and things that we couldn't falter. And I think that without such a oneness, such a...I saw so much nobility of spirit in the camps which somehow I wish would be better recorded, you know, when people reached out, you know...somebody had a birthday so uh we would uh save...on Sunday we had margarine, a little margarine on the bread, so you know you would cut off some of the bread and scrape the margarine and and give it to the person on the bread that she would have a lot of margarine on on her piece of bread. On Hanukkah, we knew it was

Hanukkah and that was still under Mrs. Keegler, and she was busy celebrating...Hanukkah and Christmas are together...you know, and she closed an eye to that sort of thing. We uh made a menorah (ph) out of potatoes and uh of course we knew that you know we couldn't light ____ but we made a menorah out of potatoes and I I still have the things which I wrote about the story about Hanukkah which we sang. I would like to translate it and give it to you. I had a wonder...if I may skip for one minute just to make a happier thing...when I went to Israel for the first time in 1961 I my friends surprised me. I knew of three that were in Israel but actually ten showed up and I was the eleventh, and they got out of the elevator in Tel Aviv, singing a song which we had written for the first Hanukkah in camp, and we carried the menorah which I naturally have now, a beautiful old silver menorah that they give me in memory of the menorah which we made out of the potatoes, and you know when you made it out of potatoes it meant you didn't eat that night because, you know, you didn't have potatoes. You can imagine what that menorah means when my husband kindles the lights and we see our grandchild reflected in that...it's truly _____. Uh so you know, that was possible under Frau Keegler and one of the things that we did was Yelda and I dressed as grandmothers and you know, under the looms which we worked there was sort of a white powdery substance. We put it on our hair to grey and uh and we had a performance between the bunks under one naked electric light and see the faces in the bunks, you know. What we did is we started out with uh you know there were two grandmothers and everything, and comes to the ____ and ____ says oh _____. That's how how it started out and then we of course predicted a brilliant future for everyone and then our two granddaughters came to listen to us. Strangely enough the person who played my granddaughter...her name is Hilda Steinhart Goldschmidt (ph). She lives in Israel. Her son was one of the heroes of the Six Day War. Hilda never lived to have a grandchild and so the one who played her granddaughter did not survive and our granddaughters listened to our tale of the past and uh I'll say it in German. The exit line on that was uh _____. Do you understand German?

Q: Translate it.

A: Uh come and look. I'll show you my newest _____, you know, what the granddaughter says..._____, OK. Then the _____, because old people uh exaggerate so much and then we see them exiting. Now mind you we were eighteen years old at the time and we say to each other, _____. Dear children, let us just say that uh humans endure more than they think they could. And I think somehow uh considering how how young we were, we must have touched the core of our existence, the hope that someday to live in a world where our children and grandchildren would live, but best of all to live in such a climate where they will not believe our tales of the past. And that was possible under Frau Keegler. I mean she didn't exactly hear the performance, you know, and and we would sing songs in which we would say, you know, would make probably sound like a summer camp there you know for her ears and and then we would throw in a few things in Polish, you know, which were exactly not meant for her ears, but but by and large uh that part in contrast of uh...of course you know we were fortunate, quote, unquote, that

we were taken early yet, you know, before Auschwitz was in its full ____ aspect of the...because after that people didn't go to working camps anymore. OK. Briefly uh and finally Landeshutz was liquidated and we went to the most miserable and bitter camp called Gruenberg (ph) in _____. Uh Gruenberg was an enormous camp. Uh its factory was one of the most beautiful in Germany in as much that it boasted the most beautiful collection of roses surrounding the factory. It was direct contradiction of the beauty the ____ was in. Uh I don't remember his name now...we called him LaLouche (ph). I will have to remember his name. That was the most brutal, sadistic uh...I don't know if he was director but he was one of the people there. He wore a signet ring on his hand and and he would jump like a cat and beat his victim until blood showed, mostly beat the faces. He would have sort of a glazed look on his face. I don't know if...I tried to suppress the feeling...we called him Lalouche. He was a beast. Uh things changed very drastically then. I still worked in uh for a very little time in the weaving factories, but pretty soon they had very little raw material for that and I was moved into what was considered sentence of death...spin____...spinning. Uh we were spinning fabrics or rather threads which came from raw materials which...the raw material consisted of clothing which came from Auschwitz. It came to a place called _____. _____ are hugh machines which sort of shred that. Uh it was not difficult to imagine that some of the clothes belonged to our parents. Uh I worked most of the time on the night shift there and I remember when whenever the the horror of some of that became overwhelming, one or at least I played a game. I perfected it. And that was to imagine my homecoming, with all the details being there including the sort of things that we had long sold but it was the miracle of freedom would always be there. In any event, the most dreaded thing on in Gruenberg was that...I'm not quite sure now if it was every four or every six weeks...we would go to a doctor's office to be x-rayed because tuberculous was rampant and whoever displayed anything was immediately sent to Auschwitz, so you had to leave some life, usually between four and six weeks...I don't remember now if it was four or six weeks. Uh there was something there with those x-rays. I uh did a thing which I will always regret. Uh the last day that I was with my brother, we had to go to the _____ which was something that like the Jewish Federation, you know, when he did his registering, and we uh next to it was the ruins of the temple and we climbed over the debris and we sat there for a moment and one column of the eastern wall stood un...undisturbed and everything else was in ruin and Arthur picked up a little stone and he handed it to me and he said just look at that column and always remember that our people will survive. And he give me the stone, and I made a little sack of it and I carried it on my neck, and when we went to to x-rays I took it off and I had it in my pocket and I don't know...it was later probably...I think it was on the death march that I lost it. And that was the one thing that I would...you know, pictures survived because I had them in my boot, but I lost that piece of stone. Anyway, this was about Gruenberg. Gruenberg was a miserable camp. There was a lot of people being sent to Auschwitz. And and then see we knew that things were going bad with the war because there were uh not bombings but we had uh sirens were blowing every so often and uh we had to stop working. There was no electricity, and they were going crazy being vicious. Everybody there was incredibly bad. They made us stand outside for for hours on appell, you know. And uh if a piece of bread flew over the fence, which it once

did, everybody was beaten and to say who who got it. I'm proud to say about our people that nobody gave away the culprit. We all knew who it was, and I think that this is that...you know, uh what has troubled me so much that I have read some of the accounts that people say how cruel people were, how they stepped on each other, or they make it sound like it was like a snake pit that people ____ for survival. Look, I don't know what happened in other camps, and this is why, you know, I have always used my maiden name on everything that I have written _____. I would say that people behaved in the most incredible manner imaginable by and large. And I think that this would be something that cannot be emphasized enough. It was in Gruenberg that Yelda once found a raspberry in the gutter on the way to the factory. She carried it in her pocket all day long and presented it to me that night on a leaf which she plucked through the barbed wire, had washed it, and gave it to me as a present. I asked her to take a little bit of a bite and she wouldn't. One single raspberry. A total possession. She gave it to a friend. There were other acts like that, many. They unfortunately are not recorded. And I think this is probably the greatest tragedy of them all. The nobility and the love that was felt. Anyway when things got really bad, you know, you sort of knew when things are going bad for the Germans, they're probably going to finish us. When things are going good for them or well for them I should say, uh they aren't going to let us go. I know we will forever be slave, you know. It sort of varies what is going to happen, and that became our obvious in January of 1945 where one day uh we knew...we were told we were not going to go to the factory any longer, to gather our meager belongings of whatever that was. Uh the night between the 28th and 29th of January, with great commotion and suddenly the doors opened. The camp, you know...we were then about two thousand girls. An additional transport of two thousand came from Auschwitz. They told us they had walked for I don't know how long from Auschwitz and we were going to go on a march the following morning. Destination later on we heard Orianienberg. Orianienberg was a murder camp also, small enough known near Berlin which fell into the hands of the Allies when General Eisenhower made his swift move on Berlin and we started to march now to to...the death march, 29th of January. I remember I had a terrible cold. I was coughing terribly. Uh we were told to assemble in four abreast. Was Yelda, Suzie and Leisle (ph). Leisle was probably the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She sort of...she moved like a deer, had hugh brown eyes, _____. She and Suzie were were sort of like sisters as Yelda was and I, you know, but the four of us together. Lei...Leisle was from _____ from Czechoslovakia and Suzie was from Czechoslovakia and Yelda and I from Beilitz and the four of us sort of formed friendships, you know. Leisle was the sort who looked after me. I would say oh, it's raining today. Do you think I should wear my green raincoat? And she would say no, wear the navy blue one and have you been to the garden to pick up apples yet. I mean she would fall into any imaginary game and I remember that morning very vividly. You know there's such scenes in Dr. Zhavigo (ph) when you see this incredible uh almost like a wasteland of white...it was freshly covered snow. The snow, it had snowed during the night and the whole thing in front of the camp in effect...it was all all covered with snow and uh we were assembled and and they lifted their whips and forward, march. And I remember Yelda said to me, she said I don't know how you're going to make it. We'll all make it. And I was coughing so hard and we

started the first step and I remember taking that step and I remember saying to myself this is the last chapter. But you know, I never had any doubt that we'll make it. And Yelda was to my left, Leisle next to me and Suzie on the extreme right. And I'm the only one left. I think the march is documented in I'm sure many other stories. (Pause) It was unspeakable. I had my skiing boots. I was the best equipped because I had my boots. It...(pause)...at first we still had a little bit to eat that we took along and hoarded. We marched I don't know how many miles a day. We came to rest sometimes in in a barn. A lot of...we stopped in a camp called _____ where blessedly a few of our girls escaped. I didn't. Uh people were shot continuously. If somebody stepped out of line, then you would see snow being red and there through the forest, beautifully covered with snow and birds chirped sometimes and uh we were marching. Everyday the number got smaller and then we came (sniffing) to a place called Flossenberg and in Flossenberg, Yelda was already very sick. Leisle, Suzie and I were still going pretty strong. One time we had nothing to eat so we started eating snow which was a terrible thing to do because the more you eat, the more thirsty you are. And of course then diarrhhrea and all was rampant. Uh when we left one morning, one time they uh put us outside. They would spray us with water and then they would herd us, literally hundreds into a small _____ and everybody started to perspire, put us out again and pneumonia was just like that (snapping fingers)...people died like flies. Then one morning we were told, for example, we were going to leave there. I remember Yelda was frantic. She said that's going to be the end. I don't want to leave. And I said if we are so much better off out in you know in the open. Maybe we'll have a better chance. And all of a sudden came in an incredible announcement, that President Roosevelt died. Then I knew it was too late to run because you know we reconstructed at the time was and jubilation broke out, that all the enemies of the Fuhrer will perish in such a manner. It was a horrible blow, horrible. But we found something that day which sort of compensated us a little for that. We found a wrapper of margarine and there was still some little vestiges of margarine stuck to it, so we licked it dry. We thought we'll certainly get very strong. And things got very bad from then on. Yelda was really very, very bad. And one night we slept in...we all used to sleep outside and uh it started to snow and sort of reminded me of the story, you know, there's little _____ and went around that everybody don't sleep, get up, because if you fall asleep and it started snowing, you know, you'll never wake up. Some people said it's the best thing we can do is fall asleep like that, and uh then one...we came to an orchard and before we came to that orchard sort of something incredible happened. Oh yes...one time before that, because I thought Yelda was so sick, I said to her well we heard, you know...we saw a lot of people on the road already...it was an evacuation and people were on wagons sort of similar to when the war started, you know. And those people were running away from the front, and we heard somebody talking in a similar dialect, German dialect, that we had, so we concocted a whole sort of story, that we will run away in the next thing, and we will say that we, you know, will take our _____ and we would say that we were with our mother on the on the wagon and we got lost, you know, and that we are from Beilitz because we had a similar dialect and of course with names like Yelda and Gerda you know, it was...and we we really had a whole thing how we are going to do it and Leisle and and Suzie were doing something similar, and we said our father was in

the Wermarcht and in order to get the numbers if we felt you know _____, we used our house numbers and 1939 when the war...had to make it a long number that, you know, if they asked, so they will see that we tell the truth. And we came into that little forest where we rested, and uh sort of took a signal to each other that we are going to stay there when they say everybody assembled. And suddenly Yelda looked up at me and she said I'm afraid. And I was going to say come on, you know...and I didn't. And when we got out of the forest, they rounded up fourteen girls, some of our best friends were in the forest and we saw them all being shot. Right then and there I decided no matter what happens I'm never going to run away. I'll go to the end whatever the end is, but I'm not going to attempt to run away, you know, because we've had people already running and, you know, and uh the Gestapo, the SS was not too much in charge and, you know, it would be it would be OK, but we made a pact until then I said we're never going to run away. We were just saved by by her not, by her saying, you know, don't run. And we...it was either that day or the next day...I don't remember, an incredible thing happened. People were running in the streets and threw bread at us. And so we had bread and that night we rested in an orchard. It was again it was snow...it started to...it was spring already. It was April and this was after President Roosevelt's uh death...it was something like maybe the third week in April. And uh I told Yelda to watch the bread, to hold on to it. She was really very funny, already at this point. And my very dear friend uh ____ ran away and she survived. She's in in Detroit. That's quite a story to tell you about her...how I found, how we found each other after the war. And uh what we didn't realize was that we had crossed over to Czechoslovakia. And those were the Czech people who were throwing bread and you see, if I would have known that I would have stayed because they would have hidden us. We would not be, you know, because if you could make it and went to a barn or something, very possibly so the German farmers turned the girls over to be killed. But never in Czechoslovakia...the Czech people threw us things and then there was a wagon and they threw something. It landed and it was an egg, and I was sure that that egg is going to make Yelda get well. Hadn't seen an egg in years and years. And Yelda didn't even feel like having it. And then one night we were again out in a meadow...snowing or raining...and a very dear friend of mine...her name is _____ Keller...she lives in Israel...came by and she brought two potatoes. I don't know where she found it. And I remember I devoured mine. I was so hungry and Yelda had the other one and Yelda said I'm not hungry. I just couldn't believe it that she wasn't hungry. And she said to me you eat it. And I said maybe she'll feel better later, so I kept it and said I'll hold it for you. (Pause) She said she was thirsty, and I went to try to get water for her, and an SS man came and kicked her and she said why. (Pause) And then I tried to catch some water in my hand for her. (Pause) Then she said something incredible. She said I'm not angry at anyone. I hope no one is angry at me. And then she said to me, you are going to survive. And she said if my parents survived, don't tell them how I died. (Pause) (Crying) And then she said something else. She said to me you have to promise me that you are going to go on for one more week. A week was a very long time. And she said promise. And I said I'll try. When daylight broke, and I had...there were some, there were some blossoms on the trees and I had gone earlier and I had gotten a blossom for her to smell, and I showed her the blossom...it was all dead, probably from her fever, and when

the sun got up, it was over for her. And we were told to bury the dead of that night. I couldn't do it. It's strange...I know she was buried because my friend told me under a tree. I remember the most minute details and places, names of cities and towns where we went through...I still and I cannot remember the name of the place where she died. I can't. And sometimes I wonder perhaps it is so that that every tree sort of reminds me of her. You know, she's become over the years my my alter ego, my ___ with my childhood. And every year on the 29th of April I sort of step back and _____ did for me some incredible things that happened on the 29th. In the past how many years, forty-eight years...no, forty-five, forty-five years. Forty-nine...from 1945. I didn't see Suzie and Leisle. I didn't know where they were because by that point I couldn't walk very well myself and I don't know now if it was a few days later, whatever, they really descended on us, and with tremendous vengeance, screaming it was all our fault because the Fuhrer is told...you know, Hitler is dead. We felt if it was true then either they're going to kill us now or maybe we will survive. It was uh we came to a place in Czechoslovakia...things were really quite crazy, you know. A lot of people were on on the roads again and uh soldiers running away and but we were still with the group. We had one woman SS with us and a couple of men. I don't know to to how few our group had uh...it diminished enormously from thousands to a handful, maybe a little over a hundred and I I think I was quite ill already, you know, because...I know, I mean I was ill anyway and and terrible upset about, you know, Yelda's death and uh one evening we came to rest...was a place...oh, a place in Czechoslovakia. We were in Czechoslovakia at that point, of course. And and that place was called _____ which I only realized that later. Uh we were sort of outside. It was quite quiet suddenly and uh a truck came. We were going to go some place and my friend...oh yeah, and one SS woman came and told _____ Keller...the one who's in Israel...to take off my boots. Apparently she wanted...she saw I had good boots. She liked my skiing boots. And _____ said to me, I'll come, I'll hide you, and she hid me in some _____, pretended, you know, there wasn't...she never took them off. And then _____ said to me, uh and a truck came and the truck was going to take us someplace. I have no idea where. And she said you better get on that truck, so that she shouldn't see you. And I suddenly said to her, you know, I really want to stay here. I don't know what but I'm in no hurry, you know, whatever. And it sort of was a feeling that it is probably going to happen now. They're going to kill us and I uh it was sort of at that point quite warm. After all the snow, you know, it was a balmy night and I thought to myself it's all over. I'm going to start thinking what it would be like for a night like that being home, being in the garden with my parents, so if they kill me that's the memory I want. And the people, trucks came and some of our girls went on it. I didn't. We waited and waited and waited but the truck did not come back and fortunately I heard that on that truck uh there was one of the SS women who was pregnant apparently. I didn't know that. And uh I don't know if they were shooting, and she was hurt and one of the SS men then turned and killed fourteen girls on that truck. Fourteen. No, I think it was fourteen before. You know, it's funny how how you play with numbers...fourteen or was it twenty-five. I really don't know but a goodly number of girls. And we stayed there and uh and they came back for us and took us into sort of a barrack or a hole or something like that and they locked us up there. We heard a lot of commotion. There was uh shooting and there were planes

overhead and everything, and then the story had it uh that they uh attached a time bomb. It was strange...we just went my husband and I to a reunion of the 5th Division Medical Corps who were our liberators and they spoke about that bomb and how the _____ was there. I mean, you know, for a while we thought you know maybe they just threatened it was a bomb or something but apparently that was so, and they barricaded the doors with chains and things and we, you know, we sort to moved. They told that we are going to be killed and I think before that there was some shooting. I remember some shooting was going on like it was here and there. Nothing nothing happened...just a little skin, and uh you know, at that point I must confess that I'm not absolutely clear. Must have been quite ill already or or whatever but I remember sort of that night it was quite turbulent and I remember them curling up and sort of uh the SS left and they left their coats and things behind and I sort of went and and tried to sleep there. A lot of people were very ill. We knew the Americans were coming. I saw two the night before, and then there was the crazy night and in the morning I asked where...I asked Leisle...she was...this was the biggest irony of them all. They were shooting from planes and Suzie was hit in the foot. Not Suzie, Leisle. And she was lying there on the straw and I asked her where Suzie was. It was morning and she told me that Suzie went to find some water at the pump and I went to look for her and there she was, lying in the mud and she was dead. And I didn't want to go back to tell Leisle that. So I I went out. You see, I had seen...there were two Americans the night before. I spoke to them sort of. But that that is very vague to me. But I remember all the things of that morning and that was after I had found Suzie and I couldn't tell Leisle so I went outside and I stood sort of in the doorway. It was a brilliant morning. Oh yes. I have to tell you that I saw that morning on a steeple of the church a homemade white flag of peace. And I remember that was the first time I cried in many many months. It was a strange thing that I remember that my tears...you know, it's funny because now I cry at the slightest provocation. I cry when I see a dog or cat or something like that but didn't cry for many years. And uh and I was standing there and saw and all of a sudden I saw (pause) a strange car coming down the hill, no longer green, not bearing the swastika, but a white star. It was sort of a mud-splattered vehicle but I've never seen a star brighter in my life and two men sort of jumped out, came running towards us and one came toward where I stood. He was wearing battle gear. I have to think...you know, his helmet was this mesh over that and he was wearing dark glasses and he spoke to me in German and he said, does anybody here speak German or English, and I said I speak German. And I felt that I could tell him we are Jewish and didn't know if you would know what the star means or anything, but you know and I uh I was a little afraid to tell him that but I said to him, we are Jewish, you know. And he didn't answer me for quite a while. And then his own voice sort of betrayed his own emotions and he said, so am I. I was...it was the greatest hour of my life. And then he asked an incredible question. He said, may I see the other ladies? You know, was _____ we have been addressed for six years and then to hear this man. He looked to me like a young guard. I have to tell you I weighted sixty-eight pounds. My hair was white. As you can imagine, I hadn't had a bath in years. And this creature asked for the other ladies. And I told him that most of the girls were inside, you know. They were too ill to walk and he said won't you come with me. And I said sure. I didn't know what he meant. He held the door open

for me and let me precede him and in that gesture he start me to feel ____ and that young American today is my husband. (Pause) And that's my story. (Pause) I was very ill after that. They established a hospital. I was in the hospital for quite a while. I was told I was going to die. Leisle unfortunately died a few days later of the wounds that she sustained. I was in the hospital for quite a long time. He told me...he asked me if he could do something for me, and I said if you could write to my uncle in Turkey and tell him I was alive and see if he had any news about my parents and my brother, and I didn't see him for quite a long time. You see, the following day the war was over too, and how I found out about it when we went to the...they was making a hospital out of a school house and uh I remember the incredible things. As a matter of fact, as I just told you, we had a reunion with the Medical Corps of the Division...

Q: We're going to have to interrupt. We have about a minute. And you've come to liberation. Tell us in a minute...your liberator was your husband. Tell us uh...you came to America and you have children.

A: Yes, we were married a year later in France. My husband came back after being uh discharged from the Army. He came back. We were married in Paris and I came with him to the United States. I landed here on the 30th of August, 1946. Came to Buffalo, New York on the 13th of September. Have three children and eight grandchildren. Do I have one minute to make one statement? I wrote in a preface of my first book something which is very dear to me. It goes like that. As I finished the last chapter of my book, I felt at peace at last. I have discharged a burden and paid a debt to many nameless heros resting in their unmarked graves. I'm haunted by the thought that I might be the only one left to tell their story. Happy in my new life, I've had the last sentence of my past. I've written my story with tears and with love and in the hope that my children, safely asleep in their cribs, should not awaken from a nightmare and find it to be reality. I have just put my youngest grandchild, three weeks old, to her crib. It is with this prayer in my heart for all children everywhere...I hope the world will remember all children.

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW