

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Gerta Blachman Wilchfort

July 3, 1989

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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Gerta Blachman Wilchfort, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on July 3, 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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GERTA BLACHMAN WILCHFORT

July 3, 1989

Q: Would you tell me your name please and when you were born?

A: My full name today is Gerta Wilchfort. I was born on the 24th of April in 1923 in Breslau. Breslau is in _____ today and . . .

Q: What is your maiden name? What was your family name?

A: Blachman.

Q: Blachman, OK. Tell me, you were in Breslau when you were born. Tell me what it was like. Did you grow up in Breslau?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell me about growing up in Breslau. What was it like? What did your parents do? What was it like to be a child in that town?

A: Well, I was an only child. Had no brothers and sisters and I had my grandparents there. I had my mother's both parents and my father's mother. And we had friends. I went to school. Went to, to four years of uh public school and then uh to up to four years you have to make a decision what kind of schooling you want. You have to, you can go either go on to the _____ unit to the public school or you can go to the gymnasium (ph) and there were also two choices. You can go to a humanistic gymnasium where they learn Latin and Greek and little mathematics and little science or you could go to the other school where I went. We had, we started right away with French and the sciences. No Latin or Greek but French, modern languages, French and later English. But you had to go to school very little was exams, even then at ten years of age we had a whole day of exam to be able to get into this gymnasium. So I passed that exam and I went to the Catholic school. That was already uh shortly before Hitler came to power so I went to the Catholic school for girls only. And uh, I think right after, I don't know, must have been right afterwards that Hitler came to power and the anti-Semitism started right away and then I had trouble with some children. Some children stayed with me and became very close friends and said don't worry. But others started right away, I don't want to sit next to the Jewish girl. I don't want to the Jews smell and I don't want to sit with her and they had uh religious instructions. You know in the Catholic school especially they had a lot of religion and of course we didn't go. We had still a religious, a Jewish uh teacher come to the school and we had extra, different uh religious instruction. So that set us apart uh right away and uh, but in the beginning it wasn't too bad you know. In in 1933, '34 it wasn't too bad. As a matter of fact I was a pretty good athlete in sports, you know, sports and Hitler put a lot of emphasis on sports so, I think in 1935 or so they uh had like little Olympics for young people and all over Germany they had to come and do a certain program and if you passed that program you got a certificate. So that swimming in

clothes and a uh certain distance and we had to jump from a ten meter board and had to run and all these things. And when you passed it I got a little, I got a certificate signed by Hitler that I passed that thing, so it wasn't you know, and the Catholic school, the the uh principal was a lady and she was very much for us and helped us overcome these things. But after a couple of years or so she called me into the office or called my parents and said they are no longer able to keep us in the Catholic school. I either have to leave the school altogether or go to a Jewish school. So luckily we had in Breslau a very good Jewish gymnasium. We had actually two Jewish schools and this gymnasium was accredited like any other school like here the Jewish Hebrew Academy that is accredited now. And I I knew a little bit of Hebrew but I was always very ambitious so I, I had, I took tutoring to get better in Hebrew so I could be up to par with the other kids who had started there. We had a lot of Hebrew, a lot of _____ but all the other subjects _____ I started where my English we had a very good English teacher and he was a stickler for uh grammatic and we learned very well the irregular verbs and all those things so we had a very good schooling there. That was only two years I think you know but it was very intensive and very good. And uh I was a member of the Zionist youth movement there _____ which, I don't know and uh we had meetings and we had outings but I was the private, I was the single daughter so my father was always protective and I couldn't go very much to outings and to things but I went to meetings and uh we talked about youth _____ going to Israel and to _____, to you know these little cans where we were prepared to live in kibbutz in Israel but uh they wouldn't give me the permit and the permit and so finally I, one day I said I have to go Berlin to the headquarters of the Zionist movement and see what's the trouble. So I went there all by myself. We had family in, in Berlin that I stayed with, and here they told me they can't give me the certificate, can't give me the permission to go because of my eyes. The eyes have to I am very nearsighted and uh they are afraid that if I do agricultural work, if I stoop very much that I'm going to have, my retina is going to uh depart, separate from the eye and they wouldn't give me, they have to have consultations and so forth. So I couldn't, I couldn't go. So when I had to leave the school and my parents knew that we're going to have to leave Germany you know pretty soon, in Germany was the custom that almost every, every middle-class family had a maid. So the kids would grow up, we didn't do very much. We didn't know very much of household work and cooking and things like that, so my mother said you have to learn because we're certainly not going to have a maid any longer. So they sent me to _____ Hausen (ph). That was a Jewish household school near Munich and uh, I went there from in April, the German school year goes from April to April, not from September like here. I went in April and I came back for some vacation in the summer . . .

Q: What year is this?

A: This was in 1938, I guess. Yeah, '38.

Q: OK. You are how old?

A: Fif... I was born in '23 so fifteen, fifteen, sixteen. And us that was clear across Germany near Munich. From Breslau to Munich was quite a ... and uh I went back in September and in early November uh they had this uh _____ in Paris on this on this ambassador _____ so you know what happened there. On the ninth of November we were sitting near the radio and we were listening and we knew something terrible is going to happen but we didn't know what. And we were there, all young kids, young girls and uh so sure enough on the tenth of November that year the police came and the SS came to wake us up at six o'clock in the morning. Out, out, out of bed. You couldn't take anything only the clothes you know, we were there for a year. We had all our belongings there clothes and books and everything. They said no, no, nothing. Get out, out of the thing. So here we stood outside and uh the uh direct... director and the teachers wanted us to go home but there was no money, so they took us back to Munich and we stayed at the uh at the uh, uh station till they got the money together. We were maybe fifty, sixty girls from that school to send and get the railroad tickets to send everybody home. So by the time I got on the train was already afternoon and I was the only one from Breslau at this time so I was all alone on that train and really heard, heard only fragments of what happened. So I had to stay over and change trains on a little town _____ so I got there about ten at night and I was afraid to stay alone on the in the station so I went to the nearest hotel and got myself a room and told them at five o'clock they should wake me up and bring me here back and went back to the station and back on that train. And here comes a whole bunch of SS people and sit in the same compartment with me. And start talking and telling the stories about the Kristallnacht how they were, uh how they smashed all the windows and how the synagogues were burning and how many people they arrested and beat up and so uh I got more and more scared. What will I find at home? Will I find my parents? Will I find, how will I ... so I got to this, to Breslau about two in the afternoon and uh uh the station was right in the middle of town so I took the trolley car and I saw already all the Jewish stores, all the stores the glass was on the _____ and here we passed by the synagogue. The synagogue was still not burning but smoldering and I saw what happened. And I came home. Nobody was home. So, but after a while my mother came and told me that they were arresting all the men so my father had been hiding at his mother's house because there was no men in that house and my grandfather too was not arrested, but uh most Jewish men were arrested that night and many in smaller towns were beat up but I, I stayed home then for the winter and we knew then and there that the time has come to leave. Before that time, if I may go back, I was fifteen like I say, fourteen, fifteen, and I wasn't so emerged in in daily living or making a living and I always knew that we're going to have a terrible end in Germany. I couldn't figure out, you know, that they're going to burn us and kill us but I always had the feeling that they had in mind to to to have us die somehow. I always thought they're not going to give us any food coupons anymore and they're going to starve us to death and I begged my parents, let's get out, let's get out, and my father had a very good boss and he unfortunately loved him and said as long as you're with us we're going to keep you and you're going to make a living and he he put in a non Jew into the office and did all kinds of things to keep him there and uh that of course was wrong. So by the time they realized that time was up for us it was already pretty late and no other country took in Jews. The only possibility at this time

was to go to Shanghai and uh my parents didn't want to go to Shanghai. So they managed, we had a cousin in Cuba and after many weeks of communications, we, she sent us a so called visa to go to Cuba and my parents purchased us seat (ph) uh the the cabin space on the Havana (ph) American line, on the St. Louis, and we were supposed to leave on I think was the 13th of May. Now to be on the personal side, on the 24th of April I had my sixteenth birthday. And my parents thought well you know, I had such terrible youth, at least she wants to make me a little party and I had a friend and he said uh can I bring another friend of mine. And my mother said yes, and I had some very good girl friends that uh my parents are friends with their parents from way back from World War I already, and so we had a little party, and he brought this boy. And he had come from _____ so and that's how I met him. That was my future husband. (PAUSE) So a couple of days later these friends, these, they were two sisters and their parents left for Shanghai. And uh this young man _____ Marcos (ph) said we'll go together to the station to say goodbye to them, and I met him again and he gave me, had given me a book so I went up and I met his mother. I went up to his apartment and I went and met his mother for the only time. And he told me that uh he wants to leave but his parents are quite old already and his father got quite beaten in this smaller town in _____ during the Kristallnacht and he won't be able to go anywhere. So his mother wrote, he was also an only child, his mother will bring him to _____ to the Belgian border and he will try to go illegally over the border to Belgium. He has a, he had a girlfriend that he met the year before in in some camp and uh her parents have written that they will be willing to take him as a border and he should come to Brussels. They are in Brussels already and he is going to try to go there illegally. So we said goodbye. I was going to Cuba and he was going to Brussels, and we were never going to see each other again. So we went uh ... a week later or so we said goodbye to my grandparents and uh I must say that to this day that affects me terribly to think back at how we said goodbye to those old people. You know, today I'm as old at this time, they were really old when you were sixty five or sixty you know, and my grandmother was a tiny little woman and she was not well and they just couldn't ... my parents thought we can send for them later on. Otherwise they probably wouldn't have left them. But there was no way at that time to take them along so we had to say goodbye to them and that was a terrible terrible moment. And my other grandmother also. So uh we went to the, to Hamburg . . .

Q: Just before you get to . . . slow down a little. We have time. Tell us about your your grandparents. Uh they stayed behind?

A: Yes, they stayed behind and...

Q: What happened to them?

A: Well, they were eventually sent to Theresienstadt, this couple, my mother's parents. They were sent to Theresienstadt, but my other grandmother was alone. She was a widow and when she got the order to come to present herself you know to be sent away, she said no, I don't want to do that. I'd rather die peacefully in my kitchen rather than go to this camp

and be killed there. But my other grandparents couldn't do that because they, first of all they were quite religious and they wouldn't commit suicide and uh they lived for each other. They thought they're going to help each other and maybe but and but they both died. I never heard from them. They never came out after the war. But my Grandmother Blachman, my _____, she was quite a lady and she always had her hair done so she had her hair done and she put on a wonderful, her best dress and she sat in a kitchen chair and opened the gas and went that way. People told us that after the war and we only heard about that later. But that was maybe two years later. And my husband's parents, I still have letters from them. They were sent to uh forced labor in Breslau at first after we left and uh it got harder and harder and they had to leave uh live in smaller and smaller apartments and rooms and they finally were sent to Theresienstadt also and never came back. So where was I? Oh, we were going to Hamburg and uh we, we got on this boat and you know, it's one laughing and one crying out because we knew we never going to come back and we never, we didn't know what the future will bring us but on the other hand we were happy that we left as a family and healthy. My parents were so young in 1939. My mother was 38 years old and my father was in his early forties so there was still the future we thought. And uh on the _____ passage, going there was fine. I had a good time. I was sixteen and I had young men friendly and older uh, young men who taught me how to dance which I never did because in the Zionist Youth Movement you don't dance. You don't put on lipstick and you don't do anything but think of working and you know what. I changed and I had a good time. I played ping pong and I but uh everything of course was very innocent then. It's not like today that he was already twenty years old and I was sixteen but he was a gentlemen and . . . So we came to Havana ...

Q: Tell us before we get to Havana, tell us when you first began to suspect that it might not be a pleasure cruise? Did that . . .

A: Well, I personally didn't think of that. (OK) Uh we knew that uh the shipping line had uh asked for return tickets and uh it should have told us something but maybe my parents knew. I never thought about that. As a matter of fact when we uh came into Havana there was a big rush at the uh telegraph office on the boat that uh everybody was you know, the ship money, it was German money that would have been useless afterwards. They wanted to send telegrams send telegrams back home we arrived. But my mother also sent a telegram to her parents arrived safely in Havana. You know, and they didn't know much about this either.

Q: So you have come to Havana.

A: Yeah, we come to Havana. But we didn't really dock. We were out un in the not too far but far enough so we couldn't even see much of Havana. We just saw the silhouette of the buildings and of the harbor and the _____. And they told us to come to the dining room with the passports and the uh the visas and uh to be admitted. And we went to the dining room and they were all sitting there, the officials. The Cuban officials had come aboard and uh they said, well, there are some difficulties or something. We should wait until

tomorrow. So we stayed another night. It was very hot and very sticky and I think we slept that night up on the on deck because it was already unbearably hot and you know, coming from Europe and we are not used to this climate and uh next day, the next day there were all kinds of little boats came from Havana with family. There were lots of families that were uh split up. There were some men that had come out of some German concentration camps that had gone out first and the women and the children had come later when there weren't any places on boats or they had small business to attend to or some reason lots of families were split up. This one family, Matulski (ph), and that uh we befriended on the boat this lady was alone on this boat with three children and her husband was in Cuba already. And the cousin that sent us the uh our visa was of course in Cuba and she came and so a lot of people, relatives and friends came and hired little boats and there's a picture of that in that in the book if you want . . .

Q: Well, let's see your pictures. Let's see yours.

A: My pictures. OK. This is a picture of me with uh with this friend that I was talking about. (OK) And this is a picture on the way to Havana where there was a party on boat uh on board. We had parties at night and this was . . . I think these, this picture is of my parents from Breslau yet, from, from before we left. My father was a very good looking man. (Yes indeed) Yes. So I think it was interesting to see this, this picture of this of these little boats that this was the St. Louis its... itself the dining room was a beautiful dining room and came down the spiral staircase. I felt very glamorous.

Q: We can get, we'll get other pictures.

A: Oh here's the little picture. Here's the picture where the where the relatives came. You see it? And they sent up pineapples and they sent up all kinds of things and there was yelling up and down the you know and we were standing very close on the on the railing and it was you know hard to find the people that there was almost a thousand people on the boat, on the ship. So anyhow it became clearer and clearer that we're not going to land. I mean you don't want to hear this. . .

A: Yes, do. Talk about that. Yes I do.

Q: I mean the, the background of it was . . .

A: No, the background we don't need but your how did it become clear to you that you weren't going to land? How did you know?

A: Because of the time element. You know, we were in Cuba almost a week. We were sitting there in the harbor and we just gave up hope you know that the negotiations will come to an end and uh . . .

Q: Did Captain Shroeder (ph) come and talk to you at all?

A: No, there was a ____ Committee. There were lots of uh prominent people on board, you know Jewish lawyers and uh teachers and people like that. They formed a Committee and they were the in, the in between the people, the passengers and the uh captain and they sent telegrams to Roosevelt and to all over the world and they tried to get you know to get us going but didn't. So I think also the people that came in these little boats uh let us know that it looked pretty bad in Havana itself. And there was some few people, I think twelve people, that had, that were not refugees so to speak, that had regular visas and uh they got off the boat so we knew you know more or less we knew at the end that we're not going to stay. So one good day we just pulled out you know the anc... pulled up the anchor and we left and this is the picture here of this cousin she's standing there. Havana, June '39. She standing at the ____ and crying and in the back you see the St. Louis pulling out.

Q: Describe for me the scene on board as you pulled up anchor.

A: Well, if you can imagine there was a terrible mood. Everybody was very depressed. Few people committed, tried to commit suicide as I think uh the one man he, I think he cut his wrists and they, he was the only one landed because they had to take him to the hospital to to tend to him. I don't know whether he stayed or not. I think he did. He must have been the only one who stayed. But you know, humans are always hopeful. You know, we always cling to the hope something is going to happen. They're not going to let us rot on the ocean. I mean, something had to happen to us. Of course, the fear was that we would go back to Germany. That was the big thing you know. So we the food got worse and worse and the what ever water supply, I mean we had water but we had to be careful and of course the parties were over. No more parties, no more no more fun. We were just sitting and waiting what's going to happen you know and uh here again the Committee tried everything and sent telegrams all over the world trying to get us in but was everyday they had like newsletters printed and put out on board to tell us what's happening and everyday there was another country we were supposed to be going to go, but we never and nothing came about until finally at the we were already well, first we came to the coast of Miami and we thought we could you know I heard later that the captain had agreed that we make some kind of a forced landing or something but we didn't know anything about it. We just saw the uh Coast Guard boats surround us near Miami to make sure that we wouldn't even come close to the boarder, to shore, so that was out. So we saw the lights of Miami. We saw the lights of America and that was it. So we slowly sailed back to Europe and of course behind the you know there were a lot of negotiations going on with United, the United Jewish Appeal and there was a Mr. Tupper in Paris and he finally got it together that we will be divided between Belgium and Holland and France and England. And uh I don't remember very well I was up on deck not near my parents. You know when you're sixteen you don't cling to your parents and so uh when the loudspeaker came on and they announced that the first uh contingent of people will debark in Antwerp uh you know we were out already in the water before Antwerp. And they announced the names you know that was also the work of the Committee they made

the list, the passenger list and they divided the passengers to wherever they wanted. Of course England was already then the preferred country because we knew it was away from Europe you know a little bit and that we had a feeling that would have been the safest, but not everybody could go to England. But my friend, this friend went to England and I never heard from him again. I don't know what happened to him. But we went uh to Belgium. Maybe my mother told them that she had a brother there. I don't know how we came to Belgium, but I ran back to the cabin and my parents were already packing again and uh we debarked in Antwerp. We got off, one of the first ones and then the Paris Match came, the uh newspaper people came and took pictures. Do you want me to show you? (Sure) And uh we were all standing up on, on deck and waiting a man saved his dog, he had to have his dog, and my parents happened to be here they're here. This is my mother and my father. They were standing there, but I was not there. I had been running around. So this was in the Paris Match, and uh you know, was a big story, newspaper story at the time in Europe that this first boat and the people coming. So they put us on a train right away to Brussels and we stayed a couple of nights in a hotel and we were free.

Q: You had papers?

A: Well, they made us sign papers that we were not to work and that we were accepted as refugees but that as soon as the situation will allow us to leave the country, we will leave, we will leave. And we signed to that my parents, we signed to that. And forgot all about it but when the war was over, you know, we had to uh report every six months to the police and they presented us with this signature and with this promise. They hadn't forgotten it. It was just filed away through the war and uh that was one reason why we left again. They didn't pressure us actually but every six months we were presented with this again. (Oh, I see.) After the war. (After the war.) Yes. But we had signed that, we signed anything we didn't even read we were so glad that we were on uh soil and that we were not in Germany and that somebody was going to take care of us more or less. So here we were in Brussels and after, to go back to my private story again, I we walked down the boulevard and I stayed and I looked in the windows and I come and there's the young man and he didn't say anything and I didn't say anything. And I came home to mother and I said, you know, I think I saw _____ Marcos, this young man that came to my birthday party. And he went home and there was somebody sitting there and he said if I didn't know that Gerta went to Cuba I would think I saw her today. And this man says, to Cuba? What boat was she on? And he said, I think it was the St. Louis. So he said yes, you saw her today. I was, I just come off the St. Louis and there was a Gerta Blachman and that was your friend girl, so we met again, and but he had this other girlfriend and but we were good friends and we saw each other off and on. And it was really a big coincidence that we got together again. So we stayed in Brussels and then uh by the time, by this time it was June . . .

Q: What were you doing?

A: Well, we had a very limited budget from the United Jewish Appeal to say the least. And my parents, all we could afford they brought us, this lady brought us to find so called apartments. Well, we were, we had then one big room and a kitchen and the bathroom on the _____ floor that was used by the people on this floor and the people on the other floor and it was not a bathroom either. It was just a toilet and a sink. And we had to have the water from there. There was no running water in this so-called apartment. So my parents let in this one woman on this couch that had to be made up every night and I slept on a cot, the cot in the kitchen, so my mother was very anxious for me to get out of this environment and even though we were not supposed to work, she found me a little job as a children's maid in a very nice high rise apartment where I had my own room and had normal conditions. And I had charge of a little boy that was four years old, three or four years old. And it was away from them but you know, it was better for me. And uh so by uh I was there the whole winter, the whole winter until the 10th of May. I woke up and I heard the noises and there were bombs coming. And I was way up in the _____ you know, in the little room on the top of the tilted roof so I was pretty high up and I heard the I heard the bombs. I went back to my, to the people in this apartment and I said what's happening, what's happening. The Germans attacked Belgium. So the husband was also German-born. They were Jewish. She came from Luxembourg but he was also German-born. But they, you know we were just there a few months and we lived there. We didn't know much what was going on but he knew somebody told him maybe from the police or something that they're going to arrest all the German men. The German Jews or non-Jews but because of the first column of spies. They were afraid of spies so they had orders to arrest all German men and he went to bed. He said he's sick. And he said go and call your parents and tell your father to do the same. And I don't remember anymore that they didn't have a phone I just see myself running through the streets to a for a drugstore for a telephone which was quite far and calling my parents and telling them the same, to do the same. And they wouldn't believe me. They said ah stories are . . . you know. We weren't use to doing things like that. Everything had to be on the up and up. So he didn't do it and two days later they made arrangements. They got into a taxi and they sent me home and...

Q: Who got...who they?

A: This this couple with the little boy. (OK) You know she came from Luxembourg and they went to Luxembourg, or they went away. I mean they saved themselves. I saw them again after the war. They passed, they spent the war in _____ ville. I don't know exactly how they got there but they left everything standing there and they got into a car. I think they had their own car. And they said we can't take you. You go home to your parents. So I see, I remembered going home I think even by taxi because I think by that time the trolley cars weren't even running anymore. And I come home and my mother is there and they had already taken my father. So I never saw my father anymore. They had taken him in the uh to the _____ to you know, where the soldiers live. (A garrison?) A garrison, yes, and they had all these people, all these men assembled there and my friend _____ Marcos had been just sixteen so sixteen was the cutoff age and he was on the street just

walking. He didn't have a toothbrush. He didn't have a shirt. He didn't have anything. They took him off the street. My father they let pack at least a little, you know. They took him off the street and he was with my father and all the other Germans in the garrison. And uh . . .

Q: How did you and your mother handle that?

A: Well, we tried, you know we packed up things and we packed up things _____ and we took it there. We couldn't get in and then they said, the next day they said they going to be transported to south of France and the train leaves on so and so, so we went early in the morning and we saw them marching through the streets. We saw them going to the train. And that was it. So I really wanted they said they're going to take them to south of France away from the war. Well the war accelerated but communication was so bad we didn't know in Brussels that they had attacked _____ line and they to take France. We just thought they just had taked Belgium. You know, there was no television. There was hardly any newspaper at that time and our French wasn't that great. We didn't read the newspaper every day. And we didn't know anything.

Q: You didn't have a radio?

A: Yeah, but I don't know. I, maybe they didn't uh communicate that I'm pretty sure we didn't know. So I persuaded my mother we'll go with _____ you know. Go away. We'll go, try to go to France or try to find my father. So we took the train from Brussels to Antwerp. This is usually; it takes today a half hour. At that time it took maybe three quarters of an hour. There were already really good trains. It took all day and we got to Antwerp it was dark and it was full of glass from the bombs. It was worse there than in Brussels. And uh, but there were we weren't the only ones. There were thousands of refugees you know so they herded us to a convent into the basement and we spent the night there. They gave us shelter and uh they gave us breakfast. And it was a terrible night that we'll never forget. You know, the bombs were flying and uh we were there down in the cellar and uh with hundreds of other people. So in the morning we got up on the street and here again everything was covered with glass and the only way to go to the French border was the tramway, the tramway that went all the way the co... all along the coast from Antwerp I don't remember any more the last station in Belgium, uh, all little resort places that all along the coast and that tramway used to you know connect these little places. So we went to the end of the line till we found a young boy there that had lost his from this Mrs. Matulski (ph) that was with us from the boat and one of the three children she had gone the same route without us knowing it and she was there in the morning waiting for the tramway and she was a very nervous person, boom boom, she was on the tram with the girl and the boy was a little slower and he was standing there, and so we took him along and we eventually found the mother and the other girl and so we stayed together on this trip, on this what we called the _____ and again something personal. When we got out of this tramway even though I was on the St. Louis and we were four weeks on this, on the water, I had never been on the uh on the shore of the of

the ocean. You know, never seen the beach like that on the ocean and it was in evening and I really remember that that was such an incredible sight, and you know, the peacefulness and in the midst of all this uh turmoil and war and running and then there was the ocean, untouched and beach and the sunset and this is something I have never forgotten in all these years. So we tried. We found a place to stay. I was almost a woman. I was you know and the two ladies and the two children and uh they said the French border is closed. No body can go across the border. But we couldn't go back either. We couldn't go back and we couldn't go forward, so we stayed in this little hotel room and waited. Then one day they said, tomorrow they're going to open the border. You can go. So from there to the border was still a ways to walk, but we walked. That was the only, the only way to go. There was no transportation and there were no buses or anything so if you can picture this, there were hundreds, maybe thousands of people walking to the border and they thought across the border will be safe. It's France. So here comes the famous story of my mother's silver fox. We come to the, to the border and you know, we didn't have much luggage. We didn't have anything, you know, but she wanted the silver fox and she had it like just a stole like so when we came to the border and we showed our German papers, he said, oh no, you can't go through here with German papers. You go back. You can't, we won't let you in. So as the and then the people were pushing from the back and there was a young boy with a bicycle and somehow that wonderful silver fox got tangled up in the uh in the wheels of that bicycle and my mother ran after him.

_____, _____, _____, and you know things have sometimes very funny undertones you know. So _____ saved us. The silver fox, and we were all holding hands, and all five of us ran through with the silver fox. Well it wasn't such a wonderful thing you know. It wasn't any different over there than in Belgium. It was exactly the same. There were thousands of people and this bicycle with with uh wheelbarrows pushing their little belongings, with baby carriages, with any way they could you know, go along and bring things. And so we stayed one night in a school house and they had a great big pot in the school yard and they made one big pot of soup and everybody had a spoon went in there and ate and uh was pretty tough you know. And we knew that the Germans are behind us and how can you run away from the German army. I mean the German army was uh on tanks, on trucks and we were on foot. How can, you know, but we walked. We walked and then one day we walked around a highway and I heard, we heard the uh German uh planes over us and that was really the first, the only time I was really really afraid because they they uh machine gunned all the refugees right on this highway and I pulled my mother and said, let's go, and there was a farm house. We didn't even ask can we come in. We just went in. And we, all five, we were always together with this lady with the two children, and uh we stayed there and they let us in and you know, we stayed there a couple of hours and here come the Germans marching in. Now we weren't too thrilled. But we couldn't stay in that house because they didn't have room you know, so after, we stayed a few hours I think and after a while we walked on and there was a like a chateau, like a big castle like, you know, not a castle, castle, but a castle and we went in there and there was an old lady and she was also _____, she said yeah, yeah, I speak a little Flemish and I speak a little German and I speak a little French, and she said, yeah, you can stay here. And uh we stayed maybe one night or

maybe not even a night when the Germans came there too. And they wanted to make the headquarters there, so the headquarters then we had to leave regardless of who we were, but they didn't want any civilians there.

Q: But they didn't stop you because you were Jewish?

A: No, no. They didn't even know that we were Jewish. They didn't know. But uh they had, she had a little house on the premises for the uh servants before, and she said you go and stay there. So we stayed there, and, but there was nothing to eat and we were five people and there was nothing to eat. The little girl went to, into the stable and the chicken coops and she got some eggs but you know it was so much, so my mother said I don't think, they, they are very delirious now with their victory. They walked all over Europe you know. They're not going to do anything horrible and besides I don't want to hide that I'm Jewish. I think we should go and tell them, the Germans. You know, they were officers in this headquarters for the whole region. And so she went and she didn't actually say Jewish. She said we are German refugees she just said and let them figure out what they want to figure out. And we asked, we are two children, three children and we have nothing to eat. Later on maybe you can do something. And they were very polite and very nice and they sent us bread and they sent us all kinds, you know whatever they had rations. And so we stayed there a few days and uh then there were some soldiers that uh

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and uh there was one from Hamburg who was actually a Communist ____ you know from Hamburg, and they were from the waterfront, and he came and he helped us and they raided the uh the uh winery. You know, France has a lot of wine, so instead of water he gave us the wine and the kids drank the wine and we were half drunk after a whole week because there was no water but wine. And that was something. So anyhow after a week of that we said well, what we going to do, you know. So this guy and also that soldier got me a wheelbarrow and he got a bicycle for the young boy and whatever we had we put on the things and started walking again. So we walked . . .

Q: OK. Let's hold it there. Let them change tape, but before they do, did you have false papers, because you would have had to show the Germans something?

A: Not at that time. No.

Q: You had papers that said Juda (ph) on it?

A: They didn't ask us for papers. Not at that time. That was in the very beginning, in 1940, when they were very victorious and very, and they didn't have any uh any plans, any directives to do anything with Jews or not Jews. They had this in Germany, but this was war and there was nothing against Jews at this time.

Q: OK. Thank you. Let's let them change tapes.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: OK. Let's pick up you are leaving the chateau. You've been there for a week now, and you are leaving with this wheelbarrow and a bicycle? OK.

A: The five of us.

Q: The five of you. What happened?

A: Well, we made it into the next town and there were signs all over for the refugees, you know, we can go to the next, to the school. And we stayed at the school. They have cots or I don't remember any more. But we stayed in the school for a few days and uh they fed us there more or less and we never, there was already an organization in place to take care of more or less of the refugees, but uh then we figured we have to do something on our own so I went to the headquarters again and we were already emboldened by this first experience, so we went, I went to the headquarters there and I asked for transportation back to Brussels.

Q: OK. Now which headquarters are you talking about?

A: The Germans. (The Germans?) Oh yes, was all Germans. And uh they put us on the uh, they said yes, go down to the plaza. There were lots of trucks and _____ of these trucks are going to _____, to to a town near, in Belgium already but near Brussels and they will take you. So, cause you know, sixteen year old girl they all wanted to have in, during the war, they wanted me to sit in front with one and the other, my mother and the other and the Matulskis were in the back of another truck, but we were all together. I wouldn't leave them. You know, I said we have five people and we go together. So we got into _____ and uh we stayed overnight with a with a Belgium family. They put us up but we didn't, we were really _____ you know as Germans. They hated the Germans and we came there on the German truck, but what can you do. They had the advantage of the language at least. You know, we could speak. So next time, next day they picked us up and they gave orders to back to Brussels and we went back to my, to our old apartment and there was nothing there anymore and so, but Mrs. Matulski, the other lady, she had another apartment and there was one empty in her, in the same building and so we stayed there. And uh . . .

Q: How did you live now? How long, you stayed for quite a while?

A: Yeah, well for a couple of years. As a matter of fact, that's where I started uh my, my sewing career. Because by this time I was seventeen and my mother said, girl, you'll never go back to school. There's no way. You should learn a trade. And sewing was always my big uh strength. I was very good in Home Economics and sewing in school and in that household school in Munich. I was always good in sewing so she found two Viennese _____ dressmakers who was who were established and they, they uh in

dressmaking, you know. To order. People came and brought their fabrics and so I really learned it there, learned a lot from them to do to do fine sewing and to do fittings and to do that's really where I got my first apprenticeship so to speak, with those two ladies. And uh my mother was able to make a little bit money and we didn't need very much and we finally got our uh the lift, this this box with things from Germany we got them out and uh out of the uh out of the they had been in the warehouse all the time (in storage?) In storage, yes . . .

Q: What was in the box? What did you have?

A: There was a very ingenious way of packing. They had made to order boxes like like uh closets and you know, on the one side were some clothes and then there were shelves on the shelves and then, they were sometimes as big as a small room but it was all one great box. So I don't remember any more exactly but I think my mother had uh uh table service that she was able, that we were able to sell and some crystal. No silver. No silver. No gold. That had to be brought to Hitler you know we had to, they allowed us two uh table settings silver a person, one for milk and one for _____ supposedly. And uh, but everything else including jewelry and silver had to be uh brought you know, give them away, but she had the table, so she had beautiful linens. She had uh crystal and things like that that we sold. Little by little we sold it and she made a little bit of money and I must have made some money there too. I don't remember. Anyhow, we lived. We had a little apartment then in uh in Brussels and on the other side _____. Then she made friends with uh Jewish people who had lived there for a long time and they helped us and we got along.

Q: OK. Tell me about your, the papers that you had at this time. They were . . .

A: At this time we still had our regular papers. (OK) And nobody really bothered us because the Germans, you know, that was the beginning of the Germans but, and the and the occupation and the Belgians were kind of in the background but we got food stamps. I mean not for free but for rationing. That we got. I don't, I guess with our regular papers. I don't remember.

Q: You brought a Juda, the star. Were you wearing that later?

A: In a minute. So in 1942 then they, the Germans started to tighten the screws about the Jews. First they said curfew. You had to be home by eight o'clock at night when, you know. And then they started yes to, all the Jews had to wear this star out on their on their outer garments when we were out on the street. And a lot of Belgium people put it on too in solidarity to us. In Sweden, the King of Sweden wore it. A lot of people wore this to be, you know, in, to show solidarity with us. But we were still free. We could still go around with this or without it, not without it, you know, but this is, we could go. Till one day there was a proclamation, all Jews have to go the uh uh City Hall, City Hall and register. Just register. So my mother said, we are not going to register. If they don't know

about us, they you know, that _____ I'm not going to register. And this other lady, this Mrs. Matulski, said no, we have we have to, they're going to send us to work you know. We cannot do against it. Too dangerous. And she did register, but we never did. So time wore on and it got a little bit worse and worse. All of a sudden it started with people catching people on the streets or deportations. And they, on the street they took anybody that had this, you know. They went on trolley cars. They went in the front and in the back of trolley cars, the SS, and nobody could escape and they went through all the people and we had, we had identification papers, Jews. But from the lists that been registered they went from house to house and you know, they had the addresses. They had the people. It was very easy. They went and picked them up. So they sent them letters that they have to report, _____ and it said for work only for labor. But my mother got around and they started to get rumors to rumors already that specially girls that they put girls in whore houses, that they used the Jewish girls for the soldiers and that's all she had to hear. So she wasn't going to let us down. We weren't going to go to any forced labor and we didn't. But then one day this lady got the letter. She has to report then and then for labor. It always said for labor. So uh she came, the boy came running to us. Mrs. Blochman, my mother wants go to labor camp and please help us. I don't want to go and so my mother went over there and she said start packing. They lived with a family that had a grocery store downstairs and she had sent the girl away in the country with, to the family of these people they became pretty well friendly with them. And you and _____ will go away like here _____ is punctual and you can go under false names and you go there. Nobody knows you there and we will see what happens. Nobody ever sent us a letter but they came closer and closer and they had these deportations so mother made arrangements we should hide like Ann Frank, you know, like in the house only we didn't have that much money and it was very expensive. People didn't do it just for the love only. You know, they, they wanted to be paid and they wanted to be paid for the food at least and for the room so mother and I we went, one night somebody said there's going to be a, _____ said it's going to be uh some you know people going to be picked up tonight so we went into this room. We spent one night there. And I said mother, that's not right. We're going to go crazy. We can't stay here the two of us until the end of the war you know, alone and we don't have enough money to pay her so we came out of hiding the next day. And we had friends and he said, he got us into connection with the French underground. There were already the French underground and there were some uh English uh prisoners of wars that had escaped from Germany and there was an underground route to bring them to Switzerland and from Switzerland to Portugal and back to England. And somehow they got us into connect... into contact with this group and we were the first women that went. Mother and I first. Not this lady. She was still in the _____ and her little girl was in the country and everything was so far so good. So, but we didn't have that much money anymore. You know, when they only took you to the French border you know and then you had to have some money so we got together with another, with a Belgium lady or at least a lady who had lived there, had a business there for a long time, and she had also three children ^aa little girl was the smallest, was only two years old or three years old. And they said if you help me she said with the children on this trip I'll pay your expenses. So one Sunday, uh

the meantime in France had started the deportations already. And the people like my father and, they were _____ in this French camp. _____ had come and _____ the south of France wasn't free anymore. Was also German. So they got all the non-Jewish Germans out of this camp and took the Jews to Drancy. Drancy was this camp in Paris from where the French Jews were sent to Poland. It's a... so we wanted to go on a Sunday and on Thursday morning we get a card, a postcard from my father from Drancy. So we knew, and my mother was very upset and she said, you do what you want. If you want to go, I'll go but she was out of her you know. So we left everything standing there like we lived you know and our whole apartment, we had everything threes between. Three blouses and three bras and three this, so we could change. One changed and the next day somebody, the other one changed. And we only had little uh like an attaché case, that was all our luggage because they told us not to take anything. But we had some dollar bills. My mother had some dollars I mean, at that time maybe two hundred or three hundred dollars which was a lot of money then, and that was the most dangerous if, you know, if they found this on you that was immediate death. But this other money wasn't worth anything. So this French, that friend, said don't worry. We'll do something so he took a whole loaf of bread. Everybody stuck it in their shoes and that where the first place the Germans were looking for. But he was smart. He took a piece, a whole loaf of bread and he sliced it very fine and two slices, he put the dollar bill in and he sewed the two slices of bread together you know, so you couldn't tell no way, unless you really pulled it away, so we had this bread. You know, like we wanted to have something to eat on the trip. And he gave us, there's where we got the false papers. From this underground uh from this underground organization. With different names and we rehearsed the names over and over and we were supposed to been born in Luxembourg or in _____ so to explain our German accent, that we didn't speak perfect French. And we got on this on the train and uh with this other lady with the three children, and we we somehow got through. I mean there was a control on the border, on the French border, and we, we showed our papers and he accepted that. That was we got through that.

Q: How did you, you were coming up to the border

A: Yeah ... in the train...

Q: ...in the train. How did that feel?

A: Very fine. I mean, you know, we were but uh we somehow made it, you know. We, we just sat very quietly on our seats. We were not in the same compartment with the other lady, and then we had somebody with us. He didn't, from the underground he didn't communicate with us but he had his ears open and he might have heard some uh people reporting to him from the underground or, you know, and we knew he was there. And he you know it was either that or going to the camp in any event. I mean the alternative you know, wasn't that much better. We had to do it. And then we came to a another, then we got out in the next, in this French town I don't remember anymore but there was uh border patrol and SS on the on the exit and they looked everybody over and you know,

they, but we got through that. So we got the little hotel room and we stayed overnight and then when they, I think next morning, we went for breakfast into like a cafe, you know, this little French town, and we were all sitting around and here comes, in a round, in a round table with the children, and here comes the SS, comes in and looks because we weren't the only ones. I mean that the way to Switzerland and we weren't the only ones going to Switzerland. And they were trying uh to catch as many as possible but they didn't want to make uh very big thing out of it so they just went, came into the cafe and looked and looked and our hearts stood still. It was like you know, like you're frozen in time. You know, we don't and then he looked at each other and he said no, I don't think there are any here. And they left you know. And you die a little bit at a time. So that was really the closest we came with the Germans. And then this young man told us uh we're coming very close to the Swiss border now and they are even more vigilant and more uh you know, so he won't go. He doesn't want to jeopardize the this underground. You know, they don't want him to, and we are on our own now. But we should look in this village there on the French uh Swiss border, we should look around and ask for a guy named Gerard (ph) and Gerard will take us over the border. He knows we are coming and he will take us over. Well, we got off the train didn't go to this village. We got off before and we were afraid to go all on the same bus so we sent this lady with the smaller children on the bus and mother and I were walking. And we were walking on the highway with our little attaché case and two women it looked kind of in in city clothes after all, and we looked a little bit conspicuous I guess. So the French gendarme stopped us. And he really questioned us. Questioned our papers and he heard as a Frenchman more than the Germans that our French wasn't up to par and we said well, we are from _____ and we always spoke German but well, it was a long story and but finally my mother said, look, uh you hate the Germans don't you. And he said yes, I hate the Germans. I said more than you hate the Jews. Yes. So, she said, what do you want from us. Let us take our chances. You know, she didn't tell we're Jews, we're not Jews. So he says OK. I'll, he let us go. So we went to this village. We came to this village and we couldn't locate Gerard. And wherever we asked for Gerard they just froze. The people froze up. So we stayed one night and there was a lot of German soldiers in this village and we were very scared. So we said, well, we have to get out of here because here they will catch us. So here we started walking again, and we walked up the highway and we came up to a little country inn. So we got in there and we asked for two rooms for the two families and there we were. And I think that people knew who we were. You know in German we have a saying when you die and you don't leave any money for the funeral, he says we're going to smell him out. You know, it's going to smell. They're going to have to bury us with a _____. So we're going to sit here until we smell, till they do something with us. And they did. They they got together and they called the uh, without us talking about it, they knew exactly what what we wanted you know. Was very close, within walking distance of the Swiss border. So uh, so they got the _____ the priest and the priest talked it over with some people in the village and they talked it over. There came the letter carrier. The letter carrier was going on a bicycle, was always going on a bicycle. So they said to us, I mean we paid. I mean the lady had _____. We paid her for what nights we stayed and you know, and uh they sent a hay wagon with clothes.

They gave us uh old aprons like this farm women are wearing and they hid, they put us on the hay wagon and the, the children, they were hiding in the hay and they gave us milk cans. You know there were milk cans on _____ like we were farmers' women that were going on the, coming home from uh milking cows or something. And they hiding our little bit of luggage under the hay and they took us back; the highway that was the way was back to the village. Oh, I forgot to tell, I went back one day with this young man, with this with this boy, to the village to ask again for Gerard, and I found out that he had been arrested. That's why everybody was so afraid to even mention his name. So we went back, they had to go back to this village in order to get to the border. And the letter carrier, they went around the dinner hour when the German border patrol was having dinner and they knew exactly by observation what time, but still, to make sure, the letter carrier on his bicycle went right in front of us, ahead of us to make sure that we don't run into any patrols or anything. So he went ahead and we came on that hay wagon and they brought us to the farm right on the border and we got out and we got, each got a glass of milk yet and that was the farm was like a hundred years ago and I can still see it and they said well, that's as far as we can go. You go down here in the back of us is like a ravine and there's a little brook. We go over the brook but there is barbed wire. You have to go through this barbed wire or over or under or whatever, and on the other side is Switzerland. Good luck. So that little girl had a pacifier and we, we went down this ravine and we went over the brook and we went up the other side and that little girl lost her pacifier and started screaming bloody murder, but we still made it and we came over the border and uh but the Swiss border guard had heard her all the way across and he came and he helped us and you know, and we were kind of happy, but my mother said let's go, let's go little bit further in. They can still send us back, and you know, we'll celebrate later. So we got but he was good. In the meantime in the beginning of the deportations, the Swiss didn't let anybody in. And they turned back a lot of people. But in the meantime, we came a little bit later already, the public opinion had forced them to take them in, especially women and children and we had no man with us, so he wasn't going to turn us back anyhow. So he took us, I don't think to another hotel by the way. He took us to a little, to, to a town where there was a bigger uh police headquarters and uh we stayed overnight and we had he stayed with us and he even watched us when we went to the bathroom. He stood in front of the bathroom. I mean he didn't let us get out of sight and uh my mother said by the way, we're not free. They watch us. They treat us nicely but we're not going to stay. So we tried to call our relatives in Zurich but we couldn't uh commu., there was no communication. I don't remember any more. We couldn't tell them that we were in Switzerland. So uh we told them of course right way that these papers are false, and we gave them our right papers, our right names. We had no papers to the effect but we gave them our right names and _____ and everything and they were OK. I mean they fed us and they were very nice. And then in the afternoon, there was a bigger group of us. They put us on the train and it was a very strange feeling. You are in a new country, and they do with you what they want. They put us on the train didn't say a word where we're going or what's going to happen to us. And uh they marched us through the city of _____ and there must have been about ten or twelve of us and uh people were looking out the windows. They'd say ah, the poor people, the poor people, they're going

to the I don't remember anymore but they uh we spoke enough French to know that the prison is a prison is a prison, but it was a different word it was different they said a different word that we didn't understand. Well, we understood pretty soon, pretty quick. We came to this prison that must have been five hundred years old. The keys were this big. They had you know, thick walls and thick and they, right away they separated this lady from her family. They took the son. He was only ten or twelve years old. They took him to stay with other men and she and her daughter went in one room and mother and I were in another in another cell, and uh as a matter of fact the first cell had only one bed and we didn't know how, so we slept like this, like sardines. We had funny things that happening too you know. _____ like I said the key was so big and the key hole was that big too, so I was laying in bed like this and all of a sudden I said mother, somebody is looking at me, somebody is looking at me. She said who's going to look. So anyhow there was a prisoner outside that had it wasn't you know a penitentiary or anything. It was an old jail where people was kept and all of a sudden I see, there comes a knife with a pad of butter through this key hole. And this _____ was apparently in _____ or something that could order his own food in there and he had wonderful breakfast and he wanted us to have a pad of butter. Oh, we had all kinds of . . . then we heard singing. . . Hebrew songs, Jewish songs, singing. And there was another group of refugees. They wanted us to know that they are there. You know, they couldn't communicate with us any different way, so we heard this singing and so when the regular prisoners were, they had time out in the morning to make their beds and to empty their sinks (ph) and so you know they kept us in the cells, but when they were, when the regular prisoners were in their cells during the day, then they kept us, we could go out in the hallways. And they were great big hallways with and we met with the other refugees and you know, it wasn't so bad. And we, we got food and we uh the basement they had bathtubs. We could even take a bath. And not everyday but you know, they were very nice. But the food of course wasn't too great so my mother was always afraid that I was going to starve you know, the regular Jewish mother. So one day she said to this, to the _____, can't I get anything else for my daughter? And I said, mother, what do you think we are in prison what are you . . . Sure enough a couple of days later he comes up with a whole tray with a little steak and other things and I almost died because all these, our poor prisoners, got only water and you know the regular food and here I had a steak, but I guess mothers will be mothers even in prison. So that little by little everybody was transported away and even this lady with the children I think got out earlier than we did. _____ and we were left just the two of us. We had Rosh Hashanan there and they had taken us to another little town for, and the women were in the hotel but they didn't have money to put the men in the hotel too. The men they put in prison there over night but OK. We were happy then.

Q: You got to go to services?

A: We got to go to services and they gave us a very nice meal in the hotel, under surveillance. They were policemen there, but we met the Jewish people and it was it was very nice. Yom Kippur we spent in prison and there were a couple of men who held services in the cell. We were, like I said, we could visit during the day and they held our

food until at night and we got the whole meal at night and it was OK. But then mother and I we were the only ones left and it got colder already and we didn't have any clothes so there was one family in _____ had a beautiful department store, wealthy Swiss Jews and they always came visiting and see, to see what they can do for the refugees and uh when you know it got colder then uh mother said to them we really don't have any clothes and you know Switzerland is, gets cold pretty soon. Oh, they said, there's no problem. And he asked the prison warden, you know, can these people come to my store and pick out clothes, and he said yes. So was a very strange situation. They opened the gates and mother and I we walked out and we went to the store, and the lady invited us up for tea. We had beautiful tea in the salon with cake and you know, like real people and he took us around in the store, and he said pick out what you need you know, was for winter and it became a habit. We went every day we went out walking and five o'clock we went back to the prison. You know, there was no place else to go. Was home. But of course not for very long. Then I got sick and we got to the Salvation Army and we stayed at the Salvation Army a little bit and then in the meantime this Mrs. Matulski and her two children came the same way we came and she was a very nervous person so she took some sleeping pills and she slept through the border. She was, and the boy was already you know children have to grow up pretty quick. He gave the policemen the the patrol their papers and she slept. So they thought if this lady sleep so well she can't be very nervous. So they made it too. And they were already in a camp uh like they called _____ lager it was the beginning where people got processed. And she wrote to Mother we are here and it's very nice. We even have curtains on the window. We have and it's not so bad and why don't you try coming here. So while we were at the Salvation Army, we went to this to the police to the you know, and my mother said we have friends at this _____ camp. We wouldn't mind going there. So he said Mrs. Blachman, I don't think you want to go there. I wouldn't like you to go there, but if you want to we will send you there. So he gave us a policeman and we you know went to this camp. That camp was worse than the prison because the camp was barracks and in the meantime it's November and it's raining and it's muddy and they have a toilet out on the yard and the watchman out in the yard, and my mother got a bladder infection and the food was terrible and we had it was like _____ almost. It was terrible. And not only that there were a lot of people from France that we for the first time talked to and found out what my father went through and they told us that my father was deported. Actually that's where we learned it. And we saw how terrible these people looked already. You know, we were still fresh from Belgium. We hadn't lost so much weight yet and we looked still like people, but these people looked already like they had been through the mill you know, so so it was very depressing and uh there was nothing to do and we were sitting there. We had little curtains on the windows but that didn't make it. So it became winter and we got, we were divided into different camps, and mother and I we went, and this lady too with her daughter, went to uh Leistahl (ph). That's close to _____. And in the meantime I think we had communications with our family in Zurich. I think we wrote to them from the camp and they wrote back so one day, low and behold I get a postcard to Gerta Blachman from _____ Marcos. _____ Marcos is also in Switzerland. He had walked. He had, he was a member of _____. Uh not a member a child in the _____ camp and he was in

an _____ school in France at uh one night they was going to be deported and the policemen came to the director of that _____ school and said, send your oldest ones, the ones that you think can make it on their own, out tonight because tomorrow morning the SS is coming to take all the kids. So he was seventeen, eighteen, in the meantime and the director gave them whatever they could and money or whatever little, and he had made it to Switzerland. Like over five or six weeks he walked, in hotels and he walked at night and slept in daytime and he spoke beautiful French. He was very talented with languages. Spoke a perfect French. He worked for a time in the French youth group and they had trouble with them and I don't know how he made it to Geneva coming from south of France. He made it in to Geneva and in Geneva he got on the train. He was never caught. He was never _____ and he traveled to Zurich to his uncle and he presented he had an uncle or a relative in Zurich and he presented himself there. And uh the uncle said I am very happy but you can't stay with me for the rest of... you have to go to the police and present yourself, you know, tell them. So they sent him to a different camp but not back you know. So he wrote to my relatives we had given each other the addresses so in case you know there were, and here he is also in Switzerland. And uh so the next spring by coincidence he got into what called _____. That was also nearby _____ but maybe two hours by foot from my camp to his camp. And uh at that time we weren't allowed to go much yet but he sent, some other young man came and told me about him and maybe we could use telephone or something, I don't know. But anyhow we got together and that's really when our courtship started and we walked and walked to get to each other you know. It was down to _____ and up through the fields and there were beautiful cherry orchards in the summer and the things were... Each had to walk an hour to meet and then we started walking because there was no place to go. I mean we couldn't you know was a very strange courtship but... Sometimes we met in the little town in the winter and we sat in the tearoom and had uh coffee or tea or called cafe _____ in Switzerland. Was this bread and jelly and butter and coffee that's very uh Swiss? So that's where we started our friendship, our courtship when we got so we were in this working camp and here I sewed. I was sewing again. I, there were also the people sent in, donated clothes and there were also some Viennese who seemed to be the best dressmakers and they asked me, I said yes, I know a little bit and there I learned some more. And we changed, we altered the clothes, these donated clothes, for the for the people in the camp you know. And uh one day the director of the camp received a uh request, you know if there are young girls in there that know how to sew, there's a shortage of operators like operators you know for uh in a blouse factory in Bern and they would get the papers on the working permission for such a person. So she asked me would I go. And I said yes, sure. You know, to be free and to learn more in my trade. So _____ was very upset and very heart broken that I would leave and he wouldn't be there. So the only way for him to be free was to become a dishwasher. That was also in shortage. So he put in to go to Bern to be a dishwasher and my, these people put in for me the papers to be an operator. Well, the dishwashers were needed more than the operators. He was there in one week. And he was washing dishes in Bern in a in a restaurant. And he was quite a spoiled young man but when it came you know from at home, he was an only child but when it, something had to be done, he did it. And he was alone in Bern and I was alone there in the meantime. But we

stuck it out. He came back one weekend to see me and then finally my papers came through and I came to Bern too and we were together. I mean he stayed, he had to live there under very bad conditions and very dirty conditions. You know, _____ but anyhow, this is so many years back. So we were there together again and uh I learned a lot in this factory. That was my first job as a power machine, you know, uh experience on a power machine and uh it was quite a strict thing. I had to be there very early and I am not an early riser so I had to be there from, they just started to change from uh sixty hour uh from uh from uh six day working day to five days a week and that meant of course more hours every day to put it into five days you know. They started very early but uh we managed to see each other on weekends. But he had to work weekends too. You know, in a restaurant was a different schedule so one day he stuck himself with a fork in the dishpan and he got an infection and couldn't and they sent him to the hospital and he got all bandaged up and he couldn't work so he, his boss said if you can't wash dishes you are no good to me. You are fired. And that was the end of that. So he came to stay with me in the same building. Had a little room next door and he stayed there for a while. And my landlady was very proper and she got very upset and she sent no less the vice police after him and he got arrested. I mean he got taken in and they took, brought him to the police where he should have reported that he wasn't working anymore you know. And he, they said well, what's you know, what's the story and he told them and he said that's my fiancée but we can't get married because we have no papers so he says, oh sure, you can get married. He says do you have any _____. He said yeah, my mother in law is here, you know, her mother is here and I have a cousin. He said well, if they uh certify that this is your name, you can get married. So we got married. (Laughter) But he never went back to this camp. Neither one of us got back to the uh went back to the camp. My mother uh became a housekeeper. She got commissioned for a housekeeper in Bern and after we got married the first of May he uh went to a school there. The Jewish community sent him to a school to a uh business school. And so we worked. We were there together. We had one room but a bigger room, a nicer room, and nice people and my uh my boss, my you know, from the blouse factory _____ kind of made the wedding. They came with us to the uh, it was on the first of May and there was no trolley cars so we running like crazy through whole of Zurich, no Bern, to the to the uh to get married _____ and my mother was uh brought the flowers. The lady had given her lilacs. She came with a armful of lilacs that was my flowers. And after ceremony my the uh my boss took us out for lunch and then in the afternoon we went to the rabbi. We had a Jewish ceremony at the rabbi's home and the _____, the wife of the rabbi had made cookies and wine and it was... Then my mother had made little sandwiches and they all came to our new apartment. So we had no dishes. We had nothing and so this lady said what, you have no dishes. No. So she went to the department store there and sent us our first set of dishes the same day so she wouldn't . . .

Q: Can you pull it. Let's, you're, you're now married and we need some of the little ...

A: Well, after the war . . .

Q: Yeah, bring us to the close of the war. Tell us what happened.

A: Well, by then the war was almost over. As a matter of fact on the on the, I have a newspaper uh Bern, from Bern, where the headline is Hitler is dead, on the thirtieth, I think it was the thirtieth of April, 1945, and then the, and the civil column was of our marriage announcement. It's in the same paper, and was a big headline you know. And so uh, well sure there was uh the the landing in in France you know, when the Americans landed in France and we were listening to the radio, but we were powerless. We couldn't participate. We could only listen and hope and pray that the war will end. Then slowly came the news out about the concentration camps, but it came only at the very end that we heard about the liberation of the camps and what went on there. We had no, we didn't know anything about that. So we had no more, you know, we didn't hear from my father anymore and as a matter of fact long afterwards somebody told us, I don't know if this is the truth or not, that he was put into one of those famous uh railway cars and that they died in there, that he never made it to the camp. I don't know whether this is reliable truth or not, but that's what we heard from people who said they knew him. And my mother's brother didn't come back. He was in Drancy. He was sent back. And my grandparents and my husband's parents and actually only Mother and I made it through you know, through Switzerland. So we went, when the Red Cross sent us back to Brussels after a few months, about six or seven months after the end of the war, and my son was born there three years, two years, three years later, and we actually all wanted to go to Ecuador. I have an uncle in, my husband had an uncle in Ecuador and after that didn't materialize it was always a delay and all things so my step-father, my mother had remarried in the meantime, and my, the brother of my step father had a farm in _____, New Jersey and he said if you'd like to come, you know, and we started working then we had to, started at the blouse factory after I had been working in Switzerland for blouses and I had uh taken some private lessons from the uh lady who did the models and who did the patterns. I went at night to her place and learned that too, because the sewing alone wasn't enough, so I did this and my step father helped cut and my mother started selling and we had a beautiful little business going. But like I said they presented us with the signature then that we were, we had promised to leave and our status was semi-legal. I mean they prolonged, every six months they prolonged our papers you know. But we weren't citizens and then my son was born and he, they made him _____, not an enemy but German, and we didn't want our son growing up as German in Belgium you know. Today it doesn't make any difference I guess, but at that time that was the enemy you know, and having him go to school or something as German, so we decided to go to America where we can become citizens and live, you know, and he became a citizen. As a matter of fact the judge made him a better status than we are. When he said, when we went, he made us citizens first and then he made him like an American born of naturalized Americans abroad. He was born abroad, not that it made so much difference, but you know, he has an even better status than we have. And that was very important to us. I think we did the right thing, even though we liked Belgium very much but for my son's life it is much better. They both educated and they both have wonderful lives and

wonderful wives and children and they are full American and you know, like born here and this was the right decision I think.

Q: I think so too. Thank you very much. Thank you so much. That is quite a story. I didn't know all this when I started.

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview