

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Florence Gitelman Eisen
August 18, 1994
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Florence Gitelman Eisen, conducted by Randy Goldman on August 18, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Arlington, VA 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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FLORENCE GITELMAN EISEN

August 18, 1994

01:00:01

Q: Will you tell me your name, your date of birth and where you were born and your name at that time?

A: Well, my name is Feigele in Jewish, Feigele Gitelman. I was born August 28, 1928 in small town in Poland by the name of Lachva. It's not far from Pinsk. Usually, if anybody ask me, "Where were you born?" I say Pinsk. If they know Pinsk, they'll know Lachva. So I tell them it's Pinsk; it's Lachva.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family life before the war ...

A: Well, I had a mother and father, of course. I had -- I was the oldest of three children. A younger brother, one year older -- one year younger, excuse me. And a sister five years younger. I think she was born 1935, if I'm not mistaken. Also, a grandma lived with us, my father's mother. She, she was, she had, she bear 10 children, and she lived with a younger son and daughter-in-law with us. We lived on a street, a small street ... It was an old, old street. And my father was a barber, men's barber. And ... he had his own barber shop in the middle of the town. He made a good living, pretty good living. He also he, my, he also played music. He played the violin, the trombone, all kinds. My father comes from a family of 10 children, and there were four boys and six daughters. All four boys, they were musicians. Beside that, they had also professions. One was a tailor; one was a watchmaker; my father's second profession was a barber. We made ... My father made a pretty good living.

Q: Did you go to a public school or a Jewish school? Were you religious?

A: We were not really religious, but we were a Jewish home, a Jewish kosher home. And I went to a regular -- it's not, excuse me. I started off with a public school but for one year. But then my grandma started to yell, "Oy vey! you know, she's not going to go. She has -- " So they put me in a Hebrew school. I started off with Yavneh¹ for the first two, three years, I think, and then Tarbut, Hebrew Tarbut.² In my house, they used to speak Hebrew, all three

¹Yavneh: In Eastern Europe, Yavneh schools were formed in the early twentieth century by religious Zionist groups. Hebrew was the language of instruction. This was a radical departure from traditional Yiddish studies. Orthodox Jews believed that Hebrew was only appropriate for the study of Torah, not general scholarship.

²Tarbut: Literally means "culture" in Hebrew. Religious Zionist schools, similar to the Yavneh schools. In the Tarbut schools, students were oriented towards pioneering in Palestine. Both Bible and modern Hebrew literature was in the curriculum.

children, Yiddish, and Russian. Deutsch was Poland then, but they used to speak Russian. And I went to Hebrew Tarbut.

Q: Did you have a lot of Jewish friends, non-Jewish friends?

01:03:01

A: I had mostly Jewish friends because of my upbringing, also. Not that we were separate or whatever. My mother had non-Jewish -- the best girlfriend was non-Jewish ... next door to us. My father had a lot of non-Jewish friends. We had good neighbors, non-Jewish people. But I remember having Jewish friends from, from the school, from the Hebrew Tarbut.

Q: Now, were your parents or other people in your family involved in any political organizations any Zionist?

A: No, no. They were not involved in any political organizations, no.

Q: What ... Tell me a little bit about what happened when the Germans invaded.

A: Well, in 1939, we were invaded by the Russians. Two years later, I think in the month of June,³ we were invaded by the Germans. And ... six months we stayed in our own house, and then they took us to the ghetto.⁴ They made a ghetto, which it was towards, towards some waters. It was like the center of the town and towards the waters. And we lived in a house. They gave us one room. Can I go one second before, please?

Q: Absolutely. And, actually, I wanted to hear a little bit about before the ghetto was formed. Your memories of when the Germans came in.

A: Well, the Germans came in, and my father, He, as I said before, he was a barber. He worked in the middle of the town in his own barber shop. So food, we had enough. He used to bring in from the peasants who -- those years, they didn't have those shaving things that you shave yourself and you threw it away. I mean, they had to come to a barber to take a shave, and to take a haircut. As a matter of fact, in the ghetto, the war in the ghetto, my father worked in his own barber shop for the Germans, because they needed him for this particular reasons. They couldn't shave themselves, I guess. They needed a barber. And after six months being in our own home, they told us that we're going to the ghetto, and this is where the ghetto's going to be. Where there were two synagogues, so they took up the area of the synagogues and towards the water and they, they, segregated with barbed wire -- it was extremely tall barbed wires -- and a peasant next-door neighbor came. My father told him to and asked him

³The Germans entered Lachva on July 8, 1941.

⁴The ghetto in Lachva was established on April 1, 1942.

to, and they came and they put us, whatever little belongings -- we took very little, and they put us in this wagon, we were six people, and I was walking. I didn't want to go on the wagon.

01:06:10

I remember when I left my house, I looked back and I cried my -- as little as I was, as young as I was, I knew I'll never come back. I cried my eyes out. And we went to the ghetto. They gave us a room. I mean, one of my -- my father requested it, that they gave it to us just because he worked in this barber shop, and he knew a lot of German soldiers. So they gave us -- there were two families in this room, very small room. And we slept like two, three in a bed. We were six people, and there was another other two people, also a barber, but only two people. There was no family, they elderly people. And my mother never took me down to the kitchen. I never saw how the kitchen looked. There was one kitchen for about ... at least 20 families, 15 families. So I guess they didn't want children there just to take up the kitchen. And there was really nothing much to cook there, I guess. Whatever, as far as I could remember, whatever my father used to smuggle in through the gates, because in the morning he used to go to work, come back at night, as a barber. So he used to hide on him something, because you, you were not allowed to smuggle in any food. So he used to hide, let's say a piece of fish or a piece of bread, or a piece of potato to smuggle in, they shouldn't see it on him. And this we lived on. And then I saw my mother was swollen. I said to my mother, I said, "Why are you so swollen?" She was only 36 years old. She said, "Nothing, nothing, nothing." But then I find out that what she did whatever food she had, she gave it to the kids, and she never ate. And she got swollen, and then she had also an elderly mother who lived with her older sister. And they had nothing because they couldn't go out of the ghetto to bring in any food. So they had to live on whatever they gave them in the ghetto. And the little kids died of hunger. There were little ones. And my grandma was dying, so she used to send me whatever she had to give it to grandma. Finally, she died a hunger. I came one day with the food, and I saw her laying against the house where they lived in, dead. I don't know how long she was laying there. There was -- they didn't give any funerals or something. They just took her away, I guess. I'm not sure. I really don't remember. This is how we lived for six months. At least six -- between six and eight months, I think it was.

Q: Did you have any activities, or did you just stay home? School?

01:09:01

A: I -- there was -- I did not go to school. I went to -- I actually worked. They used to send me, they used to send my mother, actually. But my mother was a pretty woman, and one German was after her. So instead of her, I went to work. What was my work? My work was to dig graves for other people, so they used to pick us up like ... half a day, like 12 o'clock or 1 o'clock, and bring us back like in the middle of the night. And we used to dig those long, long, long ditches. Long, long, long -- I didn't know what it, what it was for what. This was night after night and mother was home with the younger kids and with my grandma and this

was my job. But as far as I hear, there was no schools but they did -- it was some kind of a little activity there. There was little activities there, but I really don't know what it was because I never went. In my girlfriend's book, she, she knows more details. But it was something -- she had an older sister. But I think that it was -- life was going on. There people were in love. Some of even got married, I've heard, later on. Like just a huppa⁵, you know, or something and some kind of a life, but people were dying of hunger. In six months, eight months, people were dying of hunger.

Q: Do you remember seeing people sick on the street?

A: My grandma. My grandma. Later on I saw, but not at this point.

Q: And you didn't know what you were digging?

A: No.

Q: Was this on the outside of the ghetto?

A: Outside of different towns, not our town. What they did, the Germans, they used to send from those towns to dig our graves. And from my home town, we dug different, from different towns the graves. And that's what I used to do, until, until one point.

Q: Were you aware of the governing structure in the ghetto, the Jewish Council and all that?

A: Well, yes. Not much, though. There was a committee. I have all the names written down there.

Q: Okay. But if you can just tell me as much as you remember. You don't have to name names, but ...

A: Yes, yes there was a committee, and they were really in charge. If -- let's say, they took count of the people. If one person would be missing, the Germans said they're going to take the whole family and other families, and they're going to be killed in front of everybody. They knew that there are Russian partisans or underground in other areas. If one young man were ... be missing and take off, the committee has to deliver a certain amount of people to be killed.

01:12:04

So, of course, this didn't happen because, they were afraid that instead of one -- the truth was that really people didn't believe that they gonna do it. That they gonna kill us like that.

⁵Huppa: Jewish traditional wedding canopy (Hebrew).

Something's gonna happen. Something's is gonna give. Something will change. Because nobody really saw, and nobody -- you couldn't travel. You couldn't go from one town to the other to find out what happened to the other people in the other town. They didn't let anybody out, and people were afraid to -- I'm sure that young people would've taken off, going into the woods. But he was afraid that if he's going to take off, they're going to kill all his family. They were family oriented people, whole mishpachus,⁶ like sisters and brothers. Married with children, grandchildren. And just because if I'll run away, they're going to kill my whole family. Who would have known that they're going to be killed anyway? And that's exactly what happened. They were killed anyway.

Q: So people really weren't taking off?

A: No. No.

Q: And did the Jewish Council have to give names? Did they do that?

A: Yes. They would of. They, they would of otherwise would have been killed.

Q: Were there any selections or roundups or anything before the uprising?

A: Not by us, no. Not by us. Not in our ghetto.

Q: Do you remember any resistance activities in your ghetto? I mean, was there an underground, or ...

A: They was some kind of a connection, but very -- they knew that there's some place underground. But nobody left; they were afraid to leave. Nobody left. Not until the ... uprising.

Q: But was there organizing going on in the ghetto?

A: Yes, there were organizing going on, yes. Among the men and young boys, young men. Let's say, the younger generation, the younger people. They knew that the older ones couldn't make it, and the very young ones couldn't make it. But they made up among themselves if they're gonna come and take us to kill, to kill us, they will make a revolt. We had, they had no guns, just with hammers and hacksaws and all kinds a sticks and ... This, they were prepared, yes.

Q: And do you think that the Jewish Council was involved in the organizing with the underground?

⁶Mishpachus: Families (Yiddish).

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A: Yes, yes. They were. But everything was, of course, in a quiet way.

Q: Did you know people involved with the underground?

A: No. I knew the people who was -- they were on the committee in the ghetto. I have all the names written down. I have all the names.

01:15:02

Q: Were any of those friends of your family?

A: Friends of my father, yes. They were my father's age, in their 30s. My father was ... what? 38, I think.

Q: The reason I'm asking this is, I mean, you know that in other ghettos sometimes the Jewish Councils were not so -- I mean, they had to do their jobs, and they weren't -- they often followed the German orders. They weren't as sympathetic to an underground activity because they were afraid, I guess, for themselves.

A: Yes, it's true. But luckily in our ghetto, they did not ask for a certain amount of people to give them out to kill. We were lucky. So they really didn't have to do this, this job.

Q: So why don't you tell me a little bit about your memories of the uprising, how this all came about?

A: Okay. I came in the middle of the night from my work. This ghetto was already surrounded by trucks, ammunition, guns. There were soldiers all around the ghetto.

Q: German soldiers?

A: German soldiers. There were already Polish people, peasants, they were already standing there looking into the ghetto. But mostly trucks and trucks with, with all kinds of ammunition on the trucks. When we came in, I knew right away. I mean, you didn't have to ask questions. So nobody said a word to each other. We had two ghettos and there's a street separating us. And that there was one ghetto, I was in the second ghetto. The young people, they were accumulating themselves, mostly men, in the first ghetto in case they're going to start taking us on trucks to kill. They gonna to try to break the gates and see how much, how many people could be saved, run. Saved. You can't save your child, you just run. Whatever will happen will happen. So we knew. I came into the ghetto. Nobody was sleeping anymore. My mother was waiting for me. My father and my brother wasn't there anymore. I asked them where they are, and my mother said to me "They are in the other ghetto getting organized. Maybe they'll be able to run." And everybody was already crying and yelling,

"Shema Israel,"⁷ and crying. I couldn't take it. Like you saw in "Schindler's List," this little girl who was hiding in the toilet, I went -- the toilets were, let's say, outside of the ghetto. Little ... It's like a -- it's like a little, you know, a little boot standing on the ground. And, you know, you made there and you walked out. I went there -- to hide.

01:18:03

I sat down; I closed my ears, and I was, it was quiet there. I was sitting there for a while, and I said ... I can't -- somebody else came in, and I had to get out. And I had no place to go. I was sitting there maybe ... more than a half an hour. I just for some reason I couldn't hear the people crying and screaming. I went back to bed. I came into the room. Everybody was, for some reason, dressed. And my mother and I hide ... I hide under the covers. And I closed my ears, and I was laying there -- over my head not to listen to this yelling and screaming and crying. All of a sudden, my mother said to me "Feigele, come out of there." I said, "What's the matter, Ma? Are we gonna get killed?" He says, "We gonna get killed, but not you." I said, "Ma, why me?" She said, "Don't ask questions. Here, put this on." She put in one of her red little rubies she had from her ring, she put it in there, and she said, "You go to the second ghetto. I don't know what's going to happen. You might get killed there, too," she said, "but people are going to try and run from there. They're going to rip the gate. This is what they made up, so you go there." I didn't ask any questions. I got dressed. My sister ran after me, and I said, she said, "Feigele, I want to go with you." This is the first time I'm telling this. I never mentioned this to nobody. I just -- maybe I was cruel. I don't know. I said to my sister, "Where are you going to go? You're just a little girl. You -- you can't run." So she stayed here; I still see her standing there. And I tried to, and I ran. I ran, I saw other people standing there. I tried to open the gate. The gate was closed already, locked. You couldn't go through anymore. I started to yell; they let me out from this gate. So there was this street in the middle, and outer gate was locked. I came there, and I said -- I went across the street and I start banging, and they wouldn't let me through. They said, "Too late." All of a sudden, I see -- I hear shooting. I see fire. I see the buildings are burning. The other ghetto, not this ghetto where I lived. So I guess the Germans thought well, she gonna die anyway. Why -- let her in, this kid, you know. So they opened the gate, and they did let me -- I was the last one to cross the gate from one ghetto to the other. I came in, it was -- I ran in there. It was really chaos. Everything was burning. Everything was shooting on everybody. I didn't know if the gate was ripped or not. I saw the Rabbi and I saw my aunt and this girl here, my first cousin, standing on the porch of a building, and the Rabbi was wrapped in a tallis⁸ with hands up crying, "Shema Israel." The house was on fire. Every building was on fire, and people were just falling right in front of me. Just like flies, shooting, blood all over the place. I ... All of a sudden, people are running in this direction towards the gate. And I'm running, and they are

⁷Shema Israel: Literally means "Hear oh Israel" (Hebrew). It is the beginning to the (eponymous) prayer Jews traditionally chant in times of duress.

⁸Tallis: Jewish prayer shawl.

running and I'm running. And people are just falling in front of me. I step over. I don't know if they were alive or dead, or just falling full of blood. I didn't look. I was running. All of a sudden, something hit me, and I fell. I fell on two people, and there were people on both sides of me. I see blood all over me. I touched myself. I said, "I'm alive. Get up. I'm alive. Run." I got up, and I ran. I ran over people, not over the ground, over people. The ghetto, I think, was about 2,600 and 800 people there, and whoever was still a little bit alive, they ran and I was running. We ran to the main, to the main, to the main place where, you know, how you call it? A mark. The mark, they used to call it. A mark. People used to get together there for business, I guess.

Q: At the square?

A: At the square, right. Small square. And I went through my house. I went through my house with the garden, and I couldn't run anymore. I was -- I saw the house, and blood was coming over me. I still didn't know what happened to me, and we came to a place by the name of Pripet. It was water there. And the Germans were still chasing us, I guess. When I looked back, and I saw the whole town was on fire already. And we came to that place, Pripet, and Zina, my girlfriend, met me there. She was also running with her brother, I think. A father and sister, she left behind. Her sister, I think, got killed while she running, so was my brother. And she saw me, she says to me "Feigele," she said, "look at you. You're all ripped to pieces." My whole back was ripped. My shoulder was ripped. She said, "Well, whatever will be will be." If I'll live, I live. If I'll die, I'll die. She said, "Your father's not with you?" I said, "No." She said, "He was in the other ghetto where everybody was running. Maybe he was there." I said, "I didn't see him anymore."

01:24:04

I just didn't see anybody anymore. So she took off her shirt from her back. She ripped it in pieces and she bandaged me. And we were sitting on that Pripet. Unfortunately, there were also a lot of grownup men, but they didn't want me. They said to me "Go home." I said, "Where am I going to go home? Where's my home? Look at my home. It's burning on fire. I'm sure that everybody's dead by now." They were putting on trucks and taking those people to the graves. They put 'em all around, shoot them out, throw 'em in the graves, put some -- I guess something on top. And then again and again, until they killed everybody. This was a Thursday at 11 o'clock in the morning. Einun Tzvansig Togen Elul⁹ in Jewish; I have it written down. This was exactly to the moment because I was there. And then I met some other girls, some other children that, unfortunately, the grownups left them behind. They didn't want them to run after them. I was skinny, I was sick, I was swollen. When I was

⁹Einun Tzvansig Togen Elul: "The 21st day of the month of Elul" (Yiddish). Elul is the Jewish month that falls at the end of summer. Florence was referring here to the day she escaped from the ghetto. In 1942, the 21st of Elul was Thursday, September 3 on the Roman calendar. This was, in fact, the second day of the Lachva uprising.

running, I lost my shoes, and this was like September, I think. It must have been September just before Rosh Hashanah. And that time, they take off -- the peasant, they take off the weeds. You know, they cut the weeds. And it's very, very -- it's like the little things of thread is like needles. And they go into your bare feet. So my feet were swollen and ripped in pieces because I was barefoot. I lost my shoes while I was running. And then the grownup people, I don't know what happened to them. They really tried to leave the kids behind. Whether they were wounded or not wounded, whatever it was, they really tried to leave us behind. And ... that was me, two girls who live in Israel now, Zina, my girlfriend; the two sisters from Romanowsky, Evelyn and Genia Romanowsky; and her father, one man. And I got close to them. He was kind of a relative, a distant relative of my mother. I don't know how, my mother's maiden name is Ravitz, and his name is Ravitz, so I said, "I'm a relative of yours. Let me stick to you." And he had two of his own kids there, and he just had pity over all of us.

Q: Where were all the other people who were running at this point?

A: In different directions. They ran in different directions. Most of them ran to the Pripet.

01:27:00

But they were grownup people, and maybe they did business with the peasants and they knew who -- where to go and who to run. And we remained there; I don't know what happened to the -- yeah, wait a minute. We -- let's say, we had some grownup people, so I was kind of close to them. And the night came on, and we all tried to sleep under a big, big stack of hay. And I knew if I'm gonna fall asleep, they're going to leave me there. Here I was wounded and sick and hungry, of course, for the whole day. So we used to put our hands into the mud, take up a little water with my hand. Make my mouth wet and just sit there. There's no place to go. I woke up -- and I fell asleep under the stack of hay. There's nobody there. I'm all by myself. There's no place to go. There's woods, mud, and darkness. All of a sudden, I heard some talking, but I didn't know if it was Jewish or German. So I followed from where the sound came, and I found some of my people. And ... they were not happy to see me. They were not happy to see me. They still kept on saying, "Go to your parents. Go home," unfortunately.

Q: Why is that?

A: They left their families behind. I was a sick, young child, wounded. They were afraid that I wouldn't be able to run with them, to keep up with them. And sooner or later, they will have to let me either die there in the mud and I'll tell them that there are more Jewish people around here, whatever. I don't know. People came, people became like animals. They were looking out for themselves. They had nothing to account for. They had no life, no future. They didn't know where they were going. Maybe they've heard that older people knew that someplace in this direction there must be some underground going on. So maybe they tried to follow there. I didn't know where to go, I had to follow them. I had to run after them. Then

there was no food. There was absolutely no food. You looked at the berries, and you ate some berries. A lot of them were not poison berries, so -- or -- and the water from the mud. So this was the first night. They left me twice. The second night, too. They left me again the second night, and a few other kids; they left me. And this was about two, three days later when I found the Romanowsky, two sisters and the father.

Q: Did you just find them by chance?

A: By coincidence. Just by walking, just walking. And I just found them there, and there were some other few kids. She was there, Zina was there. Two girls in Israel. The must have been seven or nine children there, including his two daughters. And there was -- I've seen cruelties on this Pripet. There was a father who left his little son there to die. There was a mother who left her little son there to die. I saw it. I saw the Rabbi's little boy wandering a daze; he had no place to go. He was wounded. He died there right in front of me. I'll never forget his face. I had to leave him and go on. I was a wounded little ship myself. A lot of people left there on the Pripet. They run away from the ghetto and they were wounded like I was, and they died on this, on this Pripet. They just died. They had no place to go. They died from hunger. It was cold already, very cold at night. There was sitting -- all nine of us -- there was still another woman there with a little boy. And we saw the Germans walking.

01:31:15

They came with dogs for us. They knew that the people ran there to this place, so they came to look for us the second day and I saw the boots. How in the world he didn't see us is beyond me. Just a miracle that God picked us to live and to tell this story. This is my reason, I think, that God said somebody has to live to tell this story later on, it shouldn't happen again. Because I saw them, I saw the dogs. Why wouldn't the dogs smell us? I saw the boots of the, of them.

Q: Right near you?

A: Right near me. We were nine kids and a mother and this father, the Romanowsky father. And they didn't see us, the dogs didn't smell us. And I was wounded and this woman, unfortunately, when they left, she said to me "You moved." I said, "I didn't move. If I would of moved, they would of seen me." She took a stick and she beat me up, a Jewish mother who had her own child there. (Nods her head). Anyway, we were there for about seven days, I think. How did we survive? This man, Romanowsky, knew more -- he was a rich guy in my home town -- he knew where a peasant lives. He went there and he said to him "You know what?" He said, "If you gonna bring us little food every day, take us over the river. Over the river, they are partisans there. They are underground people. Maybe they'll protect us. I'll tell you where the gold is in my house, hidden. You could go after the war and pick up the gold." This man brought us every little day a little -- a small fish for everybody, for each of us. Or maybe a small piece of bread every single day until he took us over the Pripet. We survived the seven days or nine days, I don't remember exactly. I drank the water from the

mud. Cold at night. Lice, full of lice. Full of lice. Our hands couldn't come out of my hair and I had a lot of hair.

Q: Was there lice from the ghetto, or from ...

A: This was laying there. We probably brought from the ghetto the lice already. But laying there, there was more lice, you know. And he took us over the Pripet in a small, little -- it's not a boat. A small, little, like a kayak, the size of a kayak probably.

01:34:06

And as small, as young as the kids were, they were smart. They left this man, the last man in case he decided to take off with his two daughters and leave us behind, so we made sure that he stayed the very last with his daughter. And only one or two people could fit into this kayak and take us over the water. That fear I'll never forget, that they gonna leave us behind. They gonna leave us behind to die, but this man was a nice man. Unfortunately, he died too young. He was sick too young, and he didn't deserve to die that young -- in this country. And they took us over the Pripet, and we were really under his wings, and then we were on our own. So this guy, the Russian peasant, he took off, and we were left there just like that. So, what? How did we survive? We walked like somebody said towards the underground people. The underground was someplace in this area, let's say. So this, we followed this man, his name is Romanowsky; we followed him. We had no other way. There was that woman, too, but she didn't know nothing, with this little boy. We used to -- at night, you see, the peasants they go to for their harvest early in the morning, like 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning when it's still dark outside. So we used to sneak into the house, grab a piece of bread because homes were open, or a pancake or whatever we grab our hands on. You know, whatever we could touch. Some people gave us to eat, we -- if you came in, let's say, and they knew that I was Jewish. I had black hair and they knew it was a Jewish group of kids, dark, dirty. Didn't wash themselves for a few weeks, full of lice. They didn't even let us into the house. They said, "Okay, here, my child." Here -- They felt sorry for us. "Here, my child, here's a piece of bread, but go, go, go." Because if somebody would squeal on them, they would have been killed. They would've been dead. And this was going on for a few weeks like that. We used to either crawl in, sneak into a house, and steal a piece of bread -- or it was also in the gardens, they had like raw potatoes, raw beets, raw corn. So we used to steal these from the garden and have a raw potato, eat a raw potato. But you couldn't make a fire, you couldn't let anybody know where we are or whatever. Even not even the peasants, because they would have given us out. Or ... The beets, the taste of the beets, raw beets day after day, I'll never lose the taste in my mouth. This is the most horrible, horrible thing. Potatoes, I thought I'll never have a raw potato in my life. Now, I love potatoes, I love potatoes. And this was going on for a few weeks. And --

01:37:17

Q: Let me just ask you a question. Do you remember any really striking experiences with the

Russian peasants that either they were really terrible to you or really tried to help you significantly?

A: Some of them -- not significantly, no. They used to give us food. They gave us food. And they just "Go, go." They didn't want us near them because the truth was that they would've been killed. If a German would have found out that this peasant gave me a piece of bread, he would have shot him immediately. So they really were afraid unless like that guy who gave us to eat on the Pripet that he knew that he's going to find a whole pot of gold someplace. The truth was he was killed after the war. Somebody gave him out, and they killed him; the Germans killed him. Because we were looking for him, they wanted to help him and do everything possible for this guy. But we couldn't find him anymore. They told us he was dead. And ... was sitting there in one forest, it was a few weeks later.

Q: Do you remember the name of the forest?

A: Not really. It was between Lachva and Slutsk already. But Pest, let's say, in the war between Poland and Russia, there was a, how you call it, a boundary. It was a -- how you call it in English?

Q: A border?

A: It was a borderline, exactly. But there was no border then because it was already Germans. Between Poland, where I was, and Russia which is Slutsk is in Russia. It was already Germans, there were Germans there. So we -- there was no line there. There was no borderline there. So we crossed, I guess, the Russian -- that used to be Russia. And we were sitting, laying there in the woods and I was already almost dead. And we hear somebody talking from a distance either German or Russian or German or or Jewish. I couldn't walk anymore. I couldn't go anymore. I couldn't see straight anymore. It was quite a few weeks later, and all of a sudden, they say, they, "They Jewish, Jewish. It's not German; it's Jewish." And I opened up my eyes -- I was laying there three-quarters dead -- and I see my father. And, of course, I start yelling and falling on him. He had a beard. He was already bearded and he was skinny and he was only 37 years old, 38 maybe. And I used to yell -- I yelled to him, this was still in Jewish, I said, "Tatinge,¹⁰ it's me your daughter, Feigele."

01:40:12

He looked at me, he didn't recognize me. He said, "No, this is not my Feigele. This is not my Feigele." I said, "Tata, it's Feigele." And he looked at me again, and he passes out. He dies on me. I grabbed him as much as I could, and all the other people, I said, "I have my father." And he died right in front of my -- in my hands. And I said, "Tata, Tata, it's me; it's Feigele. Tata, wake up." He opened up his eyes, he looked at me. Of course, he recognized me then. I

¹⁰Tatinge, Tata: Daddy (Yiddish).

weighed maybe, who knows, maybe 50 pounds; there was nothing left of me. A head of hair like this, full of lice crawling all over my face. How could anybody recognize? So he had in his pocket -- of course, he recognized me -- he had in his pocket what he used to work in the barber shop outside of the ghetto, his razor and the thing that he cut his hair. You know, the old fashioned type of things. He ... took me under his wing. At that time the whole group fell apart. Everybody went in different directions. Romanowsky said he's not going anyplace. He knows people in that area, he's going to stay there. First we walked for a while. We walked for a few weeks together, and then we split apart. That woman with the child, I told my father about she hit me stick with a stick. And my father said, "You go your way. I'm taking my daughter. I have a profession in my hands. If I find the underground people, if they'll take me." Fine. We had no ammunition. We had nothing. My father just had this razor and the thing that you cut your hair.

Q: Who was your father with at this point?

A: My father was with a few men from my home town, but not my brother. He lost my brother running. He run with my brother. My brother got wounded just as much as I was, but much worse. And he was in the back of him. My father was running, but by the time he turned around, he didn't see my brother anymore. He collapsed in the middle of the town. Unfortunately, it was not far from where I lived. The people that recognized my brother, they said, "This is Gitelman's son." And they finished him off with sticks. (indecipherable.)

Q: The Polish people?

A: Polish people.

Q: Somebody saw that afterwards, I take it?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: These were your former friends?

A: Yeah. Some of them who knew us. Who knew my father, and ... Jewish kid, and they finished him off with sticks.

01:43:04

They didn't need much to finish him off. He couldn't run anyway anymore. He was more wounded than I was. My father was not wounded, so my father took me under his wings. The first thing he did -- I'll never forget -- he cut off my hair, the whole thing. He just left a small piece here, and the whole head, he cut off the hair to get rid of the lice. During the day, he made a fire to burn the lice out my whatever clothing I had on me. You just take off, let's see, whatever I had on me. I think I remember I had my school outfit where I used to go to Hebrew school. And you make like a knot out of it, and then when you make a fire and you

let go, lice gets killed. They go into the fire. That's what he did. And then he -- we went into a peasant's house ...

Q: Now, is this just the two of you? I want to be clear. Or were there other friends?

A: Just the, just the ... two of us. Just the two of us. He left everybody behind. And he spoke fluently Russian, and he had a profession. So he used to knock at the peasant door and said if they need a haircut, or a shave. And he said he has to clean up his daughter. So one family -- I remember just like today, a nice peasant family -- they took me in. They gave me a bath. She said, "I have nothing to wear for you," she said. But she went into the pig house -- they had, they raised pigs -- and they took off the blankets from a pig and she wrapped me around. And she gave me a little kerchief to put on my head, and she says, "Look, I would love to help you, but I can't. You have to leave the house immediately." But I cleaned up, she cleaned me up, you know. She gave me a bath and she gave me this, this wrap around from a pig, you know; this had no lice, you know. And they killed the lice from this little outfit I wore. And we had to leave, so we left. So we left, and this is what we did for quite a few months. Walking at night -- walking daytime, sleeping in the woods at night, and looking for the underground people. Where are the underground people? Which my father didn't know. He used to go in -- then we met some other Jewish people from different towns, and -- my father was a smart man. He knew if there gonna be a lot of us, somebody was going to tell on us from the peasants; they gonna get us. Sure enough, we joined some Jewish groups, and we went into this house, and my father said, he said, "You know," he said, "we have too many people. Let's get out of here." And he grabbed me and we left, we left this way. From this side, the Germans were already there. They killed everybody out. There were just me and my father, who took off right away.

Q: How did you know that? Did you learn that afterwards?

A: My father -- no, I was there. I knew it. I knew that everybody, he told me that everybody was killed. The peasants told us that everybody was killed. There were quite a few -- most of them you've seen, younger people. Like I was the youngest always. Always the youngest. I -- the truth was that I didn't know what, what, happened to the other girls. Later on, I found out that they were not in the partisans, but in a, like in a family group working, let's say.

01:47:00

Working, doing nothing, maybe peeling potatoes, maybe washing clothes, maybe whatever. But they were never in the group in the partisans; they were really not. They were outside of the group.

Q: Now how long, how long did all of this last, going from house to house, trying to find someone, sleeping in the woods?

A: At least maybe few months, I guess, maybe six months. Living in the woods, until -- let's

say, after a while, after a while, my father used to give peasants a haircut, and my grandpa also knew how to sew. So my father said he knows how to sew, so when we went into a peasant house during the night when we could take off -- because we didn't know if we could trust them or not, you know -- he said he could sew something. So they gave him something, like to make a little jacket or whatever, and they gave us a piece of bread. And also we lived on stealing potatoes and beets and corn. So most of it, we lived on this.

Q: Did you ever get caught stealing the food?

A: No, but I caught in ghetto once. I went out -- somebody said to me, you know, I was a child, and somebody said to me, she said, "You know what? Let's try and get out of the ghetto, and maybe we'll go to the peasants and they're gonna give us a piece of bread or whatever." But we had to walk through some gardens, and we got out of the ghetto. There was like a hole underneath, we got out of the ghetto, me and my friend, and I went to my house where I used to live and asked for food. They gave us food, but then on the way back, we had to -- from my house the people, they threw me out. But another guy, another peasant man gave us some food, a piece of bread probably. But we had to go through some gardens, and while we were passing the gardens, we were caught by the Germans. They beat the living hell out of us. I thought this is it, they're going to send us straight to the concen -- I didn't even know if it was a concentration camp. We didn't know about concentration camps. We knew about the ghetto, but I knew they gonna shoot us. So I said to them, "My father works for you. My father is a barber, works here and there and there." My brother, as young as he was, he worked in a stable in ghetto. They, he e used to bring in a piece of bread or piece of orange peel or whatever they gave the horses to eat, you know. He used to bring in from the food of the horses, he used to bring into the ghetto. My mother used to cook something there from this here. Anyway, they almost killed us, not by gun, by sticks. I came in and crawled back into the ghetto from, you know, and I got caught then. But stealing by the peasants the food, no.

01:50:09

Because we were stealing, let's say, like during the night. I mean, how much do you steal? A potato or two, but no, never got caught.

Q: Were you aware of any German troops or ...

A: We were aware. We were aware, yes. We had raids, they knew that this whole area is full of underground people and partisans because while the Russians were taking off, the German took it over, that whole area. They were, I think, about three weeks without a government altogether. The Russians, they, they just took off. And the Germans weren't there yet, but then the partisans, the underground people, they were groups and groups, armies left in Belarus. This was Belarus area. Armies were left there behind, and they just, the Russians, they, they took off. So when the Germans took it over later on, this must have been in '42, right? The beginning of '42. '39, two years with the Russians, and then the Germans came in

'42, I think.

Q: Fall of '42, maybe.

A: Fall of '42, right. When did the Germans ...

Q: I think the uprising was in September '42.

A: September '42.

Q: So this was after that?

A: Yes, this must be, this was -- this was after that. So they were all around. We knew, my father knew, if you have some kind of ammunition on you, a gun, a revolver ... any kind of ammunition, they took you in. They didn't want me, they didn't want me even I knew how to shoot or whatever. They wouldn't take me in because I was a child, and I was sick, undernourished, of course. I could hardly walk. My father, they needed it, so they didn't want neither of us. They didn't want us, so that's what my father used to do for quite a while. He used to give somebody a haircut. They used to even take him into the partisans and let him work there as a barber or as a tailor or play the violin for them. There was an army, an organized army.

Q: He had his violin?

A: Yeah. An organized army. Actually, it was not his violin. He found this violin by another guy, by a peasant man. It was way, way later. And he played with it, and he took it.

Q: When you say it was an army, you're talking about a partisan group or the Red Army?

A: A partisan group, part of the Red Army.

01:53:05

Partisans groups, part of the Red Army. Armies, whole armies. Organized groups of armies, but first of all, they didn't want Jews. They didn't want children, Jewish children, girls, and they didn't want to feed us. They didn't need us. They didn't -- But the truth was that they were not allowed to kill us either, but we were killed. A lot of us got killed there, a lot. They used to -- whoever had a chance to run away from ghetto or from any other place as a Jew, they came to the partisans. They didn't have a gun or a rifle or whatever -- who had a gun and a rifle? So they took 'em right away someplace and they killed them. And they were not allowed ...

Q: The partisans?

A: They were not allowed.

Q: So you and your father were wandering?

A: Wandering.

Q: And occasionally he would go into these army groups, give them a haircut, play for them?

A: Right, right. And as soon as they said -- he said that he has a child with him, they didn't want him. And I was not a baby, I was 14 years old. But I shrank to a baby, you know, and they didn't want me. What use can I, can they have for me? I'm not a woman to have sex with me, and I'm not -- which they probably did -- I know they did to another girl, a young woman, a Jewish young woman. She had to go in there because she had no other choice. And I had a father with me, and I was nothing. I was like a stick without hair. I had no hair at all.

Q: Did they let you cook for them?

A: Well, later on -- they didn't need that either, because they had cooks. The really had cooks. They had contact with Russia, with Moscow. They really wanted me -- they wanted my father so badly there. They needed him, they needed him. Not that they wanted him, they needed him, that they, they told my father if -- they'll take him in if -- they had contact with planes, even, planes used to come in there, come in and out. My father told me this, I didn't know it. That they're going to take me to Russia on a plane and keep my father in the Russian partisans, in the Russian army. And my father told me. He said, "Look, mein Kind,"¹¹ he said, "you could save your life. I don't know if I'll be alive or not. I don't know if I'll survive. There's Hitler here; there's a war here, but you could be saved." We didn't know where the German army was.

01:56:02

At that time, they were still way, way before Stalingrad. They were way -- they were still maybe in Belarus, I'm not sure where they were. But, so he said to me "But you could save your life." I said, "No, my father. If we'll survive, we'll survive together. If we're going to die, we're going to die together." And every time -- there were a lot of raids there because they knew this is the area from the partisans -- I always used to lay right next to my father. I said if we're going to be killed, it's gonna be both of us together. I will not be killed by myself. Or mainly, I didn't want to left by myself without my father. I was on the Pripet for a few weeks without anybody. And I even looked worse now than I looked then. So he used to -- once, he grabbed me by my arms, there was hours of raiding in that area. And the bombs were falling all around us. They're trying to get the partisans out of there. He grabbed me, he pulled me out, off this grave, you know, where we used to hide in ditches if there was a ditch. I turned

¹¹Mein Kind: My child (Yiddish/German).

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around and as soon as he left, I was right on top of him. And we survived together, we did survive together.

Q: We're going to stop right now because we're almost out of tape. This is a good time to change and take a little break.

A: Okay, yeah. Thank you.

Q: Sure.

01:57:34

End of Tape #1

TAPE #2

02:00:00

Q: Was this before you were with this partisans?

A: This was before, way before.

Q: Okay, let's pick up, I guess, where we left off. You and your father ...

A: Well, we were walking and walking days and nights. And, of course, there was no showers or bathtubs -- for washing for yourself except washing at night, not during the day. They shouldn't see us, sleeping us barns. Nobody should see us. Or in the woods most of the time, nobody should see us. Steal a potato in the gardens or steal a piece of carrots. Or it was right at -- it was harvest time. It was like in September, and until we did, we reached the area where they said there is partisans there, groups and groups, armies of partisans. Armies. After then, then we started -- so my father got in touch with somebody that told us where they are. Well, they wanted my father, as I said before, but they didn't want me. So we stayed like this for a few weeks, and then my father said to me, "Well, let me go the partisans. I'm going to leave you with this family." This whole area was occupied by Russian partisans, so really there was no Germans there. But I was in a peasant house; I was not in the partisans, they were in the woods in underground. And I lived in a house with some peasant people, peasant family, and I was a maid there and I did whatever they told me to do. I slept on a ... on this oven in the back which was hot. There was no blanket there, and it was concrete. It was behind the oven, they call it. That heat, I'll never forget. I used to lay on one side, bake it well until it was on fire. Turn around on the other side, turn on my back, turn on my stomach until the morning. And I couldn't wait to get off. And then I went to the woods -- to the fields and worked -- worked with them. I wore a kerchief because of my little black hair here, they shouldn't recognize me I'm Jewish, and my nose. And they used to hide me, of course. They were nice. They were afraid of the partisans to touch me, to hurt me because my father was in the partisans. And he said if something happens to me, they're going to be all dead. So they used to really keep an eye on me, watch me, feed me whatever it was left over. But if you had bread and a potato, you had food. It was luxury.

Q: Did you change your name or pretend you were Catholic?

A: My name -- no, no. I was Jewish, but my name was Fania, but I was Jewish. I mean, they looked at me and I was Jewish, you know. And ... so they knew, so they had to be very careful.

02:03:02

After a while when they kept me, they were afraid to open up their mouth for two things. First of all, for the Russians, because they were not allowed to kill anybody who is Jewish

legally, you know. I mean, illegally, they caught them in the woods, they kill them. But there were a lot of leftover Jews, let's say, who ran away from a small town who didn't go to a ghetto or one somebody who says well, he didn't think that they're going to kill his family. He just took off. So it's like lost sheeps, they were here and there scattered around. There was even -- my father told me this -- there was even a whole family of five people came: a father, mother and three kids. They had no ammunition on them. They had no guns. They had no rifles. They had nothing. They just disappeared. They just, they were gone. My father never saw them again. Then my father asked what happened to this family. They said they transferred them to another group, which it wasn't true; they killed them. And then my father told them that he's in the partisans and they had to take care of me. That's it. So they kept me there. I was there for about a year.

Q: With the peasants?

A: With the peasants, yeah. I was there for about a year. Then also, the partisans, like Zina was, they was a group of people like -- they called themselves in Russian *semeyny otryad*¹², they were like families type of things there. They didn't let them into the group, into the army, in the partisans' army, but they were outside like protected by the Russian, by the partisans. So they put me there, but not, Zina knew already where I am. Zina knew. When they came, when my father came to pick me up and put me in the other group, Zina came with him on the wagon.

Q: Your father had found your friend?

A: She found my father. She found my father. She found out in which group my father is from the partisans, and she came to see him. And when he told her that I lived with some peasant family; he's going to pick me up and bring me to the other group where Zina was but in a different group of -- like connected with the partisans. They like took care of them. They fed them. They had it better than I had with this peasant family, let's put it this way. So Zina came with my father. I remember he put together a small piece of four jackets, from, a ship, a ship jacket like from small pieces. He brought it over and he made, he himself made for me a pair of shoes. I don't know how, because all this time, I had no shoes. In Russia in those areas, they make they call it *lapti*¹³ in Russian.

02:06:00

It's made out of the corn sticks, and they make shoes out of this here. And this is what I had, the peasants made me a pair of shoes like that, and this is what I walked in.

¹²*Semeyny otryad*: Family detachment of partisans (Russian).

¹³*Lapti*: Peasants' shoes made of straw (Russian).

Q: The peasants made you, or your dad made you?

A: Oh, no. They made me because I was barefoot. So I wore this type -- before that, too, somebody made me a pair of shoes like this, also from the peasant people. They gave me a pair of shoes. It's not shoes; its laptis. It's -- I mean, if you went into the water with them, the water came to your neck. But it didn't stick into your flesh, these sharp things didn't stick into you. And they wore it, too. They wore this type of shoes, the peasants wore. So my father brought me a pair of leather shoes that he put together by himself, I don't know how, from small pieces of some kind of a leather. I don't know where he got this leather. I guess in the partisans, maybe. Maybe it came from deep Russia some place, I don't know. So Zina came, and they picked me up.

Q: I think we need to just explain for the record who Zina¹⁴ is because I know Zina but ...

A: Yes, Zina is a friend of mine that lived next door to us. She came -- she comes from a family -- let's see, she came with a father and three children into my home town. When the Germans invaded half of Poland, her father with the three children took off and came to my home town. They called them bierzences,¹⁵ like misplaced people, let's say. And they lived next door to us. She was the oldest of the two children, and I think, I think she mentioned it to me that her mother and the other three young ones were supposed to come over later, but they never did. They never came. So they lived like next door to us, and my mother felt sorry for them. There were three small kids with a father. The father was a shoemaker who couldn't make a living. They were starving. And my father had food because as a barber, he used to bring in food to the house. My father was, My mother was a very, very good-natured woman, extremely good-natured woman, and she used to bring into her house food. Sometimes she used to call into Zina to my house, wash her, comb her hair, brush out her hair from the lice, and take her, give her something to eat. Do some cooking and bring into her house. This is my girlfriend, Zina. And this is the one who actually took off the shirt out of her back and made a bandage on my back. This is my friend, Zina.

Q: Okay, so Zina found your father in the woods?

A: Yes.

Q: That's where we are.

A: She didn't find my father in the woods. She found out through from other people where my father is, and she was looking for him. She's a devil, this Zina.

¹⁴Zina is Zina Schultz Baum, who was also in the Lachva ghetto. Zina has been interviewed by USHMM. Her interview can be accessed through the Archives: RG-50.030*018.

¹⁵Bierzences (bierzency): Refugees (Polish).

02:09:02

She's a devil, and she went to my father to the group of the partisans to find out what happened to me. She didn't even know it. So when she found the partisans, the group where my father was, and she saw him, she asked him about me, of course. So my father told her that I am like miles away in this peasant's family, and I'm far away and I'm being taken care of, more or less. So she said she would like to see me. So, finally, they came, they picked me up, and they brought me to this camp, family camp next to the partisans. And I stayed with them for a while, which it's hidden in the woods, actually. Everything in the woods; everything was like hidden in the woods. And I was there. During the day, they used to take me in to the partisans. I scrubbed potatoes. I still have calluses after now 50 years later, I still have calluses. Once, they told me to wash the, the big, big -- they used to call it the kotiel.¹⁶ It's a big, big pot where they used to cook the food for the partisans, and they told me to wash it. I crawl inside, it was huge, I washed it. Didn't come out clean. One of the guys took a stick and beat me up. Just because it didn't come out for the partisans already, it didn't come out clean. So my job was sitting, peeling potatoes for them and knitting gloves and socks for the, for the feet. This was my job. So my father used to come to this camp, pick me up, bring me into the partisans. I did some cleaning for them, cooking for them, and bring me back to that camp.

Q: And your father was working for the partisans; was he fighting, as well?

A: He was fighting, as well, yes. He was in the partisans fighting, as well, yes. There were once a raid on us, a air raid, and, of course, I was not together with my father and everybody was running. We had to leave that area, and my father ran with the partisans and I ran with this little group here. I don't know where we were running, I guess away from the raids. And we're supposed to cross a river, and I don't know how to swim. I knew how to swim, but I was drowning as a young girl so I was afraid of water, actually. And this particular time some other people, the men from this camp, they took a rope and somebody swam through. And two people were holding the ropes, one on this side and one on the other side.

02:12:02

And we're supposed to walk on this rope. I walked halfway through, and I fell in. And somebody saw me falling in there, and after a while, I don't know how it happened, this person saw my father. And they told him -- so he said, "Where is my daughter, Feigele? She was there and there and there. Did she ran, did she hide herself? Is she alive?" He said, "No, your daughter's not alive; your daughter's dead." "What do you mean? Did you see her dead?" He said, "Yes, I saw her falling into the water. She drowned. I never saw her come out." I never came out this way, I came out the other way completely away from my people.

¹⁶Kotiel: Big soup pot (Russian).

I just -- it wasn't deep enough that it was maybe to my neck, and I crawled out on the other side which there were only about two or three people left there. There were two people, two Oriental people from the Russian army, I came across there. I was all by myself, all by myself, and I found these two people. But the people behind me saw me drown, and then they ran back. Unfortunately, most of them got killed, but I survived. And they told my father I'm dead. My father said, "No, she's not dead. My daughter's alive. My daughter's alive. My daughter's alive." I stumbled over these two Oriental people. They were from deep Russia, and they left families, I think, in Russia. They took me under their wings, and they took care of me. They watched me.

Q: For how long?

A: They watched me for quite a while. Maybe a few months. They didn't ask for nothing. They didn't touch my body. I remember every night, I felt a hand on my back, you know. And I said uh-uh, they're going to do something to me, but they didn't. They took off the shirt, the jacket from their back and they covered me.

Q: These were men, or ...

A: Men. Men. They really didn't touch me sexually; they didn't. There was nobody to touch sexually to begin with, but those years, they were animals. They didn't care who they touched, they really didn't. They touched me to see if my body's naked, you know, just whatever I had on me to cover me up. They took off whatever they had on their backs and they covered me, which is the truth. And I was -- they were watching me, also, same story. Stealing a piece of food. Eating some berries or whatever, water from the, from the swamps until we hit a town. We came into a town, and they were leftover partisans there in this town. There were leftover partisans and there was a typhus, everybody was sick.

Q: Do you know the name of the town?

02:15:00

A: Lublin. The name of the town is Lublin. And I came in, we came into this town, and these two people -- there was one more guy there, but he was not a China man. All with the small eyes, I call them Chinese people because I didn't know from where they are, but they were from deep Russia. But they were really good to me. They really saved my life at that time. And there's no place for me to go, a child. The same story, nobody wants me. Nobody cares for me, nobody wanted me. Everybody is pushing me away. I said I'm a nurse. I know how to be a nurse and know how to give a needle. I didn't have the slightest idea. Also I make beds, just keep me there; my father is someplace with the partisans. I don't know where he is because everybody knew we had a raid, and everybody was running someplace, you know. He was with the army, he was with the soldiers. I ... was on my own here. I was in this house, and I took care. They let me, I was lucky. They let me make the beds. The doctor,

there was some kind of a feldsher;¹⁷ it wasn't a doctor. He knew how to give a needle somehow. From where did he get the needles, I honestly don't know. I think he had some left over. He was also from the partisans left over. He run away, you know, when -- in the raid. He taught me how to give a needle. I got sick. I got temperature. They were sick on typhus and stomach typhus. And I start to vomit blood, and I got sick with a high temperature. And there was -- they put me already, there was laying there dead people on the -- it was not a bed, but it was barracks and each soldier was laying there. Some alive, some dead, some dying from the typhus. And I was so sick that they put me there already. They put me there, and there was another raid in this town. The house was on fire. If somebody is just meant to live, it's, it's unbelievable. It's just not normal, if you go back, you think how those things happen? I mean, it's, it's miracles that just people cannot believe, it's just not possible to believe. It was like a different person, and I must have probably have read it in a book someplace. It's like fiction; it's not real. There was laying dead people from -- dying on typhus -- and typhus. I crawled off that barrack, the bed. It was a bed for 25 people probably. I crawled out of the house. The house was on fire. I crawled out, I went behind the barn and I lay down there to die. All by myself. My -- all of a sudden, I open my eyes, I see my father.

02:18:04

He was asking, he was asking around if anybody saw me. If anybody saw me, if anybody saw a girl with black hair, a kerchief on her head, a skinny child. And he was going, you know, for some reason stumbled on this type of people who knew, more or less. One said, "Check this house. Maybe she's -- people are dying there on, on typhus. Maybe she's there." The house was already on fire. People were on fire. He went behind the barn, he found me there. He grabbed me, and he's carrying me on his back. He was carrying a rifle. He was really one of the leftover partisans, you know. He was carrying a rifle. He carried me on his back. He carried whatever food he could, of some clothing, I don't know. And they wanted to kill me, the people, the partisans. He schlepped me into the partisans with them because they knew more or less where they were going, or they had contact with somebody, I don't know. And I hear them say, "Kill her. We're not gonna take her with us. She's gonna ... If she's alive, and you gonna leave her, she knows that we are partisans. They're going to look for us." He said, "No. If you want to kill my daughter, the bullet has to go through me." I, I, I, I was listening, I wasn't unconscious. He schlepped me like this on his back for months. Months and months. Months. And they kept on begging him to kill me. Begging him to leave me and to kill me. "Finish her off." I was walking with a stick way, I just couldn't -- even after the war. I was liberated, I still had the stick on me. I couldn't walk without the stick.

Q: How big were these groups of partisans that you were with?

A: In the thousands.

¹⁷Feldsher: Old fashioned term for barber, surgeon (Yiddish).

Q: They could hide out in the thousands?

A: Yes. In the thousands. Armies. Leftover armies, Russian armies.

Q: So these groups you were with were huge?

A: Huge. Huge.

Q: Did you experience a lot of anti-Semitism?

A: Yeah. Yeah, a lot.

Q: Like what?

A: Like what? If a Jewish person came in, as I said before, some wandering that they wandered away whatever the reason was. They ran away, they wandered away, they were left over, they had the guts to run into the woods and come across the partisans and they had no ammunition on them, they killed them immediately.

Q: And if they had ammunition?

A: They might have taken 'em in. If they had a rifle on them or a gun or something, they might have taken them in, yes. Some, some, they took it in.

Q: In these groups that you were with, how many other Jews were there?

A: Not too many. Not too -- There were me and my father.

02:21:02

There was another girl with her brother, which -- she was my age. There was another girl from Minsk, an older girl, who -- with her brother. Her brother got killed and one of the -- and the, they used to go on the assignments, let's say, to put bombs on the trains. He got killed on one of those bombs. And this is all I know about Jewish people, not really. I was in the worst Jewish -- well, actually, my father was in the worst Jewish partisans' group, the most anti-Semitic.

Q: Oh, really?

A: They needed him so badly that they had to keep him there. And they was -- I know exactly. Nickoli, Nickoliovich, the commander was Nickoli Nickoliovich. And the name of the

partisans was the Stakhanovtsy.¹⁸ They were the worst anti-Semitic groups, but they needed my father badly and they kept him there.

Q: When you say the "worst anti-Semitic partisans," are there examples?

A: Yeah. The example is that if any Jew showed up, he was gone.

Q: But while you were amongst them, they didn't mistreat you or anything?

A: No. No. Of course, I stayed away from their sight. I did my job. I went in the middle of the night, I peeled my potatoes, and I went home. That's it. This was my job.

Q: What's this noise? Excuse me. Have we been hearing that noise?

Videographer: I caught a little bit, but I didn't know ...

A: On the other hand, they did saved a lot of Jews. They did. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here. Unfortunately, my father died in '62 on cancer, but he survived because of them. And Zina survived because of them. The Romanowskys survived because of them.

Q: Were you aware of any mistreatment of women?

A: Yeah. They used to rape women.

Q: You knew women who were raped?

A: Yeah. My girlfriend was raped, the older girlfriend. And she had the child, and they choked this child with a pillow.

Q: So that was common practice?

A: Yeah. They used to rape in the town. Even the non-Jewish women, the partisans used to rape them. It was against the law.

02:24:05

But, but this Jewish girlfriend of mine, she had a child. And later on, she had to live with one officer in order not to be touched by other people. She was a full developed, beautiful,

¹⁸Stakhanovtsy: The name of the partisan band (Russian). Stakhnovtsy was a miner in Ukraine, famous because for his record in mining. In the mid-30s, the Stakhnovsty movement developed with the miner as its role model. Those who followed its ideals believed in pushing themselves to set higher and higher goals in their industries.

beautiful girl, and she was with one officer. So this way, she was protected. I was protected by my father. And my other little girl was protected by her father. So, let's say, if one of the nights I stayed with my father in the group, I always used to sleep at the very end of the -- how do you call this -- barracks? Not a barrack.

Q: A bunk?

A: A bunk, yeah. Like, one, one piece of board. Like 20 soldiers used to sleep on the same ... a bunk, yeah. So I used to sleep, let's say, if I did stay overnight with my father I stayed always at the end, he kept me. But they wouldn't dare touch me, they wouldn't dare.

Q: Were any of the women fighting?

A: Yes. All of them, whoever was there. I had a rifle. I used to clean the rifles for them.

Q: Did you ever use the rifle?

A: Once. Once, I used the rifle.

Q: You killed a German?

A: I did not kill, but I let them know that they are coming.

Q: Do you remember much about your father and his actual fighting? I mean, how much responsibility they gave him, what role, what his responsibilities were?

A: His responsibility was during the day, he worked as a barber. And also, if any of the clothing got ripped, it was his job to sew it up. At night everybody had to stand guard, and, let's say, like -- everybody lived under the ground. It was like a regular army. They had a regular kitchen.

Q: Underground?

A: Underground, everything was underground. And -- my father used to stay guard. I stayed a few times, as young as I was. And ... and his responsibility was -- they never send him to kill or to stay in the front or to fight or to do things that he should be killed, because they really needed him for other things. For being a barber, sewing, sometimes playing music for them. He was very much musically inclined. Mainly, for being a barber and for sewing, they kept him there. But at night he had to stay guard. He was also inside in the committee a lot, too, with them, too, because he was working for them there in the partisans.

Q: Did you move around a lot, or was it ...

A: Yes, we did. We moved around.

02:27:02

We stayed in one place, say, like six months or eight months. I was actually only, I think, two years there. I think for about two years. We were liberated two, a year earlier before the concentration camp people, a whole year. So we were there for two years with them moving around from one place to the other.

Q: Every few months?

A: Like every few months, yes. If there were raids, we moved more, but everything underground. Everything underground.

Q: They were -- it just was built?

A: Built, made like -- like, you know, a grave underground, I would say.

Q: Do you have any other memories of some of the bombing raids?

A: Yes, I do. There were quite a lot of bombing raids, yes. A lot of bombing raids, and people got killed right and left.

Q: What would you do?

A: Run, just run. When I came to this country, I was still running, and when I, when I was in a regular bed -- I didn't feel this much after liberation, I don't know why, in, in, in displaced camp. When I came here, and I almost got killed because I was running through a window. My husband caught me in the back. I was already married with a child, and I heard a plane probably flying very low. And boom, I was running for the outside, and I went straight -- I guess in my dream or something, I saw the raid. I felt the raid. And he caught me, and he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "We are being bombed." He said, "No, you're not being bombed. You're in America. You're safe. Go back to bed." And this was going after me for many, many, many years. Many years, the raids. The raids and also that I was left on the Pripet from the people that -- it was in me that they're going to leave me, leave me. Funny, very funny, I cannot -- which I cannot explain, until when my father died this fear went away from me. It's like was taken, lifted off of me. Until my father died, I had "Tatinge, don't leave me. Don't leave me. Don't leave me." It was -- I mean years later -- 'till '62. He died in '62. I had this fear I was not a mother really -- I was a good mother, overprotective, very overprotective. But this fear in me that I'm in the war, I'm being bombed, I'm being left behind, this -- I wasn't home. I really was still floating, I was still running. But when my father died, it kind of was like this curse was lifted off me. Like, I'm home now. I'm in a free country and I'm home now. I cannot explain why. I cannot explain why. I used to say it to my father, I said, "Daddy, you're not going to leave me."

02:30:05

You're not going to leave me. There's ... I'm home. I'm in a free country. It's after the war. It's after ... " I dreamed night after night I was running, running, running. My grandma was dead. She was running after me, I don't know why. For years. I even told Zina this dream. I, I don't know why she's after me. Why is she running after me? Until 1962, until the day my father died, it's like I'm home. I'm not running anymore. My father either got to go away, which he didn't leave me. I know he didn't leave me, he really didn't. If there is something there, he's watching over me. And I'm not afraid anymore for some reason. I'm kind of protected. I don't know why.

Q: Is there anything else about that period? I know that at some point, didn't the Red Army send reinforcements into that area where the partisans were fighting?

A: Not soldiers, but ammunition. Because by running from one place to the other, they used to leave ammunition behind. But -- so they used to send planes with ammunition, but I don't think so that they had soldiers down. Just because soldiers, they had plenty. Armies of soldiers they left behind. But ammunition, they used to throw down. Food, they used to throw down. We used to even see them dropping with parachutes ...

Q: From the Red Army?

A: Whatever it was from the Red Army, yeah.

Q: Would you just explain when you say that there were armies, who were these armies?

A: Armies. Left over, leftover soldiers from the Red Army. Battalions, armies. I mean, as far as ...

Q: When they had to retreat -- I understand.

A: When they retreated, there was nothing to retreat. I think they were sold out. I mean, even the books, even history tells us, I think, that they were, they just didn't fight. They just didn't fight. The Germans came in, and they just took it over and there was no war there anymore in Belarus. They just left everything behind, and what -- whoever took off, I don't know if they took off. But there was other armies there waiting for them, I guess. But all the Belarus armies, there were armies from all over Russia. Armies, in the thousands.

Q: Anything else about your two years of hiding out or fighting or ... that you think we should know?

A: I don't -- as of now, I don't remember really. I was there -- I was there right behind them, next to my father. Being with my father. Thanks to him I'm alive. I knew that my parents -- my mother was killed. My brother, my sister was killed; I knew that. I was doing whatever I

had to do. They used to bring me, when I was hiding outside of the partisans, they used to bring me to knit sweaters, socks, gloves, clean ammunition for them. I cleaned ammunition for them. They brought me food.

Q: Were there many women?

A: No. Not too many women. Really not too many. As far as -- nobody was allowed to be married there. As far as I remember, there were three of us, unless somebody did have women outside of the partisans' groups.

02:34:00

They were, let's say, they had like women in the towns, they used to go to them, whatever. For sex or whatever, but nobody was -- no women, there were no women in the army. Just this Jewish woman, Jewish girl, older than me, and the two younger ones.

Q: Did you run into a lot of family camps?

A: Yes. There were a few. Not too many, but there were a few family camps, yes. But they were like behind the Russian armies who they kept an eye on them, actually.

Q: How did liberation come about? Where were you? What happened?

A: This was -- we were in the area of the Slutsk area, the area of Slutsk. And we knew -- I mean, people used to come, I guess. They knew through the partisans where the Germans are, that they were pushed back all the way back already, and we're going to be liberated. The raids were going on every single day. There were bombings and bombings and bombings. They knew that this is areas from the partisans, and the partisans' private camp, the family camps. Maybe somebody had women there, too. I mean, wives. They had also wives in Russia, too, left behind. And maybe they had new wives and kids here, too, which I really don't know. But most of them, they were like Russian people, Jewish people left over like Zina was left with her father and brother. The Romanowskys,¹⁹ I think they were in a different camp, but the two sisters, Anna Romanowsky; Genia Romanowsky; and the father, Barra Romanowsky. And there were quite a few camps, but not, not too many. Little by little they tried to eliminate, really, because they were a nuisance to the partisans. They couldn't kill 'em, and they didn't want to keep them, really. They had no use out of them. They had no use for them. They were just a nuisance.

¹⁹Evelyn Ripp (née Romanowsky), one of the Romanowsky children, has written her own account of her experiences. In it, her father's name is listed as Moshe. " 'Are there still places where children play and are not afraid?' A Holocaust survivor relives two years of hiding in the forests of Poland." Evelyn Ripp. *The Jewish Monthly*. April 1983.

Q: How did the partisans know that the war was almost over? Were they communicating with ...

A: Communicating with Moscow, yes.

Q: Through a radio, or ...

A: Through a radio or through planes or through whatever communication they had with Moscow. They knew that they are closing in already, that the Germans are leaving. And whatever day they left, they used to bomb us out. Try -- A lot of people got killed, Russians. Well, not too many -- this was not the Jewish area, really. This was just a coincidence that we had some Jewish people there. Let's say, there was a big town, Pinsk. Nobody survived from there. Slutsk people, nobody survived as partisans or as camps in the partisans. Whoever went to deep Russia, they survived. But from that area, if the Germans didn't kill us, the peasants killed, killed us. Or Minsk or the other smaller towns like Luninets.

02:37:03

Nobody, nobody -- Lachva survived, a few, because only because of this uprising only.

Q: Okay, so ...

A: But, otherwise, from all around there's maybe one from each town or maybe nothing. There are towns that completely got wiped out that not one person survived. Whole towns of that area. Minsk, Slutsk, Babruysk, Mikashevichi, Koshana²⁰ -- those are all smaller places, and Pinsk is big. Minsk is big, you know. But to survive in that area, nobody did. Everyone, as I said before, if the Germans didn't kill us, the Russians killed us. The people killed us.

Q: So how did you get liberated? When was that?

A: So this was in -- I think in '45?

Q: '44?

A: '44, the end of '44, probably.

Q: I don't know. Maybe July. I'm not sure.

A: It was June or July, I think. I think it was -- was it June or July '45?

Q: '44.

²⁰It is difficult to tell what Florence says here. The town is either Kosiche Velke or Koshana.

A: '44?

Q: I think.

A: '44 probably. And we knew that they are closing in. I wasn't with my father again for some reason. Through the bombing, we got separated again, you know. And, and then he found me again, also in the woods. Well, there was only woods there. And all of a sudden, there's no raiding; there's no bombing; we don't, we know there is no Germans; there's no contact with Moscow; there's nobody. And then somebody came and said to us, "Ach, the Germans are gone. The Germans are gone." And we started to walk towards Slutsk. Slutsk is a big city. And we started to walk towards that town. Well, people knew where to walk, I mean, and I followed them. I was still with a stick walking. I still couldn't walk. I was still very, very sick. And while were walking through the paths, we knew already that the Germans are gone. But we should watch how, because there leftover Germans. If they'll catch -- if they'll catch somebody, they're going to kill us. So while we're walking -- we walked already on the, on the streets, and there's no pavement on the streets, you know, in the smaller towns, you know. Nothing. And we saw Germans hanging on the posts. What happened was whoever -- they were also left over there. We were three days without any government at all when we came to Slutsk. There was no Russians or Germans. The Germans left, and the Russians didn't take us over yet. So we were just walking towards Slutsk, and beside every pole, there was hanging a German.

02:40:05

I'll never forget that scene. As much as I was mad and hurt, I couldn't look at it. I just couldn't look at it.

Q: Who had hung them?

A: I guess the partisans. The -- If they caught a German, they hung him up right down on the pole, on the electric poles. And I couldn't look. My father couldn't look. We got sick, we just couldn't. And we walked already in the streets, on the streets. Not in the woods anymore. And we were like lots and lots of groups together, so we weren't really afraid. And my father stuck me, he said, "Go in the middle. Go in the middle," you know. "Don't walk on the sides." Because if somebody's -- you know, they were still shooting there. There was still leftover shooting; not army shooting, but leftover shootings. And we walked for about a few days. By the time we came to the town Slutsk, we got there and there was nobody there. There was no government there. There was no Russians, and there were no Germans there. And the partisans gathered the leftover Germans, the leftover Russian people who wanted to turn into Germans and work for the German government and they were mean to everybody. Not just to Jews, I guess to non-Jewish people, too, and ...

Q: The Belorussians?

A: The Belorussians. And I hear that the Ukrainians, they were even worse than the Belorussians. The Ukrainians was even worse, they were worse. And there's one point that they -- we came into like the middle of the town, and there were a big, big stack of people like worms. Who were they? Germans, leftover Germans. And I've never seen such a huge group, one on top of the other. Like they caught somebody, and they just threw him on. They caught somebody, a German left over, and they threw him on this, on this -- not a bunch, but it's like a mountain of people. And some of them are wounded. Some of them were dead already there. Some of them were bleeding. I could still see them. I visualize them. And one guy, a partisan, says to give my stick to my father, and he said -- not a stick, he gave him a rifle. He turned around and he says to my father "Here, Mr. Gitelman," he said in Russian, "They killed your family. Killed your wife, they killed everybody here. Now, you have a chance to give it back to them. Hit them." And they did to me the same thing, they gave me -
- I never touched anybody, I couldn't.

02:43:02

My father turned this around, gave one zat to somebody there. He fainted, he was out. He couldn't do it either. Neither ... my father couldn't touch anybody and me, forget about it; I couldn't touch anybody. And this was how we were liberated, without a country, without anybody, without family. I knew my family's dead. My mother's dead. I knew that. The rest of my uncles. I had -- my mother had a sister with five children, I knew if they were there in Lachva, they were all taken to this mass grave and they were all shot. Because from there, nobody went from that ghetto. If anybody went, it's from this ghetto. And my family was in the other ghetto. I was hoping still for my brother. I was really hoping, but but then, by then I didn't know if he's dead or alive. I knew if he was in this ghetto, if he's in this ghetto maybe, maybe he's someplace. But there's somebody who saw what happened to him, they told us. That, this was after the war. We stayed in Slutsk. My father became a barber again. The Russians wanted to send me away to school again way to deep in Russia. I said, "I'm not going," but they were forcing me to go. So I went away. I came, I went to my home town. I said, "I'm not going no place. I'm staying with my father." So I went to Lachva.

Q: Alone?

A: Alone. I left my father in Slutsk. He was a barber, and I went to Lachva; I took a -- then there no trains yet. But any train that was going, those army trains so I snuck on top on the train. I was laying all the whole night on the top on the train, on the roof. And I came to Lachva, I jumped off. Now, you see a 16-year-old kid, they are babies. But they were, yes, people with experience, and I stayed there for a week. I couldn't stay there. I stayed with Zina and the Romanowsky two sisters. I couldn't stay there. I went back to Slutsk.

Q: Before you go back to Slutsk, did you learn then what happened to the rest of your family?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me?

A: Yes. Well, that's what happened to them. When we were running, whoever was there specially the first ghetto and the second ghetto, the one that was on fire, whoever they grabbed, they put them on this truck, as I said before. Took 'em to that massive grave, shot -- make them to get undressed, all of them. They got all undressed. They lined them up, shoot them, and they threw them into this -- put this white antibi- -- I don't know what it was.

Q: Lime?

A: Lime or whatever. You know, it shouldn't smell or it shouldn't whatever. And the layer on top on layer on top on layer and who, and they killed everybody, and that's it.

Q: And that was what happened to your grandmother?

A: To my grandma, to my, to my mother, to my sister, and they probably threw my brother in there, too. I don't know how they buried him. But they killed him right in the middle of this town, but I guess they took him over there, and they probably threw him then, you know, dead.

Q: How many people do you think were in that grave?

A: In that grave was about, I have it written down, about 2,600 people.

Q: All right. So you made your way back to Slutsk.

A: I came back to Slutsk and then my father says to me, "We're not going to stay -- " my father meantime met this woman, he got married. He knew that my mother's dead. He married her. He wanted to give me a home, but the truth was he didn't. She was a mean woman, she was very mean to me. Very cruel to me.

02:47:09

She used to -- this was my second world war, another war I had with her. She used to lock the food from me, after the war. She was just a mean, mean woman. She's dead now, but she was a mean woman. A real stepmother that you read in the books. And my father said, well, he married -- he got married, and, but this is not a way to stay. This is not a way to live. We're not going to stay here. And it was always kind of he knew how to get into people that were organizers, and he got in touch with some people in Slutsk. People that knew what's happening, and he got in touch with the Haganah. And they told him that people are being smuggled from place to place, and, of course, our goal was Israel. How to find a way to go to Israel. He also had two sisters in America and a brother in New York, and -- but there was no mail yet. There was no connection yet there, and he didn't remember the addresses. He didn't remember nothing. He didn't remember my age. He was so blocked out that he didn't

remember my age. He knew more or less approximately how old I am, but exactly to the date, he didn't know it. This I found out in this country, my age. So we went -- they told us to go to somebody making papers, and we went to a place by the name of -- we went to Lachva. In Lachva, we went to a place by the name of Baranovich,²¹ a town Baranovich. And there my father somehow through the Haganah and ... and through other different -- already that I guess from Israel -- organized groups that knew tried to gather all the leftover Jews, whoever survived to get us together to bring us -- they opened up DP camps in Germany, and they accumulated everybody. Whoever wanted, you had to go. There was no other place to go. And here we were cared for, they organized us, they gave us money, they gave us tickets. False names, false -- everything was false. And they brought us into Germany. I think, I think from Baranovich to Germany we went as Greek Jews, I don't know why. But we were not allowed to speak any Yiddish or any other language, just --

02:50:03

they didn't know what it means, Greek language. So they told us to keep quiet, and we smuggled into, to borderlines from one country to the other. This was everything was done, I think, by the Haganah by the Israeli Haganah or Bricha or whatever Jewish organizations. And this is how we came to Germany to a DP camp by the name of Pöcking.

Q: Where was it near?

A: Near München, near Munich. There they all kinds of, I think, everything -- maybe America woke up a little bit, too. I don't know. My father found out the names -- not the names, but where his sister live. I guess that the Jewish groups, the Israeli groups, maybe the Haganah, to find out for us the addresses of his sisters. And we got contact with the sisters, and they wanted us to come to America. The truth was we wanted to go to Israel. In Israel those years were very, very -- we were already in Germany in 1946 in Pöcking, in a camp by the name of Pöcking. And we wanted to go to Israel. I met my husband there in Pöcking. And we survived. They used to send me packages, Care packages from America, clothing, food. Courage that we had a family finally, you know, and they wanted us to come here. But my father -- my stepmother had a daughter. I mean, she's, she's still alive. And the daughter had a boyfriend in Germany in this camp, Pöcking, and she had a fight with him. So she got up and she went to Israel on her own without anybody asking if the family's going, the mother's going, I'm going. She went to Israel, so, of course, her mother pulled to Israel. My father was ... wanted to go to America to his sisters and a brother. But she wanted to go to Israel, so my father went to Israel. And when he came -- this was still not legally, it was before 1948.

Q: So it was difficult to get to Israel?

A: It was very difficult, and when my father came there and he saw the sewers there, the

²¹Currently known as Baranovichi.

problems there, and in the meantime I got married to my husband and I was pregnant. So he said, "You go to my sister's, to America. They promised me the world here. They promised me a home. They promised me everything I needed, everything I want to."

02:53:07

And that's how it was. I happened to have a very, very, not -- unfortunately, they're all dead - - but they were very good to me, very good to me. And so I went to America with my husband and a baby.

Q: So you were in the DP camp about how long?

A: In the DP camp, we came in ... I think it January '46 and then Pöcking was closed. This, the camp, the DP camp was closed, and they sent us to another DP camp by the name of Föhrenwald where my son was born. And I came to the United States in 19 -- I got married in 1948. My father went to Israel in 1948, and I came here and I give birth, 1948 -- I got married in 1948, and I came to this country in 1949, I think the 15th of July.

Q: So you were in the camps for two or three years?

A: But I think it's two and a half years. It's January 1946 'til 1949, 'til July.

Q: And that also means, then, you were liberated, but not in the camps, in Slutsk for a year and a half or so before you went to Germany, or something like that?

A: Well, yeah. Well, almost, I think I was almost about two years. I think I must have been there with the -- in the ghetto six months. And then I think with the Russians, I was there for about less than two years, I think.

Q: Okay. How much tape do we have?

Videographer: More than five minutes.

Q: Another thing I wanted to ask you about was getting back to the uprising. It was very unusual.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: It was one of the first ...

A: First, very first ones, yes.

Q: So there was underground activity that you weren't involved in ...

A: Right.

Q: But what did your father know about all of this? Was he involved?

A: He was not -- he was involved in a way. Because I remember him going to meetings. I remember he coming in to -- because he had access out of the ghetto. He had also connections, I think, also with the Germans. Because I remember he knew exactly, later on he told me, he wasn't allowed to talk. He knew exactly when they -- when this, they were gonna to kill us. He knew that that particular morning -- he told me later on that he was praying to God that I should never come back from work. I should run away, I should be killed there, that he shouldn't see me back being killed and taken to this. He knew exactly how it's going to be done.

02:36:00

The Germans told him, and one German said to him -- one German said to him, he said, "You know," he said, "If there is a way for you to, to run away, you cannot take your family with you, but if you could run away, because you're going to be killed tomorrow morning." So he knew. My brother knew because he was working in the stable by horses. He was cleaning the horses, and the -- one German said to him, he said, "You're a young kid. If you could run away now because you gonna be killed tomorrow morning." He said, "But I have my father and mother there. Where can I go? How? Where should I run? Where should I run?" My father knew, my father knew where to run. He knew it, he knew that area. He was older, he knew where to run. I didn't, I was running wherever -- like hurdles of cows. Everybody was running; I was running. But he knew, and he used to go to meetings because I knew he used to come home in the evening from the other ghetto. He used to bring in certain news from the outside, because he was on the outside, into the ghetto to the group, I guess. And they were really organized to do this; otherwise, they couldn't do it. They couldn't be -- they couldn't do the uprising without being organized. They didn't have any ammunition, but the way they did it was a miracle. To rip a gate, to kill -- they killed quite a few soldiers, quite a few Germans at that time. I have the correct amount written down. My girlfriend has it in her book.

Q: Did he have contact with (indecipherable)?

A: Yes. Oh, yeah.

Q: Did he ever talk about that afterwards, what kind of man he was or ...

A: They were good people. They were good people, and they really -- like I hear from -- in many other towns. They used to like accumulate a group of people, whoever had money, or said something wrong, or they said he's going to run away from the ghetto. There were other ghettos, and put him right smack in the middle of the town and shoot him out. We didn't have this, we didn't have this. I guess they must have been good people. They tried their best

to protect as they were the oldest, and they were the, the managers, to do the best to protect us. Because none they -- of us were shot right smack in the middle of the town, like my husband's father got shot right smack in the middle of the town; they killed him. So we didn't have this.

Q: Anything else about the organization that you learned about from your father?

A: This is about all that I know. Unless if you do want more ...

Q: I know, read the book.

A: Yes.

Q: Right, I'm just wondering from your personal experience.

A: No, I didn't know. Only what my father used to tell me after, after that, how the group was organized to the oldest, to really to the oldest. They were the people who -- but they weren't talking about younger people like me or children or older people. Just if somebody could survive, it was only this group. And they took my father in because he brought in some news from the Germans because he was working outside.

Q: Was their goal to save the whole town, to save the whole community?

A: A way? No way.

Q: Was that their goal, though?

A: No. There was no way for that, no. Some of us, just to survive and to, to save everybody, no. No way.

Q: Just to save the strong?

A: Just to save the strongest, the youngest, mostly men and some women. But mostly men, mostly young men.

Q: And that was even the underground's goal?

A: That was even the underground's goal, too, yeah. If anybody came any younger, or older, they were gone in no time. They were killed in no time. If not for my father, I could have never, never survived. Never, never.

Q: How do you think you got through all of this?

A: I don't know. I honestly don't know. Just after the war, you just got numb. And you blocked

out -- you, the power of life is so big, it's so strong that it's unbelievable. It's such a strong power to live, the life is so strong that you're really selfish. You become selfish. You don't -- You don't want to think about the past. You just don't want to, you just block out. You're young, you didn't live for so many years. You want to live. You fall in love. God was good to me. I fell into a beautiful family who they came from Russia. A mother with three children, two sons and a daughter. I was with them. I mean, after I met my husband, you know. And they were nice to me, and I just wanted to live. That's it. I wanted to be alive, and I was like a scared sheep for many, many, many years. Many years. I was afraid to walk the streets. I was afraid of planes. I was petrified for planes. I didn't fly for many, many years. I was afraid to go into the plane. I thought if I heard a plane fly, I thought they're going to kill me; they're going to throw down a bomb. And bitter, I think we are bitter people in a way. We're trying to be good, but in a way I'm bitter. I'm hurt. You have ... Your conscious is guilty, you say to yourself, why do you survive? Why? Why not my mother? She was 36 years old. My brother? My sister was running after me. Your conscious bothers you. You think why couldn't I grab her hand and say, "Come with me"? Maybe, maybe. No, I didn't do that. Why? I don't know why. I really don't know why. This kills me all my life. I never talk about it. I thought maybe if I would've grabbed her, maybe. She was running. She wanted to go with me. Why didn't I take her? We would have lived, lived together with a ...

03:02:50

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview