

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Blanka Rothschild
September 27, 1994
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Blanka Rothschild, conducted by Sandra Bradley on September 27, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

BLANKA ROTHSCHILD

September 27, 1994

Q: Tell me your full name and tell me when and where you were born.

A: My full name is Blanka Erma Rothschild. Born Fischer. I was born in Poland in Łódź, which is a large city considered Polish manufacturing city.

Q: Tell me when you were born, and then tell me a little bit about what your childhood was like before the war came.

A: I was born in August of 1922. I was the only child. My family was very close, well educated. I had a very happy childhood. I attended a private school, and I had a lady at home who took care of me. I had several cousins because my dad had several brothers and three sisters, and my mother had two brothers and a sister. And each one of them had one or two children. So we were a very close family, very devoted. Something that I treasure. My childhood gave me a very good background, strength, and love.

Q: What did your parents do?

A: My father was -- he actually had two faculties. He was an architect and an engineer. He studied outside of Poland because Poland had very strict admission for Jews in their universities, so my grandparents sent him to Czechoslovakia and then to Italy. And he was mainly an engineer in his last years.

Q: So around about -- well, tell me what you remember of the middle 1930s. Do you remember changes happening and --

A: Yes. Well, in the middle 1930s, I -- in the beginning of the 30s, I attended the German gymnasium, which was the best in the city. But with the change in the political situation, my parents switched me to a Polish gymnasium. And, unfortunately, I was sort of isolated. I didn't feel any pressure, any political pressure. Anything that was coming, I was unaware of it. We had a group of friends. In the summer, we were going away, and we had a small place in the country. And it was quite a satisfactory life. However, in 1938 and '39, the changes started to occur. We read about the rise of Nazis in Germany, which was neighboring Poland. We were aware of the speeches; however, we still felt pretty safe and secure. My uncle, who was a physician, had many patients

01:04

who were of German origin, so-called Volksdeutsche then living in our city. And when he visited them, because at that time, a doctor visited patients in their home, they were wearing signs. They were wearing swastikas in the houses. There were pictures of Adolph Hitler. And we still didn't take this too seriously. Seriously enough of thinking of leaving.

Q: And then tell me what happened when the war started and how you remember it.

A: I remember distinctly September '39. The 1st of September was the first day of war, and I remember there are certain moments that are crystallized in your memory. They're etched so deeply, and I remember exactly the moment. I was sitting on a balcony, reading a book. And all of sudden, I heard a thud, a tremendous thud sound, and I saw planes circling above the city. I wasn't even afraid; I didn't know with what to associate this, that this was the day that the war started, and the planes came over Poland. I did not know that they crossed the border at that moment, but I remember the planes and the thud. And it startled me, and I got up and went to the room. This is something that is etched in my memory.

Q: Did your parents talk? Did you hear your parents talking? Did they know what was happening? Were they afraid?

A: My father died a year before the war. Two years before the war, excuse me. Two years before the war. He suffered from uremia, and at that time, there was no cure for it then. There were no dialysis known to medicine. And I was with my mother, and my mother was being courted at the time by a friend, a physician. So they were rather happy. The clouds of the war were sort of coming, but yet we did not realize to the fullest the seriousness of the situation of -- in school in lyceum, which was equal to junior college here, I would say. And the radio started to play national Polish hymns and the patriotic speeches, and we were listening to people telling us that we were invincible, which was very laughable because Poland did not have the technology that Germany possessed. In a few days, the Germans went in our city, which was not that far from the border. And while Germans were coming with their tanks, the Poles were fighting on their beautiful horses with lances, dressed beautifully. Being

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patriotic and brought up in the spirit, everything was beautiful to me, but the reality of what was happening was ugly. Very soon after that, the Germans started to issue laws. Curfew was one of the first. We were not permitted on the streets past, I believe, 5 o'clock, I'm not too sure about that hour. We were required to wear yellow stars with the sign Jude identifying us as Jews. The money was frozen in the bank, and we started to be very frightened. One particular time, I was walking on a street not too far from my home, and I was called by a German officer. He called me, motioning with his hand to come over. My heart was beating wildly. I crossed the street. He asked me to go upstairs to his apartment, and being a young girl, I was just petrified. He asked me to clean the place. He took his gun off, put it on a table, and was sitting on a chair next to it watching me. Well, I didn't know too much about cleaning, but I cleaned very fast, and I did what he asked me to do. And he looked at me, and he said in German "It is a shame that you are a Jew," and he let me go. This is another of the moments that I will never forget. After that, I wasn't going out too much. My mother and my grandmother tried to shield me. Since the apartment that we were

living in belonged to -- this was a large building which belonged to us, we knew many German people in the city, Polish people of German origin. And my grandmother, who is very wise, asked one of them to come and be sort of a supervisor of the building, so she made an office in our apartment. It was a large apartment, and we did not have to display anything on the door identifying us as Jews. So for a little while, we were spared. However, pretty soon the Germans caught on. One day -- this is another of these moments -- one day there was a ring. An officer with an aide came to the door. The officer had a scar on his face identifying him as a student who had dueled probably in

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Heidelberg, Germany University. He also had a black skull on his head, a skull which identified him, I think, as a member of SS, and we knew what that was, Gestapo SS. He walked into the place. My grandmother, who was very fluent in German and knew that he represented danger, asked him if she could contribute to the German Red Cross, money. She thought that she would mollify him and that he will leave. At which point, he hit her. He had suede gloves, and he hit her with a gloved hand across the face. He proceeded from room to room with a man and was pointing to things which struck his fancy, and the young man started to pack them. At the end of one of our rooms was a small alcove filled with fern greens, and there was a cage with a canary hanging there. Once he saw the canary, his whole appearance changed. He became enchanted with the bird, and he asked us "Is this a male or a female canary? How lovely does he sing." He was a changed man. At that moment, I realized that a canary was more important, had more meaning to him than all of us human beings. This is one of the moments that I will never forget. The man was an educated man; I knew that. And we were nothing, but the canary represented something wonderful to him. He was mesmerized by the canary, and he beat my grandmother. Well we were staying in our apartment for some time until the Germans started to throw people out to ghetto -- I need to explain the term of "ghetto" to many people and children who are listening to me. A ghetto is an isolated part of our city situated in what used to be a very poor neighborhood and consisted of several blocks of buildings and small houses. And we knew that we are going to be thrown out. And since we knew somebody that was an engineer who was well acquainted with my family who lived at the outskirts of the city, and he asked us, since he was being evacuated, if we could live in his little house and take care of it, which we agreed to greedily because it was clean. It had three rooms and a kitchen, and had a garden. And a garden was very important because there was some food growing there and we moved there. After a while, they started to send Czechish refugees, Jews from Czechoslovakia, and they were being assigned spaces in ghetto. The ghetto was small; there was not much space. Well, we received a couple, a husband and wife -- a charming, lovely couple whose children were being kept by some Czechish neighbors, Christian people who helped to save the children. And the couple stayed with us for a while. But we were being already used to the rations, and we were deteriorating at a slower rate than they. They were thrown in directly from the good life to the very, very bad, and they both died fairly soon. We were all being starved, and my grandmother had an

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idea. The so-called "Aelteste der Juden", you wouldn't know which one. The man who was in charge of Łódź Ghetto was named Chaim Rumkowski. Before the war, he was an agent for an orphanage and collected money for the orphans. Since my family was involved in charitable work and donated money to the orphanage, my grandmother decided that I should go to see him and ask him for some help because there was some sort of help. There were so-called talons (ph), small pieces of paper for some food distribution, and I went to see him. It's another moment in my memory. It was a long room with a long table. He was at the end of the table, and I was at the other one, at the other end. I was led in the room, and I said to him in Polish "Panye President," which means Mr. President. And at that moment, he picked up a cane and wanted to hit me because he resented the fact that I didn't speak Jewish to him, which I didn't know. So I quickly told him "I am from this-and-this family." And at that, he stopped and said, "Where do you live?" Then I gave him the address and I left. He sent next day somebody with few of the pieces of papers for some sugar and for me to work in a bakery for three months. And that was a life-saving because I could eat some bread in the bakery, and I could take some small pieces home, and my ration card was being used by my family. This lasted three months. Three months later because they were changing -- three months later, he remembered me. He had fantastic memory. He switched me to a place which was called kitchen -- some sort of kitchen. They were feeding for two weeks soup to workers who were essential to their production in ghetto. You see, ghetto had several establishments working for the Germans. In order to stay alive we were obligated to produce some work. In that kitchen, I worked as a waitress. And one day about a week later, this Mr. Rumkowski's sister-in-law came to the room, and she saw me and she said, "Cut your hair," and I didn't understand why. And said, "Out," and she threw me out of the kitchen. Well, that was a tragedy because that's where the food was. I spoke to the aide to Mr. Rumkowski, who was afraid of her because she thought that she was a princess in ghetto. People had very wrong ideas about themselves. He was instrumental in assigning me to the kitchen where they were peeling potatoes, and I was very happy about that. I was peeling potatoes all day long, and trying to steal some of the peels to take home, because peels meant food. All this ended soon after. The ghetto was being systematically emptied. There were transports; people were being sent away. At that time, even Rumkowski couldn't help. He had several people whom he knew from before the war from helping the orphanage or whatever, and he sent -- I don't remember the number -- maybe there were 40 or 50 of us young

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women to a place at the outskirts called Mariánské in ghetto. And we were there, working there in some meaningless work we performed. We were supposed to build cement blocks for the houses that were being ruined in Germany. They were trying to have cement blocks to build some sort of shelter. We were there for a while, and the ghetto was being systemically emptied, one transport after another. And Rumkowski amongst them. The transports were going then from August 1944, and after a while the ghetto was almost empty. My mother and I and some of my friends were still fortunate enough from that place

to go to a hospital, which contained 500 people. There were two groups left in the entire ghetto. One was ours from Mariánské, and one was hidden on a street called Jakuba. I only know about it because I had a friend who was hidden there. At that time, I was not aware of it. The 500 of us were in the hospital. The hospital had a couple of physicians with their families. There were children. We slept, my mother and I, in a very large room with about 20 other people. I think we had -- I don't remember if there were mattresses, but we slept on the floor. We would lie down in rows. For a small infraction, a couple of people were being taken away and sent away. The German who was in charge of this place was called Hans Bebolt (ph), typical, extremely good-looking man. Blonde, typical Aryan appearance; he was brutal. He selected one of the girls and then he shot her. This was the story of ghetto. There was one incident in ghetto which I forgot about. If I may, I'll go back to this. When we were still living in that house of this gentleman who gave it to us and we were so very hungry, we decided that I will try to go to city to people that we knew from before the war who lived in our building. They were of German origin, but Polish. Their name was Mensel family. I took my star off, the Jewish star, and I smuggled myself through the wires, and I walked through the city. with the fear in my heart looking at people, looking at little dogs which reminded me of my dog that I had to leave at home, everything seemed very normal to me. But I knew that I didn't belong there. Finally, I reached the building that we left, and I walked up a very broad staircase, my heart was beating

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wildly because I didn't know how they will react to me. Will they let me in? Maybe they moved. It was a long time, and the door opened and it was opened by young Nina, who was the daughter of the family. As she looked at me, I saw the terror in her eyes. She was stricken with terror looking at me. And I was taken aback, but after a minute, she composed herself and put a finger to her lips indicating that I shouldn't speak. I found out that there were some German people invited to dinner. They were some sort of relation of Mr. Mensel, and she brought me to the room, and Mr. and Mrs. Mensel saw me and hugged me and gave me dinner. I ate with them dinner. I was sitting at that table looking at the tablecloth, looking at the proper appointment on the table. And I ate like a normal human being, and I started to resent the fact that I had to go back to ghetto. I almost forgot about everybody else that I left. But, of course, the situation changed in a minute. After some small talk, the man was -- the German was in life, he was a professor. He had a great deal of knowledge, and the conversation was so welcome to me, so normal, and I was not used to it anymore. And young Nina helped me, she said to explain to them that I came for some books. And the books, of course, was food. And she and her mother prepared some food, and I was already getting nervous because the curfew hour was coming. And they gave me some parcels and said that I'll be back. The young soldier wanted to see me next week, and all my friends said that they will let him know if I'll be in the city. And I took the parcel, and I started to walk towards the wires, towards the ghetto. Again, my heart was beating wildly. I was so, so very frightened because there were German patrols going on both sides of the wires. And I had to time myself to a split second when they turned around and won't be there. And when I saw that he turned around, I ran to the wire, so I spread them through the parcels, and I caught

part of my dress on it. And I saw it, so I retrieved a little piece, grabbed the parcels, and ran towards the house. The house was not too far from the wires. And when I reached my home, the stress of the entire day gave up to tremendous, tremendous sobbing. I just couldn't believe what I did. I knew that with my family I had to move from this place after certain couple of months because the Germans were making the ghetto much smaller. And we moved to a house on Zierske (ph) Street. This was a main street in that part of the city, and there was a streetcar passing by. Since we were -- and the streetcar belonged to the population -- since we were not supposed to cross the street, it was cutting ghetto in half. They built a wooden bridge over the street. When we lived, for instance, on one side of the wire, and we worked on the other, we had to cross the wooden bridge. And the apartment assigned to us was right next to the bridge. That was before I went to Mariánské where Rumkowski sent me to the girls and then back, I went back to the hospital, which was my last stay in ghetto. There was a German -- I cannot recall his name -- I tried so hard the last few days to recall his name because I was looking forward to this interview. He promised to take this group to his place of work and spare us Auschwitz. He was to take this group to his place of work and spare us Auschwitz. I knew about a terrible place that they were gassing people because there was a hidden radio in the hospital, and once even I listened to this radio. This German reassured us that when you will be taken away, we won't go to Auschwitz. When we walked through the ghetto to work after the entire ghetto was empty, it was a very weird feeling and the streets, open windows, flowing curtains blowing with the wind. No people. Once we thought that we saw a glimmer of somebody in the window, or a candle or something, and, of course, we averted our eyes not to give away to the German escorts that somebody was there. In November of 1944 came our time we had to be taken out. The entire population of our hospital was walked to the place where the cattle cars were, and we were loaded. It was a horrible thing because people had to stand. There was no place to sit or squat. If somebody was sick or even dying, he died on his feet standing up. It was just unbearable. Water was the worst, lack of water, the thirst was the worst. I tried very hard to suppress some of the moments because the life is beckoning, life is normal. I want to live a normal life. I want to be part of my family, which is very wonderful to me, but from time to time, these things keep on coming back and they haunt me. And I'm particularly happy that I am able to speak of it and to leave something behind me for mostly the young people, the people who never will, never heard, or heard a little bit about it, what it is about man's inhumanity to man. This

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train took us to first camp, which was called Ravensbrück. Ravensbrück was mainly a women's camp. It was large, we never knew about it. We didn't go to Auschwitz. We were the only transport from Łódź Ghetto that did not go to Auschwitz; he kept his word about that. Ravensbrück, though, was a hell. We were stripped of our clothes. We went through a medical examination, which was -- I cannot even say the word "embarrassing" because the people who conducted it were less than human. They were less than animal. We were many young girls who never undergone gynecological examinations, and they were looking for, God knows, diamonds or whatever. We were subjected to that. I had never seen chairs like

that before in my life. We were humiliated at every moment. Our clothes was taken away from us, and we were directed to a heap of clothes which probably was left from the group that was killed previously. I received some sort of a dress. I tried hard to remember, but I can't remember. But there was some sort of a dress that was a little warmer. My mother, on the other hand, was given a long, silk dress, and it was November and it was cold. I don't know what kind. The food we were given was, of course, of no nutritional value, no value whatsoever. It was watery soup, one slice of bread. We had no possessions. All of us stopped menstruating because we had no nutrition in our bodies. We started to resemble skeletons. I developed on my right arm large pus deposits that would swell to the size of egg, which I covered under the sleeve because there is still a will to live and to survive no matter how horrible the circumstances. Our family, when we were still together, promised each other that if one of us would survive, we should try -- at least one -- to shout to all the world, to all the nations, to all the people and to bear witness to what we were going through. To what people were capable of doing. In this camp, we had to get up at dawn -- it was dark -- to be counted. These were so-called appells, an Appell Platz. We were standing in rows, long rows of miserable looking human wretches, and we were being counted. They were twice a day, the Appells. One day I was fainting because between the hunger and malnutrition, I was just fainting. And the Germans had dogs with them, large German Shepherds, who were being trained to attack people. And they let one go as I was lying down, and the dog came to me and licked my face. That's another moment. And I came to. I adore dogs and animals, and I don't know if it's true if the dog sensed it or not, but that's the truth. The dog did not touch me, he licked my face. And my friends picked me up, and I was again standing there as a number. That was Ravensbrück. Ravensbrück had many women prisoners from different nations. We did not see them because the block -- there were blocks. The block that we were in was so temporary, we were coming and going, all being killed or sent somewhere to work. They were mixed bunch of women. The wooden bunks were about two or three tiers high, and I was with my mother on one middle one and across from us were German prisoners. The German prisoners that were across from us were prisoners from before the war. They were murderers; they were all kinds of outcasts of the society. However, they were superior to us because they had the German blood. We were only Jews. The two German women who were across from us were two women; one of them was called Peter and she was the man. I was 16, 17, 18, 19 years old, I don't remember, and this was the first time that I was exposed to something like that, and she could hit us. We had no right to say anything. She was German. In that camp we were issued triangles of different colors. The black triangles, which the murderers wore, were given to the murderers and to the prisoners of crimes. The green ones were given to Jehovah Witnesses -- no. The green ones, excuse me, the green ones were given to the thieves, common thieves. The purple ones were given to Jehovah Witnesses, who were wonderful people. These were Germans who did not believe in violence, and they were thrown with us and shared our lot. I promised myself that if I survived the war, I'll help them -- let me compose myself. I kept my word. I never sent the Jehovah Witnesses from my door, never excuse me. May I have a tissue? This was first time that I saw some sparkle of humanity in this Gehenna, in this hell that we were going through. They were gentle and they told us to hold on because the war will end and the good will come back. Going back to the triangles. Pink were given to homosexuals, which Hitler didn't consider as pure German.

One of his balconies there. And we, the Jews, had red one with a yellow. Pure red one was political prisoner, but with yellow was a Jew. We were on the lowest rank of this diabolical system. We were nothing. In this camp there was niece of _____ and Audette (ph), a French resistance fighter who was well known. They were kept separately because they were valuable to Germans as eventual exchange prisoners. We were there about four weeks. Our work to which we were assigned was carrying stones from one place to another and then back again. There was no purpose; it was hard; it was almost impossible; it was freezing cold. We had no clothes. We had no food, but we had to do it. One day there was announcement made that the people from our group are to assemble. We were being shipped somewhere else. We were shipped again in the cattle cars. We reached a camp called Wittenberg on River Elbe, which is in the eastern part of Germany. Of course, Germany's united now. At that time, it was the eastern part of Germany. Wittenberg was a medium-sized town. The population of Wittenberg had two things that they were proud of. One of them was airplane factory called Arado, which produced a small fighter plane. And the other was the church in which Martin Luther put the 95 theses to the door of the church. That was in the city, so the city had a deep religious background. However, this did not prevent the

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population of being cruel and less than human. We were placed in barracks, numbered barracks, and the only fortunate part of it was that we, the Jewish girls from our transport, were all in one barrack. We were together. One lady amongst this group was pregnant. She was about, I say, about four or five months pregnant, and we tried to shield her as much as possible because we were all so skinny. Because she was skinny even being pregnant because there was no nourishment there. Being on our own in this barrack proved to one point was good that we selected the person who was in charge, and she was very fair. She cut the pieces of bread. The other barracks had Germans. There was one German woman who came up once and hit me and broke five of my teeth. But it was all right because she was German, and I was a Jew, so I couldn't even report this. We were taken to this place because we were needed to work in the airplane factory. The previous group that worked there, I believe there was an accident, and they needed replacement. Since we were the meat they handled, we were sent there because there was a great supply of this. We had to get up at dawn. We were counted again on an Appell Platz. And then we had to march to the factory. The factory was -- I don't remember how long was that march, but when we reached the factory, we crossed a few streets of the city. And the people who saw us walking were spitting at us. Children were taught that we are goddamn Jews, no good, dirty. We didn't look too appetizing; that's for sure. But did they ever think what the circumstances were that brought us to this point? Because I remember watching documentaries. How did the German soldiers look when they were in Russia and they were being defeated and they walked through the snow with the rags on their feet and rags on their heads? They didn't look any better than we did at this time, because they were being reduced to subhuman state. It is the circumstances that makes people look this way, and we were being made to look this way by other people. By other people who during the day beat us, tortured us, spit at us, killed us, and then went home to their wives and children and dogs and played with them and ate their

dinner, and they never even gave a thought to what they did as what they considered work. The work became to them a hobby. They were being conditioned to like their work. They did not consider us as somebody who has brain equal or better than theirs. Who can think, who can feel, who can love, who can teach, who give and share good things with other people. The man who was in charge of our camp lived right across from the camp, the camp was surrounded by barbed wires and had high towers with machine guns manned by the German soldiers. When he left the camp at a certain hour, he had his God that he loved. He had children running around the place. I could never reconcile the fact that he was called a man, and I couldn't say that he was an animal because I like animals. Well, we marched through the city to our place of work. We were supposed to work for 12 hours straight. The work was divided into two 12-hour shifts: day shift manned by us, and night shift which was manned by the Russian prisoners of war who were kept somewhere there. I don't know where. We were assigned to different parts of the factory. They were called Halle A, B, C, D and so forth. My misfortune was to be assigned to Halle Ha, which is H. There were only a few of us that were assigned there. My supervisor was an elderly German man, so-called Meister, who knew that the war was being lost. It was 1945 already. He took his revenge on me. He beat me, stomped on me mercilessly. One day, the work in that particular place of work to which I was assigned was to rivet parts of the plane, the wings. I had a riveting gun, which was made of steel and was very heavy, and rivets. I had to put the rivets through two holes to join the places, and they were spaced every so often. The work was very hard because it was freezing cold. You can imagine how tremendous the place was for the planes being assembled. Huge, and it was very, very cold. And the steel gun froze to the flesh of my hand when I was riveting. There were four of us that I knew that were in this place, H. One day I noticed a very tiny script on part of the wing in a different script that I knew. It was a Russian script. And one person knew how to decipher this, and it was written there "Try if you can to skip every so often when you rivet and leave a little bit of opening." Now, we realized that if we would do that, we risked death, but this was a lifesaver for us. We can do something positive because logically if the plane's in the air, the force of wind may force this rivet out because it's not completely sealed. And if enough of them would be blown out, the part would disintegrate. And we were delighted, and we started to do it. I did this for a little while, and one day I infected my finger with part of steel. And I knew that the infection was bad because I had a red stripe going up my arm and swollen glands underneath my armpit, so I knew that's bad. And here it was already March '45, going towards April. April, it was April. I don't recall the dates exactly, and my friend said, "You must survive." We could hear the sounds of war. We knew that the armies are coming closer and closer and closer because we were being sent more and more towards middle of Germany. And I developed high fever, so we had so-called Krankenrevier, which is place the sick people were taken. Prior to this, they were taken away and shipped somewhere in Kiev. But since this was already so late, they took me there and two of the prisoners amongst us, the Jewish group, were doctors. Two young lady doctors, and one of them Dr. Levine, who I don't know if she's still alive, pulled my nail without any anesthesia, without anything -- she had nothing. Pulled the nail off me and squeezed the pus. Normally, if this would happen here, if you don't have penicillin or streptomycin or antimycin, you probably die. I didn't die of it. It some sort of healed over. I had no nail. I had some straps all around it, I think, from the dress. I don't

remember what she wrapped around it. I was in pain. They permitted me to stay in this place for sick, and I was sitting in the corner. All the windows were blackened because there were air raids already coming. And one day an SS woman came and she asked, "Who can knit?" And I said to myself I knew how to knit. I knew that properly brought girls were supposed to play piano, speak French and German, knit, and cook, besides the schoolwork. I knew how to knit, so I raised my hand. And she said, "I have to have a sweater within few days." And she brought me knitting needles and wool, and I was knitting without this finger, constantly. But she brought me soup and piece of bread for it. As I was knitting for few days, one day they came to the barrack; they boarded the windows. They didn't let anybody out. The Russians were already at the doors of the city, and the fighting was going on and we heard the fighting. We didn't know who was coming, but we knew whoever it is, it's the liberators. So to us, it didn't mean much. So we all stayed in the barrack. The plan was to destroy us, but they didn't have enough time.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Just a minute. But what I think we should do is why don't you back up to the SS woman coming in saying, "Can anybody knit?"

A: All right.

Q: Go ahead.

A: All right. The SS woman, a heavy, big woman, came to the place where we were, the few sick people, and asked if anybody can knit, and I thought that maybe this will help me to survive since I'm the one -- I'm still here. I said, "I can knit." I raised my hand and she brought knitting needles and wool and asked me to make her a sweater as fast as possible. Evidently, they wanted to shed their uniforms, which we found later on spread around there, and have civilian clothes on. They were big, heavy people; they had sticks with them to hit. And I started to knit in spite of my broken ribs and finger which was bandaged superficially and pain. I knitted and knitted. And she brought me some soup, some cold soup, and so-called bread, which was made with some sort of sawdust, I believe. And I ate very greedily, and I knitted the sweater until few days later, I found out that nobody could leave the barrack because the doors were boarded and so were the windows. And we didn't see through the cracks, we didn't see anybody manning the towers. The German soldiers were gone, so we realized that we are sentenced to be disposed of. It was almost a tonic. We heard the sounds of fight -- guns, couldn't identify what it was. The sky was turning almost crimson red, and we were huddled. Then one of the girls who was very enterprising, she said, "Nobody's here. Let's break the door and go to the kitchen." Food was on everybody's mind. Food, food was life. They broke the door. Now, I couldn't; I was lying down. They broke the door from the main place, from the main barrack and from the sick place, and they ran to the kitchen. What they found in the kitchen were bars of margarine bars, and raw potatoes and couple of eggs. They scooped the margarine with their hands, and they brought two eggs and some potatoes. And since the door was broken down, we decided to leave the place. My people took me by my arms and grabbed me, and we crossed the street to where the commandant's house was. Well, his house was empty; he ran away with his family. So we went inside. There were six or seven of us -- seven, I think. How to cook the two eggs and divide, and the raw potatoes. While they were busy cooking and as they were cooking, the commandant came back with a cocked gun facing us, the seven of us. There was group of subhumans watching this man, this well-fed, big man with the gun, and he was afraid of us. It was -- if it wouldn't be so tragic, it would be comical. He backed out with the gun and he disappeared. We decided it's not safe to stay there, so we started to run towards the fire because where the fire was coming from, whoever tried to liberate, was there fighting. As we were running, we encountered two young men. They happened to be Polish, and they were there not as prisoners, but they were taken from Poland to work in the fields because their young people and old people and whoever was capable was fighting. They needed people to work the fields, and the two Polish people joined our group. One of the girls was killed by a piece of shrapnel in the very last moment before liberation. And the rest of us started to run toward

the fire. They were holding me all the way, and we reached a place -- it's another moment -- where a dirty, strange-looking man in filthy uniform with Asiatic-looking face, very tiny eyes, with a little cappy sort of a hat and big boots, and we realized that this is not a German at that time. We were ready to kiss his boots as filthy as he was, but he told us dawai, "In the back, in the back." We were so called liberated, we didn't know what was ahead of us yet. We went behind -- this is still the war line. They are fighting -- go. Food, they had a bottle of herring. We started to eat this herring, one after another. And we were tremendously thirsty, and there was no water because the pipes froze. We all got sick, very sick from it. See, the Russians are, I must say, very sturdy people. They were fighting eating the herring. It was incomprehensible to us, but that's the fact. And they told us to get away from there, so we started to go away. This was a village. The village was not touched. The little houses, neat houses, lovely gardens, and sounds of starving animals because the Germans ran away and left the poor beasts unfed. They were running for life, so there were cows, there were pigs howling. We got to one of the houses, and since the firing was going on both ways, we went to the basement. There were the two Polish guys and man and five girls, five women. We went to the basement which was very well appointed. They had sleeping accommodation. They had shelves stocked with jars with conserves, with meat, with whatever. And they had a barrel of water. They were very well prepared. We ate and we lie down. The basement was approachable by some sort of a door which swings out and up and down, and in the middle of the night two Russians came and opened the door and came down. And they wanted women. I became hysterical because if I survived to this point, I don't want to live anymore. And I told one of the Polish men that if he would save me, I would do anything possible because my family's very influential. I thought they were alive. And he put me down on one of these wooden benches, which was prepared for sleeping and covered me and sat down on me. The other girls did the same. The third girl hid in a corner, and two girls were raped. One of them is still alive that's in Israel, but I understand that she's in a mental institution. Once -- the demeanor of the Russian soldier is very difficult to describe now because we see them now after all these years of changes, these were people who were fighting the war. The closest I can identify them, they were grunzens (ph) or kalmucks??. They couldn't understand the difference, what's the difference? A woman's a woman; I mean, a woman. What's wrong? They were childlike. Here they were fighting, and here this is quite all right, everything. They drank whatever was there, and then one of them took a gun and started to shoot the jars with the fruit. And the pieces of glass and the red fluid from them started to seep all over, and I had glass embedded in my left leg throughout the winter because I wanted to survive. I reached that point. I was going to tell the world. I remembered my promise, so I had the glass in my leg and the red fluid all over me. And I was -- and the Polish young man was sitting on top of me, and that was till the morning. When the morning finally arrived, we decided to leave the place, and we walked, walked, walked to the next village. Next village, there were beautiful homes all beautifully prepared. Food, chickens, china. We went to the house and we scouted it. We saw that there was an attic there. So we ate. I remember the two young Polish guys were running up to the chickens with a stick to kill them. We cooked the chickens. We ate. We took the china with the tablecloth, threw out of the window. We weren't going to save anything there. This was our little revenge. Silly as it might sound now. We decided we would sleep in the attic. We took the ladder. We

climbed the ladder and slept quietly in the attic. One of the girls was a little bit different. She decided she liked one of the Russian officers, so she stayed downstairs, and she went with him wherever she wanted to. In the middle of the night, we went to -- we were alone on the top in the attic. The two Polish young men are sleeping in one of the rooms downstairs, and we hear German voices. It seems the houses were facing a young forest, and there were Germans hiding in the forest. They were hungry. They wanted to get some food. They got to our house to the kitchen, and they were eating food in our kitchen. So we were very frightened, even though we were in the attic. We went underneath the bed. They had a bed there upstairs. We went underneath the bed. One of the girls could not hold her bladder from fear, and that's how we were lying in it. And two Polish young men jumped out of the window because there was low part there, and they went to the Russians wherever they were. They had already so-called stabilized the place, and they told them that there were Germans in the house. So the Russians came over, and we hear them outside. "Let's throw grenades," or whatever the name is of it. They were going to kill the Germans or dynamite the house. They didn't care about property either. But here we are, four of us, under the bed. So we started to scream, "No, no. There are Polish people here. There are Polish people here." The two Germans opened the kitchen door and started to run to the garden, and they were shot. They were lying there for a few days. Each one of us took something from the German body. I had a pair of scissors, little scissors that he had on his body. I still have them. The next day there were French prisoners, ex-prisoners of war, who lived in another house there. Now, I could communicate with them, and I told them that I'm scared to death. The other girls decided they want to go back to Poland. I was afraid to make one step outside. So the French people invited me to stay with them, and that's how I parted company with the Polish girls. And I went to the French house, and they said they would protect me; they did it. Each one is a separate story, and there are numbers of them. Numbers. Because the brain is supposed to be a storage of all these things, but yet it's almost impossible. There are things that I omitted. There are things that are coming back now.

Q: Can I ask you a couple of questions?

A: Yes.

Q: I'm not going to go in chronological order, necessarily. Your mother was with you when you were deported.

A: Yes.

Q: And your mother was with you for how long, and what happened to your mother?

A: My mother was with me until we worked in that -- until Wittenberg, and then she was taken somewhere else. My mother was taken away from me in Wittenberg, and I didn't know what happened to her. I found her after the war in Oranienburg Sachsenhausen, which was another camp, and she was already mortally ill and she passed away. If somebody was not capable of carrying the work, they were useless to the Germans. And even though she was quite young,

she was 42 years old, but she had swollen legs. She was skeleton-like. She deteriorated very badly. She was useless.

02:22:30

Q: But she carried stones with you at Ravensbrück?

A: Yes.

Q: And when she was taken away, do you remember how that happened? I mean, were you there?

A: I wasn't even there when she was taken. I was in the -- I was sick with my finger, so I don't know the real details.

Q: In the camp, tell me what you used as a support system. Did you use your imagination? Tell me about what --

A: My support system was very much the family background. The basis that I was given from my family. The love, the support, the thirst for education and living, and, most of all, the promise that we would try to survive. We would try to bear witness. We would try no matter what and how, even if it would require something that is out of ordinary. For instance, my grandmother was an observant Jewess. We were not, but she was. She was not supposed to eat meat that was not slaughtered in a certain way. She was not supposed to eat horse meat. But when we were in ghetto in the beginning, they were sending some sort of horse meat. And she ate it because, as I understand, our religion teaches that in order to survive if you are very sick there are certain things that are permissible and this was one of them. Like an absolution, she ate horse meat which would be unthinkable under normal circumstances. So the thirst of being here, surviving, and telling the people -- you have no idea how very much I look toward today, the moment that I can share some of my experiences to leave behind me. To be part of the oral history, I will feel that I accomplished something very important. I am more than delighted that this museum came into being. I feel that it's a tremendous tool for all humanity, that it is the most necessary tool to teach people of all persuasions that such a thing must never happen again to any people anywhere, anytime.

Q: In the camps, religious practices were forbidden, I assume, and did you witness any?

A: As I previously said, I was not brought up religiously. My religion was mainly the tradition of our people, and we were invited by grandparents for the observant holidays that we shared together. I loved them. I loved them; I observed the tradition. It's still something that will stay with me and something that my daughter now values and my granddaughter. She said to me, my granddaughter, which is the future -- the young person that will carry on. She said, "Nanna, no matter who I will marry, I will remember my background, and I will always carry on in my heart and life the thought of who you were, who we are, and what has to be

done." So this is like carrying the torch. It is, to me, religion, and the religion observances are not as necessary as in my heart I feel I am a righteous person. That's what my father taught me. My father said that God surrounds us all, no matter what his name or image is. God is in every blade of grass. God is in every river that flows. And if I observe the commandments, which all of us should, then I am a religious person. There were some people who would have liked to have observed candlelighting or somebody that would have it. In ghetto, there are still some candles which my grandmother had. But later on, we didn't have it. I didn't even -- I was not even aware which day this is, what holiday, what day. The days were melting into one another. You were not aware of it. You were busy trying to survive.

Q: Did you ever have dreams about food?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Tell me about it. And did you form friendships with others?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me, describe one or two of them.

A: Yes, yes. Our food was very important of our dreams and our talks, naturally. The body needs fuel. Food is the fuel. Once your body is satisfied then you can function properly, so we shared the dreams of food. In one particular instance when I was in camp with my mother, and we were issued the daily portion of small piece of bread and soup, my mother taught me to share the bread. To share, that means to divide into two portions: one to eat when I go to sleep and the next one in the morning before the long day of this horrible work. I tried to obey her, and I put this piece of bread underneath me and she put hers, because we slept together. And I dreamt and I dreamt of bread and the thoughts were coming how wonderful bread can be. Fresh and sweet smelling and when you put the knife to it, you can smell the aroma. I said (sniff) oh, I

02:30:

could imagine the aroma of bread, how wonderful bread can be. We never thought of it, how luxurious bread can be. And I was thinking what I would put on my bread. I was making it up, stories. Plum butter, butter, wonderful. And, of course, that was a revelry because the Ukrainian woman who was the Kapo, I don't know if this term is being explained is where the helpers for the German soldiers, the women who took care of us in the camp. The Kapos started to wake us up, heraus, heraus means. "Get up, out." Always roughly, there was no normal language there. And I didn't want to wake because I still had this image of bread before my eyes. And my mother said, "We must, my child. we must. We have to go to the Appell platz to be counted." And we looked for the bread, the precious piece of bread, and it wasn't there. It was stolen during the night. All ethical upbringing sometimes disappears in times like this. Some people were not capable of preserving their humanity, and somebody

stole this precious piece of bread. And I wrote a story about it, and I ended the story with if I should hate the thieves. And I came to the conclusion, no; I should hate the perpetrators who reduced these people to this level. That the people who stole the bread were not strong enough. Their hunger was greater than their morality. There were some of them who couldn't stand it. There were some of us who had to. My mother wanted to share her piece with me. I wanted to share my piece with her. This is what differs us.

Q: Was there ever singing in the camp, at night maybe?

A: In the camp?

Q: Uh-huh (yes).

A: Or in the ghetto?

Q: Or either one?

A: In ghetto, we did sing. When we were together the group of young women, we were singing some longing, beautiful song. Some romantic songs, we were young. We were ripe for love, for life. We had dreams, so we sang longingly about it. It brought many memories from the school proms or whatever. Then there were very sad songs which Jewish music has some haunting, haunting things, and we were singing some if we didn't even know the words. Some people knew it, yes. There was somebody who had violin. We didn't have piano, so we couldn't play piano. Maybe some people did in the ghetto. I don't -- I wasn't aware of it. In camp we didn't sing anymore. But in camp when I walked and I looked through the wire sometimes, and I saw flowers growing, I had such love for flowers and I said, "The flowers are here." And I look up and I saw the blue sky and birds flying, and I said, "This is the same sky on both sides of the wire, and these people look at it as I do now. And they must love it as do it." And I followed the birds that were flying, and I said, "And they followed the flock of birds." What divides us? Why? The why is so tremendous that it's -- I will never be able to explain. I wanted to reach for the flower, to see, to handle the flower because it was such a symbol of beauty and a symbol of my past. But I couldn't do that. They had gardens they cultivated, and so they loved their flowers and I loved the flowers.

02:35:

Q: Tell me about your beatings and how you were hurt and why.

A: The last beating that I received was in April of 1944, and it was done not by SS, but it was done by the German supervisor in my factory where I worked Arado, the airplane factory. I was very sick at the time. I had fever, my finger. I couldn't perform the work. He didn't know that I was sabotaging all along, but the beating was about my inability to perform my work. He threw me down. He wore high boots, and he started to stomp on me. They didn't have guns, the Meisters. He was stomping on me breaking my ribs. It was horrible. I had a fever

anyway because my finger was infected. And the two girls that worked in the same division, the same horrible place, had come back after our work and that's when I went to that place where the sick people were. And they said, "Don't say a word because in a few days we will be liberated." We knew the fire was -- we were liberated April 20-something when the Russians reached Wittenberg and displaced the people from the camps. They had no time to kill us. The plan was to kill us, but they just plainly didn't have time and I survived. As a result of the beating, I have to wear a brace for the rest of my life. I did not have proper medical care, because the Russians were too busy fighting. They did, however, provide bandages which they rolled around me, strapped me when we reached the village. I asked them, so I was rolled in their bandages. And that was maybe one thing that I was not very useful to them. I wear a brace. As a result of the brace and the ribs that didn't heal properly, I developed tremendous curvature of the spine which worsened with the advent of my pregnancy. The doctors warned me that this would occur, but I didn't care. I thought that I do have to have a child. I owe it to my family. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to my people. And I have been blessed. I have a wonderful daughter, a wonderful son-in-law, British. I have a a wonderful grandchild. I have wonderful husband. So in some way, somewhere my family up there knows that I have been blessed. I will never forget. Many times I am asked, especially in two places. One was a Catholic school that I spoke last year and the nuns and the children were wonderful. And another place there was very good reception was the Navy Intelligence Unit. And one of the questions that always pops out is "How did you permit this to happen? Why didn't you defend yourself?" See, young people in the Navy, strong, hopefully intelligent -- if they are in the Intelligence Unit, they must be very bright. They cannot perceive the conditions that we were in. We were surrounded by population which was not only unfriendly, but openly hostile to us. We couldn't have a gun if we would beg them on knees. We had nothing, we had no food, we were starved. We had no strength to do the most minor, meaningless things. We were absolutely helpless. Many people gave up, committed suicide. A number of them, because they did not want to continue this way. Many people gave up because they thought somebody from the family would stay. Many people said, "Is this what God wanted for us?" And yet, many people died with God's name on their lips, so there is no one answer to this

02:41:

question. Then they asked me "Can you forgive?" That's different question. I cannot forgive the people who did it. I can't ever forgive them, but I have to forgive the younger people in Germany because they were informed. And I have to give them the opportunity to show their outlook on life. They are not guilty. They did not participate. Some of them who were born of Nazis trying to repent for their fathers. Of course, there are some pro-Nazis. There are neo-Nazis. But we have everyone everywhere, wherever we are. We have always a group of people who are, I would say, inferior, and to show their so-called superiority, they think that other people are not up to their par and do not deserve to live or do not deserve -- whatever is their philosophy. But I dismissed them. I have to forgive the young people. There is nothing to forgive, the ones who didn't do it. As a matter of fact, when I lived in New York City through the Quaker Society, I arranged to have German young people who were exchange to

visit us, to share our meal and to discuss things with them. Not of the past, but for the future because that's what we are talking about, the future. We are interested in the future, and I think that I made some strides there. I think that's important. I think this is part of the philosophy of our Holocaust Museum, to talk about the future. That the past should never be forgotten, but it should never be repeated.

Q: Don't you think that your sabotage was fighting back?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me again about your sabotage.

A: That's very interesting story. I did what I was told to do because it wouldn't have occurred to me on my own, and it was a great deal of satisfaction that I was able to do something against the war machine, against the enemy. It was some food for my soul. I was doing something that they didn't know of, something to help to dismantle the war machine in as little a way as I possibly could. And one day when I was living in San Diego -- I am an ardent book reader -- I came upon a book. It was a story about mother and daughter in camp, and the story sounded so much like my story that I decided to write to the author. I didn't know who wrote the book. It was a mother and daughter working in a camp near a bomb site factory, and they were going to take the mother away because she was not able to perform the work. And the daughter begged her to leave the mother and she would do work for two. They refused, and they took the mother away. There are three subplots in that book. One is that there are some American airmen who know that there is a group of German airmen who are planning to bomb Downing Street Number 10. Now, this was the seat of Winston Churchill in London. So here you have the story of the American airmen, the German airmen, how they trained, and the story in the camp. And to make the whole story shortest, the air raid is on. They German whole _____ planes is flying towards London, and so do the Americans from the other side. And the Americans are able to shoot every plane with the exception of the leader plane who was able to reach Downing Street 10 and release the bomb. And the bomb falls and does not explode because this is the bomb that the girl didn't put the inside as a revenge. That was the bomb. Well, when I read this book, I just had goose pimples because I did something with the planes. So I wrote a letter and I sent to the publisher of the book. And a month later I received a letter from England, which I have it with me, from a British writer who wrote the story and wrote me a beautiful letter. And who said, "It is people like you, the little, quiet people, individuals who tried to do something to whom we in a way may owe a lot. You performed some" -- I have this letter which I'm going to give Mrs. Jones, and it makes me feel good. Incidentally, I receive every year greetings from Mr. Clyde and I write to him. And we keep up a correspondence. He knew the factory; he knew the planes.

Q: In the camps, were there -- did you ever witness torture or executions or --

A: Torture, yes; beatings, yes. I experienced it myself. I did not experience murdering before my eyes because they were taken away. I've seen, though, girls running to the wires, the

electric wires and being executed -- exterminated, well, they committed suicide. Incidentally, which reminds me that I never, never, ever, when I speak to groups, I never use the word "extermination." Because in my mind you exterminate vermin, but you murder human beings. You don't exterminate them, you murder them. So you exterminate roaches. We cannot be compared to roaches. We are human beings.

Q: Do you remember incidents of unusual courage or selflessness in the camps or in the ghetto?

A: Yes. Sharing food was one of the most unselfish things that one can think of because food represented life. There were people who were giving away part of their portion to others; that was unselfish. One of my school friends -- I went to a private school for girls -- one of the girls from my school was in ghetto, as well, with her mother. And she became very, very ill, and they wanted to deport her. All of us who were her friends from our meager portions decided to take a little bit and get it together and bring to her every day. You can't imagine the value of food in those days to give away. I had a glove, somehow, somewhere, in ghetto and we were freezing. So the glove was being worn by everybody by my friends. We were sharing the one glove, so one hand for few minutes was getting out of the numbness. I don't know who the glove really belonged to, but I was given it, and we shared this glove. And I remember this glove, and when I met one of the girls after the war in England, she said to me, "Blanka, do you remember your glove?" "Yes, I remember the glove." This was something that was very important at that time, the glove. Like the bread, like the canary, like the little flower, the glove was very important.

Q: Is there -- do you think -- maybe you can't answer this, but do you think there was something different about the experience in the ghetto or in the camps for women, in general, versus for men? Do you think they confronted it differently? I know the sabotage is one thing that got suggested to the women by the men who worked at night.

A: Yes. And the men, the Russian men, they were all killed. None of them survived, but they were trained for war, and they knew what to do and they told us what to do. We, the four of us working _____, had no idea. We needed somebody to tell us, and these people were soldiers and they had some idea what to do. And once this occurred to us, it was just wonderful. It gave us a shot of energy, of being useful, of doing a little part. In ghetto, we were together, women and men, and I worked in several places before I went to Mr. Rumkowski (ph). One of them was knitting factory, sweaters, which we were turning. And there were only women in my division, so I couldn't tell you that. There were men and women in the distribution place where the food came, but I had nothing to do with them. That's why we were starving so fast. Women sometimes, as enemies sometimes can be more vicious than men. The women SS were very, very vicious. For instance, when the dog came to me, he was directed by a man. And the dog didn't bite me, but licked me and came back to his master. He did not do anything to me. He could have. I wonder if this would be a woman, if she wouldn't have killed me. I don't know the answer, but the men somehow realized that the dog heard that I was his friend, and he let me live. There is so many incidents that collectively helped me to survive, and this is another moment. It's like carved in my memory

forever. It's a moment, it's an etching. And this was one of them, the dog.

Q: Tell me about some of the women SS that make you say that they were brutal. Maybe describe one to me.

A: They were very brutal. Most of them somehow were very heavy. They were very busty. And I don't know if they ate so much or if they had such good positions, but they were extremely heavy, the ones that I knew. And they were brutal; they were -- the hatred came from the eyes already and the Peitsche (whip) was always ready to strike. They were -- they felt so superior and, God knows, they were nothing. But they felt so powerful, they thought that this will never end. But when the one came for the sweater, she cowered. She took the sweater because I finished the sweater and she ran. I never have seen her since. And my memory -- I don't remember her face. I think it's merciful. I think that certain things, subconsciously, you don't want to keep before your eyes. I erased her from my mind. I don't recall what she looked like. I don't remember the face of the Meister who crippled me for life. I remember his hatred. I remember the beating. I remember the terror and the pain, but I don't remember his face. That's another situation that I probably want to erase the face from my conscious and from my memory. I don't want to be haunted by this face. Merciful.

Q: Let's just stop for a minute. I think maybe you should put up another roll, don't you?

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

A: My aunt, I want to talk about that.

Q: Okay. Why don't you first talk about that? Explain to me and set the context for me. Set the time and reestablish how old you were at the time.

A: Okay.

Q: Go ahead.

A: Okay. In September of 1939, when the Germans already occupied our city and after they ordered the curfew and all the other restrictions on the general population and especially on the Jews, people became panicky. My mother had one sister who was married to a physician. He was mobilized as an officer in the Polish army, and with the Red Cross left the city. He was going toward the east. Unfortunately, not knowing that eventually the Russians will cut them off and start war against Poland from the east side, east quarter. And he was caught and eventually we received a small, small notification from him from a place called Katyn', which became very infamous in years to come because there were 10,000 Polish officers who were killed in Katyn' and buried in a common grave. After the war, the Germans accused the Russians, and the Russians, in turn, accused the Germans who killed the 10,000 Polish officers. In the meantime, his wife was left with one son with us, and in the panic the rumor started that the families of the officers would be deported or arrested. So my aunt with her son, who was at that time about 11 years old, decided to leave Łódź and go to Warsaw. There were no vehicle. People started to walk. Walking sounds very innocent, but this was an unbelievably movement of masses upon masses of humanity moving in one direction in darkness of the evening and in silence. You could only hear the footsteps. We looked from our windows and there were tens of thousands of people just going. Where? They didn't know where, but they were going. All kinds of rumors were flying around. The building in which we were living at the time with my grandmother was -- had five stories. And one day during an air raid, we were standing on the staircase because we didn't have places to hide. Somebody ran in and told us that they saw somebody on our roof with a flashlight. There were many, as I said before, German-origin people living in our city, a lot of them. They were called Volksdeutsche, and they were showing signs to the enemy, to their friends with flashlights. We couldn't even realize these were neighbors, friends. Watching the masses going and going, we were discussing should we go. Grandma couldn't walk that far, so we decided to stay. My mother decided to stay because this was her mother. I decided to stay because my mother stayed and my mother's two brothers. And that's how we stayed there. Then they threw out some of our neighbors who were actually renting their apartment from us in the building, so they moved and stayed with us. And, eventually, there was a group of about 13 people, but we had a large apartment, so this was still no hardship. Remembering the moving humanity at darkness at night silently was one of the very traumatic memories that I keep, and this was the very beginning. Eventually, my aunt reached Warsaw. I don't even know how, but I know that she reached Warsaw. And as a wife of a doctor, she was

given a place with her son in a hospital. Since her husband was a physician and he was an officer on the way to war, they gave her space and she was in that hospital. We had couple of communications from her until 1942, where the communications stopped.

Q: When the Łódź Ghetto was formed at first, you still lived outside the ghetto for a while, didn't you?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you give me some idea of the dates, as well as you remember them, the periods of time that were involved, and when your family actually moved into the ghetto if you remember the month?

A: I wouldn't remember the exact date, but I know that the war started in September. Sometime late in September, my aunt left with her son for Warsaw. We stayed, we had some helpers at home, a cleaning lady and -- who lived with us. They had their own room. Unfortunately, they were less than sympathetic forgetting all the good years they spent with us, and they very brazenly came to the room and demanded this fur coat and this and this. And they said, "Now, we are the ones who can tell you what to do." And they took it and left, and, actually, we were glad they left because they could have done much worse. One of them was very pretty and acquired a German boyfriend, so at that time, we thought, "Well, it's better that she's gone that she would come with him there." So we stayed without her, and you can get used to any kind of situation that you are thrown in. I remember we didn't have fuel, so we had installed a little stove in the middle of the beautiful living room. And we had the bread rations. We were toasting the bread on top of this little stove. Why do I remember this? Because I thought the bread tastes so good. I never realized it before, so I remember this detail. I also remember that before the war, I attended Polish private school, many girlfriends. I remember with sorrow that not one of my girlfriends thought of coming over and bringing me some sort of food, not one of them. And yet they were good friends before the war. They used to come and sleep over, stay. I gave them help with work, small work. We were very friendly. That hurt me. But in the scope of time, it became very unimportant. At that time, I was very bitterly disappointed. The people who moved with us, from the other apartment, which was occupied, were very nice. They lived a number of years with us. Also, the family, Mensel family to whom I went once, smuggled myself through the wires, were people who lived in our building, and they were lovely people. We entrusted them with several valuables because we thought that after the war we would be able to retrieve them. And strangely enough, after the war was over and after my experience after the liberation, there was a period of time of two weeks that I was in Poland. There was -- I don't know how to explain this, but this was a Polish man that had several little carts, and they were leaving the German village. They had a large Polish flag, and they said anybody that wants to go and join him back to Poland can do so. And I lived with the French ex-prisoners of war at that time, and I said to myself, "I should go because maybe my mother came back. Maybe my aunt came back. My first responsibility is to see who came back, so I will go back to my city." So I joined this caravan, an indescribable journey, we finally reached Warsaw.

Warsaw was reduced to rubble. It was unrecognizable, and I had to go to Łódź from Warsaw. I had no money; I had no clothes; I had no luggage; I had nothing. I was just -- and there was a man with a semi truck, sort of. When I found out that this man standing there, he said, "Hop on. You can go with me." And I hopped on, and we traveled to Łódź. And he stopped on the way, and he went to eat. I didn't want to tell him I'm hungry. We drove all the way to Łódź. He never thought of giving me piece of bread, but I reached Łódź. And when I went to the house that we lived in before, the Polish superintendent who took care of the building reacted with tremendous surprise; not elation, but surprise that I survived and came back. And what for? He said, "You don't even have to go to your place because the Germans emptied it. They took the carpets and everything. There's nothing left and other people live there." I said, "Maybe something is left. I want to go up." And I went up, and they wouldn't let me in. So I went down again, and I asked him if other people came back. He said, "No, nobody came back here." But about three blocks away there was a place set up by the Jewish Committee. He said, "You can go there." And I went there and I found out the list of names didn't contain any of my relatives. But there was name of my school friend who survived the war because she was in the group in ghetto that was in hiding. There were two groups: one in the hospital in which I was, and one in hiding. And she survived, so I went to her and I stayed with her for about ten days. And I said, "There is no need for me to stay in Poland. Nobody came back from my family. Nobody wants me here. This was my fatherland. If they don't want me, I don't want them. I'm going to go away." At that time I already knew that there were displaced person camps, and my girlfriend, because she was in hiding and her husband, they were able to recover some things that belonged to her parents. She gave me few Polish zlotys, which is our money, and two bottles -- when I think of it -- two bottles of Vodka. She said, "This will be very valuable to you when you go through the border," which turned out to be true. I met another girl who was in the same situation as I, and we decided we are going back to a displaced person camp and we would see from there on who will want us. We reached City Poznan in Poland, which had a large station, and at the station, there were Russian soldiers sitting all along waiting for a transport. Now, we had no money, but we had Vodka. So we were walking around very frightened of Russians after the experiences I had, very frightened. And we said to ourselves, and I hope people forgive me this, "Let's look for a Jew. A Jew will help us." And we walked, and I said, "Do you think he looks Jewish? What does Jew look like?" And we spotted one man and we decided to risk it; this was a big officer in a long coat that was flowing behind him. He had very prominent nose and he was very dark. And I said, "Well, let's try it." And we approached him, and he was a dentist in the Russian army, and he was most helpful to us. We said, "We want to cross the border. We have no money. We want to go to Germany to the displaced person camp and see if the organizations will help us." He took us to his car. He took his dirty overcoat and covered us with it completely. He hanged it up and covered us and he said, "Whatever happens, you be quiet." And when the train started a couple of hours later and reached the border, we heard a lot of screaming. The Russians were raping the German women. We heard this, but we were safe underneath his coat sitting there. We reached Berlin, I don't remember that frame of time. I don't remember how long it took us, but we reached Berlin. And he said to us, "Don't go back east." We got off, and here we are. Where do we go? We left the Vodka with him. We were looking and looking and looking. Finally, the evening is

coming, and we are very frightened. We saw two men -- I don't know, it must be the fifth sense that told us to approach these men and ask them where are places that concentrate the displaced people. We have no money. He put us on a streetcar. He paid our fare, and they took us to a street -- I remember the street all the time. I don't remember now. We got off, they welcomed us. They gave us two beds to sleep and food to eat, and we stayed there for a little while, about a month or two. We found out about another place that was in a different part of Berlin. Berlin was being divided into sectors. There was a Russian in which we were, English, French and American. One day -- Erika was the name of the girl -- we decided to go to a movie. We were all ready to act almost normally. We went to a movie and that was a Russian movie in Russian sector. We didn't understand too much, but we watched the movie. So we whispered to each other in Polish, and all of a sudden the darkness -- this is one of the moments in my life, a big hand on my back. I heard "_____." They took us out of the theater. They accused us of being spies because we speak Polish. We are spies, and they took us to a so-called Kommandantura where the Russian police was. They opened a big gate, and they pushed us in. And there was about 300 people standing there, and we joined the group. This very day my friend, Erika, had a toothache and before the movie we went to a dentist who pulled her tooth.

03:20:

The Jewish committee paid for it, and she had a toothache after they pulled the tooth and she started to cry. Unbelievable what little things mean a lot in life. She started to cry, and I stand with her. "Erika, don't worry. It will go away." And she cries and she cries. They got so nervous with us, so annoyed that they opened the gate and threw us out. And this is what saved us, because the rest of the people were taken away. Once we were out, the very next day, we crossed to the American sector and decided never to step in the Russian sector again. But in Germany, you need papers. We have no papers, and the Jewish Joint Relief Distribution was giving rations, and we had card. So we went to the Jewish Joint Distribution, we got coffee. Coffee was to Germans a God-send; they were crazy about coffee. So we went with the coffee to a police department in the American sector and asked him to register us in American sector, which he did for the coffee. I'm talking about this now. This is ridiculous, but this is what happened. This was another little moment that saved us, and we went to the displaced person camp in American sector, which was called Schlachtensee. After a while, they gave us a room with a German lady. We lived with a German lady. Then one day, it was a Jewish holiday -- I don't remember which one -- and we went to the Chaplain, American Army Jewish Chaplain, and we went there and we feasted on something or other. And he asked if we had any relatives in the United States. I said, "I know that my grandmother had a half-sister living in Detroit, but I don't know her name. I know that the original name -- I know they changed the name. The original name was Pozowsky (ph)." He took my address. I didn't hear from them for a while, and one day somebody came. They found my family. They had changed their name from Pozowsky to Sauls (ph), and my grandmother's half-sister was still alive. And she said that if this is the last thing she can do, she wants to bring me to the United States. So it took some doing. One of them was attorney connected with Washington, and they secured my trip January 1947.

And I came on the ship called Marine Marlin, which took 17 days because we lost part of the boat in a tremendous storm, and everybody, including the crew, was deathly sick. And we arrived finally in New York. We were sitting on the benches with the name -- the letters A, B, C, and I was sitting under my letter which was F, Fischer. And everybody was being picked up, and I was still sitting there. Finally, when I was almost the last one, a gentleman with a picture was walking around with the picture. And I looked at the picture, I said, "That's my grandmother." Well, I couldn't speak English, and he couldn't speak any of my languages, but the picture was the common thread between us. So he picked me up. I had no luggage, very easy. And he took me outside and I saw a gentleman there. And when I saw him, an elderly gentleman, I said to myself, "This must be family," because he looked like my grandmother. This was her half-brother. She had a half-sister and a half-brother, and he lived in New Jersey, and he could speak some Polish and German yet. He came here many, many years ago, and that was how I came to the United States.

Q: One thing, was the Russian dentist on the train with the big coat --

A: Yes.

Q: -- was he a Jew?

A: Yes. I knew the word Jew in Russian is Yivreh, and I said, Yivree," and he said, "Da," which means yes. And he said in Polish he understood we want to go to Germania, Germany, to displaced persons. "Da, da." In the car, covered us with his coat. The whole life of one person is like a necklace of beads. Each bead represents a different story, and this was the most unusual because it was coincidence that we decided to look for somebody like that, that we found somebody like this. That he was willing to help us, and that's how we came to Berlin. After all, we were helpless, we had no means of support or help or food or whatever. It is very unusual now in a civilized way to think that you can survive under all kinds of circumstances, you really can. And when I hear people complaining of very minor things, it is -- I always try to tell my family, but, of course, life goes on. The little things become big.

Q: Now, let's go back to Łódź and the ghetto and the timing. The ghetto was formed, but for a while your family lived outside the ghetto?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me about how long that was.

A: Well, the ghetto was formed -- they started to throw people out couple of months, I think, later, and it was closed on May 1st, that I remember. May 1st, 1940, it was hermetically closed. You could not leave anymore. It was surrounded by the wires and the guards and the bridges were put up, and you couldn't leave anymore. And I had one little cousin, my father's brother's son, he was an only child who decided he's not going to stay in ghetto. He is going to get out, and he smuggled himself out. Without the star, he looked very -- he had an Aryan

look, very handsome young boy. And he disappeared; we didn't hear about him until one day my aunt, his mother, received a postcard which stated in a printed way, "Your son, Nickoden (ph), died of pneumonia." And it was sent from a city near the Swiss border. Evidently, he reached the border, and what happened then, I don't know if he was not permitted by the Swiss to cross, or if he was apprehended before; we have no way of knowing, but he was killed. He was young. He was strong; he did not have pneumonia; he was full of life. He wanted to live, and he was killed there.

Q: When the ghetto was sealed, was your family still outside?

A: No.

Q: Once it was sealed, we were all in.

A: Okay. And tell me about things you've witnessed in the ghetto about actions or other things that you --

Q: There were many actions in ghetto. They were trying to get rid of people, older people, people who were unable to perform work in the establishments put to their use. They were catching people on the street at random taking them to the camps. I've seen a couple of them while I was working. There was one that we knew beforehand because there were certain signs. More troops were coming to the main parts. We buried my grandmother once in bed, made the bed over her, and this succeeded twice. But on the third time when we came home, she and my uncle were gone. So, evidently, they discovered the ruse. My uncle, I don't know how he was hidden, but they discovered it. And at that point, one uncle died from starvation in ghetto. The other stayed with grandmother at home. And when my mother and I came from our work, they were gone. The bed was thrown apart. So we didn't witness how did they go to the room, but we knew what happened.

Q: You and your mother, for a long time, were in the ghetto.

A: Yes.

03:29:

Q: And your mother had been being courted just --

A: Before the war.

Q: And so whoever was courting her was not in the ghetto?

A: No. He was a physician and he lived in Warsaw, and she was supposed to marry him. And we were supposed to move to Warsaw, but the war interrupted it. The private life ceased, the individual ceased. We became a mass, a number, robotons, just performing tasks and the

starvation took -- a lot of people died there, a lot of people. Incidentally, the friend of mine who was so sick in ghetto that we gave some food to, all of us, a little bit of ours, she was taken away to Auschwitz. Her mother said, "I had one daughter. Now, I have seven daughters," because the six of us were coming trying desperately to help, but it didn't help.

Q: Now, after you were deported and you were in the camp, I want you to tell me a little bit more about the everyday living conditions, the cold, the sanitation, sleeping.

A: There was no sanitation. We did not have latrines. There were holes with wooden -- there was a wooden board with two holes, and since many of us were sick from whatever they gave us to eat, it was a constant walk to the latrines, to the holes. There was tremendous degradation of human beings. It was the human spirit suffered more than the physical spirit. Our bodies didn't listen to us, didn't obey us. We had -- as I mentioned before, we lost our menstruation very gratefully because we couldn't have taken care of this. It was -- everybody knows it was the lack of food and vitamins. We slept two, three to a wooden bunk. The tiers in Ravensbrück was packed with human beings. There was stench in the air, horrible stench, between the latrines and the bodies. The one who was in charge had a special little room and special privileges and special food. We the Jews never got close to it. The Germans who -- and the Ukrainians were in charge. One Ukrainian girl, in particular, was as beautiful as an angel with gorgeous blonde hair, blue eyes, beautiful girl. A Satan in human form. A brutal Satan, looking angelic, brutalized us in every possible way. The food that was distributed in Ravensbrück was -- we fought, we screamed. They cut wrong portions. We were deprived of every shred of civility. People were fighting over everything, with exception of a few of us. And the fear of the Germans, the German prisoners, was always ominous. They were always over us. With exception of some of us the Jewish girls and the Jehovah Witnesses, we still preserved some sort of civilized behavior. The rest of it was unbelievable because they

03:37:

survived the camp life from before the war. They were in prisons first; then they went to the camps. To survive in camps for that many years, you have to do things, all sorts of things. You have to be brutal. You have to have some sort of position there. You have to bribe. In that way we were very innocent. We were completely unaware of anything when we first came there. Our experience with the selection, we had to stand naked in front of the -- I don't know -- doctor or whatever. You couldn't have a pimple on your body. You had to be perfect for work, and then looking for the jewels, the vaginal experiments that -- it was -- the hell started right there. We were stripped of every, every human trace of behavior. The brutality, the killing, the siccing the dogs -- the dogs were sicced at the people. They were ripping the people apart with the exception of me, I think. And they had pleasure, the people liked to look at it. The same people who lived a normal life outside of the camp. They had two kinds of life, and they completely reconciled with it. It was their work, and as they cleaned up in the war, they were assigned to it. But they embellished their love of it. They did it with pleasure. They didn't have to sometimes to do things that they did, but it became a badge of honor. Human beings reduced to beasts, unbelievable. To preserve sanity, to function after

surviving this war, I don't think that we are 100 percent, but we try to pull on our reserves from our background, from our civilized way of living, from our teachings, our parents, and our teachers. We try to create environment for us, ourselves, for our children, and we try to share our knowledge and forewarn future generations of the horror of what human beings are capable of. That we must be on guard. We must protect. We must speak up. Like Pastor Niemoeller said in his very famous speech, which I don't remember verbatim, but he said, "First, they came for the cripples, and I said nothing. Then, they came for the Communists, and I said nothing. Then, they came for the Catholics, I said" -- I don't remember completely. "Then, they came for the Jews, and I said nothing because I was not one of them. Then, they came for me, and there was nobody to speak up for me." That's why we must have the red flag. We must teach, we must educate, we must do the very least we can and we are capable of. This is one of the reasons why I wanted so badly to come here and to speak up in my own little way to contribute from my past, from my knowledge, from my experience, from my broken down body. To tell the people the horror, the tragedy, the Gehenna that we went through must never happen again.

Q: I think that I have covered everything that I had. Do you have anything else that you want to talk about?

A: Well, I do hope that my message -- I don't know if it's going to be in the Archives, in Oral History Department or whatever, that it could be shared with people. That I'm sure that many people before me said the same things, that they are being widely distributed. I hope that in my own way I was able to impart and bare my soul and expose the horror that I was witness to and forewarn people and beg people to think and to pool their own resources. To read, to see if there a movie of it. Not be protected of themselves, like some people say, "I've seen enough of it. I can't take it anymore." I don't think it's right because once you see it, you're alerted. It reinforces you. It helps you. That's why I feel that if one person can do something, it's important. That's why Schindler was important because he was one. His ideas maybe were different in the beginning. Maybe he did this for personal gain, that's how he started. But, eventually, he was the savior. No matter what his motives were, he did save a group of people. And these people multiplied, and they have future generations. And they're grateful to him and his memory. That's why individual counts. That's my message.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

End of Tape #3

Conclusion of Interview