

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Norma Schneiderman
September 21, 1994
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Norma Schneiderman, conducted by Randy Goldman on September 21, 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.

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NORMA SCHNEIDERMAN
September 21, 1994

01:00:34

Q: Ok, I need you to tell me your name as it was during the war years, the town you were born in and the year.

A: My name is Norma Schneiderman. I'm born in 1912. You need the date? April...the second, the 18th. The second month, the 18th.¹

Q: In 1912?

A: In 1912.

Q: What was your, what was your name at the time?

A: At that time, Norma. But a different, the name...the second name was a different name. Przepiorka.

Q: And what town were you born in?

A: I was born in a little town, like on a farm. And then we moved into the city. Was not far from that. Was about 12 kilometers, which the rest of the family...the brothers and sisters were living there.

Q: What was the name of that town?

A: Vengrov. And, and we remained there til the war. And when the war, of course, arrived, we were scared. We were running from one place to the other. When they moved in, the Germans.

Q: Okay. I need...I want to go back a little. Because I want to hear about Vengrov.

A: Well, it was...

Q: It was a town in Poland...

A: In Poland. It was a town in Poland near Siedlce, Sokolow, which you had them in the Holocaust there. All the names, the city names. Near Warsaw, but further down from the Warsaw than the states where I mentioned before. And we lived there, like I said, until the war came in and...

¹ Norma Schneiderman was born on February 18, 1912.

Q: Tell me, tell me about the town. Tell me about your family life. What did your parents do?

A: Well, the family life...until...before the war, everything was, you know, normal. Poor life. I was the youngest in the family, so of course I had to take care of my mother and father. And there were two brothers. Younger brothers. Then one of the younger brother went away also to Vengrov, for study. And he was learning there the same trade with my brothers, the first brothers were there. You know, like they...what do they call it, Willy, in Germany? No, you can't talk. And they used to make the uppers. You know? This (indicates a part of her shoe). And this went to a special...to a different...this went to a shoemaker.
(Willaim Schneiderman is in the room and makes a few comments.)

01:03:35

Q: Okay. But I just need one of you to talk.

A: Yeah, I know this, know this. And we...my father didn't work. My mother didn't work, because they were older people already. They didn't feel good. I was taking care on them. And meina² had a brother. And then we had to went away from there. We escaped to a little town. Because of the bombs, they were...

Q: No, I don't, I want still to stay in Vengrov a little bit more.

A: In Vengrov.

Q: Now were you married? Single?

A: I was married. I married during the war. In...but it wasn't too long. Because the war broke out and we had to escape from our city...from Vengrov. So we went...should I say? We went to a...

Q: Let's...were you religious? Did you go to public school in Vengrov? I'm trying to get a sense of the town.

A: No. We went...I went to school...we were living in that little town, on the farm, like I said. I went to a Polish school there. Just...I was the only one Jewish there. Of course, it was no picnic. You could imagine. One Jewish girl with so much Polish children. But we took it, because we were staying there. Didn't have no alternative. And then when we moved away, we...only me, my father and mother remained...and we moved away to Vengrov.

Q: Now did you feel that there was antisemitism in Vengrov? Or were the people mostly

² mine (Yiddish)

Jewish?

A: In Vengrov? They were...they were Polish people. But... they were outside the city. They were outside the city. Not in the city. Around. So we didn't have too much business with them. And we didn't have no contact to be with them, except to go shopping. You know, they used to come in and they used to be like...people...Polish people, you know, farmers used to come up and bring in all kind of food. Selling...potatoes, like. And all kind of things... food. So of course, that was the living. You had the money and you went and you buy...you didn't...so you did not buy.

01:06:20

Q: Was your family religious?

A: My father was very religious. My mother was a dressmaker. So she didn't know from nothing. She didn't...she couldn't do nothing. She was just constantly by the machines. Of course, we helped her out a lot. As much as we could. And that was life in Vengrov. And when we wanted to see the family, we used to go out of the house and go to other streets...on other streets. Everybody lived in the same neighborhood. Because we were in different neighborhoods.

Q: Do you remember it being a nice life? Were you...were you comfortable?

A: When I was young, yes. I remember I had a lot of friends. Nice friends, good friends. And we were seeing each other often. Of course, we went out with them to different places. And that was the life. And the rest you spent with the family.

Q: Were there political organizations?

A: Yes. There was...I belonged to the Ha-shomer Ha-tsa'ir.³ My brother was a Po'alei Zion.⁴ Both...all of us. The whole family was the right way. And that's how life goes on. Once a week, we had meetings. You know, entertainments. We made ourself entertainments, you know. And that was the life. Like in a small city.

Q: Were you very interested in Zionist thought or anything like that?

A: Well, I was in the...mostly in the Ha-shomer. We were going to the Ha-shomer.

³ Ha-shomer Ha-tsa'ir was a Zionist-socialist pioneering youth movement. The organization's goal was to educate Jewish youth and prepare them for life in Israel.

⁴ Po'alei Zion was a political and economic organization which had a Zionist-socialist base.

Q: What did, I mean what did you learn? Tell me about that. I don't know what that means.

A: We learned Hebrew a little bit. We learned all kind of Hebrew songs. And that was, you know, we spent the time. It was like entertainment time and literature, you know what I mean? That what it was the mostly.

Q: Did you have much information about what was happening in Germany with Hitler...before the war?

A: Before the war? No. I didn't...we didn't know nothing about it. We couldn't even imagine to think that something is gonna happen. In those years.

Q: Early on, didn't a lot of refugees from other towns come to Vengrov, or not?

A: Not, not too many. Not too many, no. They remained like, also on, in little...I don't know if you'll know it. In little farms. But not...they didn't have farms but they had the houses, like on the farms. And they used to come, like I said before, they used to come to the city to buy, you know, food...more delicate things, you know. And than that was it. And the rest they would...they used to come in by horse and wagon, of course, because it was 12 kilometers to come to that city. And all around the things. But it wasn't too many Jewish people. You could count them on the fingers.

01:09:40

Q: Do you remember the day that the war started in Vengrov?

A: I don't remember the date of the day. What I remember, it was...when they came in to Vengrov, it was just before Rosh Hashanah. I think, if I'm not mistaken, it was like a week before Rosh Hashanah they came in. And it took them not too long to start taking out the Jews. Yom Kippur they...they...how to say? They took us around...they took us around, all around. And we were all in shul,⁵ this I remember distinctly. We were all in shul, my whole family. And of course the other people were there. And one of my brother came in and announced...it was in a different room ...and he announced that people we already in it. That means we were closed around, we couldn't go out. That was it. They came in and they taken us and we gonna get killed. And that what it is. That was Yom Kippur, about two o'clock. Wait a minute. About two o'clock, yeah. Just when we took a rest, you know, from, from praying. And of course, people got very nervous. And they didn't know what to do. Should we stay yet in the shul or should we start going into the places to hide or...they didn't know what... what we, can we do? Because we were already in their hands. We couldn't go nowhere. The whole city was like you take a, a wire and you put it around that they can't escape. Anyway, we wait...we finish there until the last prayer. And we went home. We went

⁵ synagogue, house of prayer and gathering (Hebrew)

home by rushing home. A lot of people got hurt, because they didn't let us go. They didn't ...don't go here, and don't go there. And you weren't allowed to have lights. Was no lights. We didn't know where to go. And we went into the houses. Of course, the dinner was...no dinner, you could imagine. But we were sitting and praying and talking between the family, you know. And we were talking, how can we get all together to be in one place and to keep...keep together. But I took my mother. My father wasn't alive already. My father was dead already. Because of them. They killed him. It happened that one day...

01:12:36

Q: How did they kill him?

A: Can I say it in between?

Q: You can say it right now.

A: He went about a week before Rosh Hashanah...he went to shul. He had a habit early in the morning to go there for prayer. And it was not easy. It was far away from us. From where we were living. It was early in the morning...in those times, then when they came in right away...that you weren't allowed to be in the evening in the street. And you weren't allowed to be the early in the morning in the street. They had certain hours. You probably know about it. And they caught him coming back already. It must have been about 7, 7:30. Because it was after the morning prayer. And they beat him up. But they wanted to cut his beard. He had a beautiful beard like you see in the, in the picture. And he didn't let himself. So that's when they told me...I was the only one that was with them, because the rest of the people were in Vengrov. There in the thing. That was in Vengrov. So he didn't let cut him the beard. So they threw him down on the floor and they beat him up terribly.

Q: You were there?

A: I, I wasn't there.

Q: Oh.

A: But my brothers went...they told my brothers that your father has been beaten up. Mendel (ph) and Moishe (ph) and the rest of the brothers, they were alive yet. Because they only came in a couple weeks before. And my older brother went and he took him home. And he got sick since then. He was very sick for a long time. And then he died.

A: All right. So we were talking about, on Yom Kippur, how you were talking with the family and trying to figure out what to do.

A: What to do. Where to go, where to hide. So everybody went in a different place to hide. Of

course, my father wasn't alive already. We buried him. And only my mother. So I had to watch after my mother. She was an elderly woman and she didn't...she couldn't take care on herself. And she couldn't walk too good. So I took her with me where I was hiding. In the same building where we were living. We went on the roof. On the attic...not on the roof. On the attic there, there was a place. They called it the boidem⁶ or whatever you.... And there was a lot of boxes and clothing ...what people throw out, you know, to give away.

01:15:31

So I, I, took her to one box and I covered her up with the certain clothes. And I went in another place like...not far from her. Not to be together...one for us to be alive. And we survived, a couple days there on the roof. We took with us the...whatever was to eat in the house. What we had from before, prepared. And we had there...while we were sitting on the attic there. Finally, they, they stopped going for the Jews to take them there...to take them in one place. So we went out...and I was remaining in the, in the apartment where I used to live. It was on the top of our apartment. On the attic. But my mother said that..."I want to go to Schlomo (ph)"...that was the oldest son. The oldest brother. He's in the picture. "I want to go up to him." And it was very far to go to him. It was to the...about 10 blocks to go over or maybe more. Just approximately. But she went. She went and they killed her there on the place. They caught her there, in the alley. It was alleys to go into the buildings. So they caught her and they killed her there. We didn't know the funeral. We didn't know nothing. We didn't know it. We only know that they took her to the cemetery. But where in the cemetery, what, we didn't know. There's no cemetery anyway there, anymore. And that was the living after this.

Q: So were you alone?

A: I was only alone, left over, yeah.

Q: And what did you do next? Where did you go?

A: They were still there and they start...then it came the time that they took out the people to kill. To go to Treblinka.

Q: All at one time or were there regular...

A: It was regular living but it was no living, you know. During the war, it was no living. It was, it was torture. We went from one place to the other. Also...while I'm talking I'm reminding myself...when the bombs start to come in, we went into a neighborhood not far from that farm where we used to live before the war. We knew some people. And they took us in. And we were there...sorry... They took us in for a couple days. They put us in the basement

⁶ attic (Yiddish)

because the soldiers were only more in the cities, in the bigger cities. Not so much on the farm and those neighborhoods. We were there a couple days.

01:18:37

Q: Who's "we"?

A: Some other people, Jews. They were living there in that, on that farm. And it was maybe about five or six families, that's all. Not too many. So when we came back...when we came back to the city, to Vengrov, they start taking people to work...the Germans...for working. Digging...telling us to make the...put in water pipes or other pipes, you know. So everybody started running again. Not everybody was able to do this work. And we heard of it...you know, rumors were going around that whoever they took and they couldn't work, they threw them in and...like he said...they killed them. So I...in between, I got married.

Q: Somebody you had known for a while?

A: I didn't know him too much. I mean not too long. Maybe I knew him about six, seven months. He was from a different city. He was from Siedlce. I don't know if you have an idea. I got married.

Q: This was a strange time to get married.

A: Well, it was no wedding. We just...we got married. As a matter of fact, my oldest brother gave us Khupe and Kdu'shn.⁷ You know what Khupe and Kdu'shn means? He gave ...the ceremony. Just the ceremony. And we kept on being there but they...we couldn't stay in our city too long, because they start taking out people to work. They send them in all kind of places to work. And he used to do a little business, back and forth. From Vengrov, with my...you know, to Siedlce. Being that my brothers were in this business...leather business...we started...you know, you should make a little living, you know. So he started to buy leather. Not make...not finished leather. Finished leather ...but just the leather. And transferred to Siedlce. And that's the way he sell them there. As a matter of fact, a brother of mine took him in, in that business. So when it got so bad...and his family was there. And they had a big house. So he wanted me to come there. Because they already had taken out the people.

01:21:19

There was not too, not too much people in that city... Siedlce. There was 30, 40 miles from Vengrov. So they said it gonna be, he...they...he had heard it whenever they took out the people to kill them or to burn them or to take them to the gas chambers, they said he's never gonna come again. And people ran away to woods, to all kinds of places. So I went to

⁷ wedding canopy and prayer; wedlock (Hebrew/Yiddish)

Siedlce. But it was not true. Because when he killed...then he went to different people and he find out... I mean the Germans...he came back to the same people. The ones that they came back, they were hiding. Came back to their city. And he start taking out again. So he came back to his...to Siedlce. And I was staying there with him. Then they came to Vengrov. And they took out from Vengrov again. So I escaped in the woods. I was in the woods a couple days. Every shot was a Jew falling. Right near me. They didn't...I don't know how that they seen me...they didn't see me, I don't know. Because the shots, you heard them so near from you that you could know that it wasn't too far. You know what I mean? Well, anyway, that's how we went through until they came back and they start taking out again the Jews. From Vengrov.

Q: So you went to the woods. Did you come back to Vengrov?

A: From the woods, I came back to the...yeah.

Q: You were with your husband?

A: No. I wasn't that time with my husband. When they start taking out again, they took me to Treblinka. From Vengrov. I went to Treblinka.

Q: Just so that I understand this. The Germans came in, in several different round-ups...

A: Yeah. And twice they came into the same cities.

Q: And in between, some people like yourself had gotten out to the woods.

A: Yeah.

Q: But some of you went back...

A: Some...when we came back...when they said it's quieter now and we could come back, we came back. So meanwhile, we were all hiding. He went to the same city when nobody was there. You know what I mean? Then when...

Q: What happened the day they came in to take you...to transport you to Treblinka? What was happening?

A: When we went away...when I was in Siedlce, they...they used to...the same thing like in Vengrov. They used to take coming in the morning and take out some people to work for them. Also digging and, you know, those tunnels and all kind of things. For water or for whatever, the pipes to put in. They took people to work. And they took me also to work. And I remained there. I remained there and then when they start again to take out from Siedlce

they took me from there. Me and his family kenem⁸. I don't know where his family was, but I was constantly with him.

01:24:49

Q: Your husband?

A: Yeah. The people got prepared...when they went into the train they got prepared with all kind of etches with.... With all kind of things. They knew what people are doing, that they open up doors and they screaming "Escape," because the doors are open. I heard...my husband was yelling to me "Norma, leave. Scream. Go out. The doors are open." So I went out. In between I went out, I lost him. I lost...I knew where to go from Siedlce because from the farm where we used to live was not too far to go there. To the, to the train. So I knew, I knew, where I am and what place I, what section I am. So I went back to the wood. Near a farm, which it was never Jews there. Just...I knew people...like I said, my mother was a dressmaker. And we had work to do for them. I was doing with my mother, the work. And I remember that one of the Polish people...we were very, very friendly. They were very good to us. I said "I'm going to her. Maybe she'll hide me." But they were afraid for themselves. So while I was going with her, I knew that I'm getting lost. I'm not...I'm not in the same place, it was the place but it was not that way to go to her, maybe. It was the other way. So I turn in the other side of the way. While I'm walking, I meet a Polish woman. And I said to her, in Polish, "Hello"...whatever in Polish is..."Dzien Dobry." And I ask her "Maybe you know"...I ask her from where she is. And she says...she mentioned the place, the name where that...where I'm looking for that woman. She didn't have a husband, her husband died. She had two daughters with her. So I asked her in Polish "Maybe you know Pani"..."Pani" means "Mrs."...where Pani Biernotska (ph) lives." She looks at me and looks at me and she says "Of course I know. That's my mother." I wasn't too happy. Because she had boys...only boys. Four boys. And they belonged to the AK.⁹ And I was going to find out that it's her mother, I wasn't so happy about it. I figured I'm afraid already, but I went. She took me overnight. She put me in a hiding place...in a shed there. And the next day she came in and she said to me...she cried for me. I could see her tears.

01:27:52

"I'm sorry that I have to tell you to leave." I says "What, Mrs., we, we knew each other so many years, you were a friend of ours. Why do you telling me to leave?" She says "Look. First of all, you know what's going on. If they find you, I'll be killed and my children will be killed." So I said to her "Why should they find me by you? You're near to the field. They

⁸ know (Yiddish)

⁹ Armia Krajowa (Home Army): One of the underground military organizations in occupied Poland; it existed from the fall of 1939 until January 1945.

going around more, you know, inside the farms. Inside the people." She says "My daughters have boyfriends. German boyfriends. And they constantly by me. And they going around with dogs." And that's what they did. They were going around with dogs to find Jewish people. I went...I went away.

Q: You're completely alone now?

A: I'm alone.

Q: You didn't...did you see your husband get shot or...

A: No. He jumped and I jumped when we...we got right away separated. Because he was in...he was in a different place. Not in a different place. He was like in the train by the end and I maybe was in the middle. All I heard is "Norma, leave. Jump. Run. Jump." But I imagine... because if he would be alive he would find me or he would let himself know where I am. He knew, where I coming and he knew where I am going. But I never found him. And that remained. I never found him.

Q: We need to change the tape.

End of Tape #1

TAPE #2

02:00:38

Q: When you were put on this train, you had, did you have any idea where it was heading?

A: I know that people are going to Treblinka.

Q: How did you know that?

A: Because they started taking out Vengrov, when I was in Vengrov and then they went to Siedlce, and then they came back to Vengrov and they went back to Siedlce, I told you before, they kept going back and back.

Q: But how did you know Treblinka was the final destination?

A: All the people from Vengrov, they went to Treblinka, which I know. Then when I went to Siedlce they said they going to Treblinka too.

Q: Who said they were going...

A: People, people, people Jewish people find out where they going.

Q: Oh, ok, I just don't, I didn't know how they found out.

A: Well you in contact with Jewish people...where you going, where this going...we going to Treblinka, we only know about Treblinka that time. I don't know if Auschwitz was later...

Q: The reason I'm asking you is because since the people who went to Treblinka never left Treblinka, how did you get information about...

A: There were some people left over. They were hiding. And they came back. I told you, they came back to the city. Because they said also the same. People said, "Oh, sizz shein gevorin."¹⁰ They took out the people is not coming back, but they still came back for the rest of them. They knew that people were hiding and they coming back to the house. They knew. They were smart.

¹⁰ It happened already. (Yiddish)

Q: So how long were you on the train and when did you jump?

A: Like I said, we went in the train maybe towards the evening. Like four o'clock...something like. It was no mind that time to keep minds of watches, of times or when you going or when you coming. You didn't know what's doing with you. You went. But the only thing that I remember distinctly that it must have been about two o'clock midnight when we start jumping because it took them time to work by the doors, to open them up. They had all kind of instruments to open up the doors. People in the train.

Q: Were there German guards on the train?

A: Sure. They had...not in...I don't know if they were...they probably did not have guards in the train. But they had guards outside. They had like...they, maybe they stood on the steps on the train outside, you know. Because they kept on killing whoever jumped. Whoever they caught jumping, they killed them right away, running out from the train.

Q: They didn't see you?

A: Probably, because otherwise I wouldn't be alive.

02:03:36

Q: So...all right. You're all alone. You've had to leave this Polish woman's house. What do you do?

A: What do I do? So I...I go to another farm. And I have another woman...a Polish woman...and I go to her. And I, I thought that one of my brothers was not a well man. And he knew...in that place I went to, they had a farm. It wasn't really a farm...considered part of a farm. I knew that my brother is very familiar with that man. They had...he had a restaurant. He had a big restaurant and he was a very rich man. And he killed a lot of pigs, you know, meat. He had ...he was allowed to have liquor. But I knew also from that first woman from the farm I met...what I told you...she told me that she knows from good sources that one of my brother is alive. And I...she told me the name so I knew that he's familiar with that man from the restaurant. Maybe he knows something, and maybe I could find that brother of mine. That was Christmastime. I don't remember it was a week before Christmas or a day before Christmas. This I don't know. But I know that I went there. Barefooted. In the snow in January.

Q: Is this 1942 or...

A: '43.

Q: '43. Okay.

A: I went there. I came in...that was the city where we used to live. The farm where we used to live but out of the farm, like on the field. I went there, I came in and there was a lot of Germans in the store. Not in the restaurant where they serve, but in the store. You know, to order something or buy something. And I also recognized somebody. One of my sisters...I don't know if this is interested to you. One of my sister...a friend...is there and I recognized his wife. But when I came in to her, I didn't come in straight right to her. I couldn't go in because I had to go in through that store. From the restaurant...to the restaurant store. So I couldn't because the Germans were sitting. It must have been about six o'clock. Dark...it was dark already.

02:06:29

But when I came in, there was a corridor with a big...you know, big doors to close that place. So I went...it was just like this. You see? The door...this is the door, and I'm here. It's closed here. And I'm standing closed behind that door. Because I'm afraid to go into the store because the Germans are there. And I recognize that man, and I knew...she knew that he gave up Jewish people for a pound of sugar. That was a neighbor of ours. A best friend of my sister's. While I was standing, standing here...I'll never forget that, that picture. While I'm standing here, the owner's wife was passing by to the room where they served the people, you know what I mean? And I...I don't know what to do. I'm shivering and I want, I want her to know that I'm here. So I said in Polish, "Pani Pocinska (ph)." And she recognized my voice. After so many years we weren't there. Maybe for 10, 15 years, she recognized my voice. She says, "Norma?" I says, "Yes." She says, "Shhh." So she went in and closed all the lights. The lights were supposed to be on, I think, only to eight or seven o'clock. I think until seven o'clock. To seven o'clock, I think the light was supposed to be only. She closed the light in the store and she closed the light where the people were sitting and eating, where I told you before, the, in the room. And she came back to me, she took me and she put me under the bed. She was very good to us.

Q: Didn't anybody wonder why the lights went off?

A: I'm telling you, it wasn't allowed to have lights a certain time. A certain time. I think it was seven...seven or eight. No, it must be at...when it got dark, you, you weren't allowed to have lights.

Q: So the Germans couldn't see in.

A: That's right. When it got dark on the streets, the...there was no lights on the street. I mean, the time is when it gets dark so there weren't allowed to be lights. Not only in the restaurant, but even in the house you had to cover up the lights. Anyway, she took me in and pushed me in under the bed...under her daughter's bed. She had that one daughter. And then when they went away, she took me into the kitchen, where she gave me to eat. And I said to her,

"Where's your husband?" And she says, "My husband's not here." She knew that I wanna stay. I says, "So where is he?" She says he's...he produced his own, let's say...how to say it? The Polish...the Polish food. Sausages, kielbasa...you know what kielbasa is? All kind of, of this Polish meat preserves.

02:09:45

She, he did...he had a special place like where they don't cook it but they...they roast it or something, you know. They smoke it. They smoke it. They had a place where they smoking it. He had a separate place in the yard where he had a room and they smoked it. So she told me he's there with the workers. So she says, "Why do you need him?" I says, "I would like to talk to Pan Pocinski (ph)". Mr. Pocinski (ph). And she says, "He'll be coming in late." I says, "When is he gonna finish?" She says, "Oh, about twelve, one o'clock." And I wanted to know from her. I figured if she'll tell me that anybody's living yet in Vengrov, maybe they were hidden somewhere and now it's quiet, they came back. So I wanted to know if he know about it...something. If he knows about it, maybe I'll go to Vengrov. Back. Coming from...jumping from Treblinka. Anyway, I waited and I asked her, "Maybe you know something. I heard that a brother of mine, my brother, Fishel (ph)... he's in the picture...is alive." "Maybe you know where he is." "Oh, no, we don't know." She right away told me this. "We don't know; we never saw him." I said, "Maybe Pan Pocinski (ph) know." Mr. Pocinski (ph). She says, "I doubt" ...in Polish..."I doubt that he knows." She did...she...I don't know. I think she was afraid of him, that maybe he wouldn't want me to know. You know what I mean? So anyway, that remained. I was there between seven and eight 'til about one o'clock at night. By one o'clock he came in. Meanwhile, I ate and I kept on saying if nobody's alive for me...if Mendel (ph) and Moishe (ph) and Schlomo (ph)... everybody went to Treblinka, they're not alive...what do I have to live? I have no money, I have no clothes on me. What do I have to live? Winter, cold, barefooted. I'm going to Vengrov. "Oh," she says, "they're going to kill you on the way." That's what she told me. "They going to kill you on the way, because they"...they was...I read about place that they kept on hiding and looking for Jews there. And on the way, you know, it was like woods. She says, "You wouldn't go there. They gonna kill you right away." And I kept on saying to her, "So what am I supposed to do?" Make her notice that maybe she'll keep me. And meanwhile he came in, one o'clock in the morning he came in. And the same thing, drink with him and this and that. So I says, "Look, I'm not in the mood. I ate. Your wife gave me to eat." And she put me in all kind of things in the pockets in the coat. But I had food to eat.

02:12:45

She thought maybe I will go. And he stopped me again. I said, "Do you know where Fishel (ph) is?" Fil (ph). He says, "No, I don't know Fil (ph). I didn't see him since the war started." But I heard a lot of rumors that he was...he was, in between the time that you could do some business, he was afraid for the Polish money. That they gonna discontinue the Polish money, so he wanted the change for American dollars. So my brother used to change him. Come and

take the money, change them in the city for gold. Gold, gold pieces. American money. American gold. So I had the idea that he does this with him and he knew, but he didn't want to admit to me. And I was afraid to tell him that. You saw him and he...you probably know about him, maybe you heard about him. Everything went like, not noticing for sure, you know what I mean? Finally, he gave in. But that, that picture, you should have seen it. Finally, he gave in. He says to me this way...he holds my hand and he says to me, "You really want to see him." You know, in Polish it has a little more meaning, more...more picture, you know what I mean? "You really want to see him." And I said to him in Polish...I answered him, "Pan Pocinski (ph), do you think that that's the only one left, and I don't want to see him?" He let my hand go. And he said, he said something to her which I don't remember even...it's like a wink, with the eyes. And he took me by the hand and he takes me in that room where it was the dining room. Where the people used to eat. And on the way going to him, I had to go through that place, the corridor where I was hidden behind the door. The door from the first coming in. And he said to me on the way, "Don't tell me that you want to be with him." So and...that tell me that maybe he has a small place somewhere he is hiding him and he can't make the place bigger for somebody else, or something. But I knew in me that he wouldn't let me go. He took me in and my brother was laying on the floor. A little pillow and a little stool with a little blanket to cover himself up. He was sleeping. He said...he woke him up. He woke him up and he noticed that he's worse.

02:15:49

So I remember distinctly what he said to him. "What's the matter, they by you?" In Polish. That means that the Germans came into him in the middle of the night. You know what I mean? He was doing things where he wasn't allowed to do and my brother knew it. He was killing too much pigs. He was, he had rationing...he had tickets, so much he's allowed to kill. But he was doing more. And my brother knew about it and everybody knew that he's killing too much in the place. Anyway, so he woke him up and my brother said to him he probably knew that maybe it was before I came also the same story...somebody...he came in and woke him up and he threw him. He made in the corner of the room...he took out four boards and he made a tunnel. He was outside constantly. Like during the daytime, and he slept outside. You know, in the room. But God forbid if they came in, if he knew that they here and maybe they'll come in, he shoveled him in, in that tunnel. You know, he made that tunnel there and he covered our back with the boards, he didn't make the boards separate, he made like a door from the boards. And on the, on the door was a machine, a Singer's machine, a sewing machine to demonstrate that nothing is there, you know what I mean? So he pushed him in there. So that's why he asked him, "What's the matter, they here?" My brother asked him, "What's the matter, they here?" He says, "No, your sister is here." He was, you know, sleepy and he didn't know...he couldn't believe, because the train who went to Treblinka with those people from Siedlce the second time wasn't too far. They went in...they went through our, our farm. So he knew that it was another train going into Treblinka. So he was very scared. He didn't know what happened. A sister surviving yet, from that train? Well, anyway, I was there the rest of the couple of hours was still dark, the nighttime. And then he came in about

nine o'clock in the morning and he said to me, "So what do you intend to do, Norma? Your brother is gonna stay here. I would not throw him out. What's gonna be with you?"

02:18:35

And I'm speechless. What can I tell him? I says, "Look, Pan Pocinski (ph), whatever you decide is good with me." That means whatever he wants to do with me, let him do. I'm in his hands now. I can't go to Vengrov and I can't stay here, so what am I gonna do? He wants to kill me, let him kill me. He says, "Look, I'll take in more shovels, we make the tunnel bigger and you stay with your brother as long as I'm alive." And that was that. But being...I told you in the beginning, my brother was a sick man. He got sick because he was...right in the beginning he was in the woods and he got sick on the kidneys. So he says, "You gonna stay together with him as long as I live and as long as I can do something for you." Because he was very friendly with our family and that's it. So they went...we stay in there for about four months together with my brother. If anything happens, we went into that bunker. Took off the machine and then we went in and put back the machine on.

Q: What did you do in the daytime?

A: In the daytime, we were out. We were in the, in the room.

Q: You're working or...

A: Well, what kind of work? We were sitting and looking out. The windows was closed with thick curtains that the outside shouldn't, we saw outside, but the outside couldn't see us, you know. So we were sitting and watching, we were reading, my brother was praying. We had praying book. I remember like now that it was before Passover, because that everything happens in the winter time. She said to my brother, "I know that it's the meaning, you have to eat matzo. You're not allowed to eat bread." You know what I mean. So she, they had a oven, so she had...she made the oven and she gave him flour. And I made the dough and we baked matzos. We baked a couple, a couple pound, about five pound flour. The meaning from the matzo, for Passover. And then my brother got worse and worse. And I don't know if I should tell you that she wanted...they wanted to save us. They wanted so much to save us. When he got very, very sick already, she went away to Sokolow...that's nearer than Siedlce...to a city which she had a doctor. Very, you know ...probably everybody who has a doctor is very close to the doctor. And she said a lie to him, to the doctor, that my brother..."My father is such a sick man that I can't even bring him to you."

02:21:39

But I...she took a bottle of his phena (ph) medication, prescription, and she said, "I want that prescription again. They don't want to give me no medications from that prescription because it's already overdue." The time, you know, when the prescription ...like six months later, or

whatever later. And the doctor was supposed...that's what she told us. The doctor said, "You don't have a, a father. Your father's not sick. You having a Jew there." And while he said there that you have a Jew, she escaped from him. And she came back home and she told us this. She told me, not him. And a couple weeks later, he died. And I buried him. I don't know if he's still there, but I buried him with my bare hands. He made the cave. He made the cave, and I buried him, my brother, there. That was a orchard behind the, the building. Behind the house was a orchard. So I don't know this, but she told me this story that they asked him, "In case something happens, where do you want to be buried?" So he told them, "Bury me under that and that tree, a pear tree." So that was the pear tree where he was buried. I used to go there.

Q: So now you're all alone...

A: Now I'm all alone and I have nobody in Vengrov. Meanwhile, in between that time, they took out my two brothers. Two brothers were remained with...they had those business that I told you. They kept him such a long time. They had to teach him the business. They taught him the business and they took out everything, all the letters, all the valuable things and the machines, and they took them to Treblinka. The reason why I'm telling you this, that then I heard when that man was working there by the glasses, what I mention before, my husband said it's not true. What he have to... what was pushing him to say that he said that he wants those two people to help him because it's too much work for him? He was sorting the glasses that the people took off, like my husband told you, that everything went in place, pants and underwear, that's separate. And this separate, and glasses separate, whatever gold separate. Everything went separates places.

Q: This is a man separating clothes in Treblinka?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

02:24:23

A: Yeah. So anyway, that's what I heard. He told me, that man who died, Reizman (ph), that he went over to somebody, the highest rank, and he told them that Moishe (ph) and Mendel (ph) is here, and I would like maybe you could give him help, because it's too much for me to do. And it's a lot of people came in there and a lot of people wearing glasses, so maybe they could help me. So they put him the same day in the fire. So that's what I know, I know while I was running around from one place to the other that Mendel (ph) and Moishe (ph) is not alive. And I have nobody. And that was the, the thing. But I also then find out...in, in that town I live through the...I was there 'til the last minute we got liberated.

Q: At this restaurant?

A: At this restaurant, I was there. I was there 'til I got liberated. But when I got liberated, I went to Vengrov.

Q: So you were, so you were at this home, this restaurant, for how long, do you think? Totally?

A: About a year. Maybe more. Like I told you before, it was no time, not time, time we had plenty. We didn't have a lot to do with ourselves. But was nothing in the mind to remember what day it is and what time it is or what month it is. Who was thinking about it? We were want that the day should go faster, maybe we'll live through this, this trouble.

Q: Now when were you liberated, and by whom?

A: I was liberated by Russians. When I went away to Siedlce and when everything finished and the war finished, I went back to Vengrov.

Q: No, but, but when you were liberated by Russians, did you actually see Russians or you just knew the Russians came in?

A: No, no. I was in the woods, like I said, again...

Q: Oh, you weren't in this house with the restaurant?

A: I went away from there to Vengrov near...there was near woods there. So I was there. But still the Russians, Germans were there.

Q: Oh, I thought you stayed in the house until liberation. I'm sorry, I'm very confused. It's my fault.

A: I was staying in that house 'til the liberation, 'til the Germans left. It was still Germans, and we were still afraid of them. The Germans were there and the Russians start to come in.

02:27:13

But I went in, in the woods, and from the woods I went in somebody what I knew to also where they live in a farm there, their own farm. And he went out, there was shooting around right away. The Russians were shooting to the Germans and the Germans were shooting to the Russians the airplanes were running. So one fellow came in, a young man came in and he kept on yelling, "The Russians are coming. The Russians are coming." So I jumped out from the (undecipherable), where the Russians are. That the Russians...we liberated, the Russians are coming. They took it over. Meanwhile, I was shot.

Q: By...

A: By the Russians.

Q: Unintentionally.

A: Unintentionally. Of course. Because I was running where the Russians.

Q: Why did you ever leave the house?

A: They were afraid. And I was...I can't say that I, I felt that, that maybe they gonna be killed or something, but I couldn't have in me that because of me they should be killed. They wanted the good for me and for my brother. Why should they be killed because of me? They killed them anyway. They killed them anyway...her and him. One day they came in, they came in to eat breakfast at the restaurant and they served them and when they went to the buffet to pay, they ask how much they want. And they told him how much he want...the bill is. They took out the gun, they killed them both. The daughter was in the church, so she remained alive. She's still alive, probably.

Q: So here in the woods, you got shot by a mistaken bullet...

A: Yeah. No, I got shot when...by the liberation.

Q: Right.

A: By the...when the...we went out, like I said. We went out to look at the Russians and the Germans are fighting in the air. They shooting. So we went out to look, we wanted that the Russians should come in because we knew that that's the way it's gonna finish and maybe we'll be liberated. So while we were running around outside, I got shot here. I don't know if it's still there, because it's a long time. It wasn't a big wound. It healed itself. And that...I never found my husband. Then I went back to Vengrov. I was back and forth. And he came from his city.

Q: Did you feel that you were finally free? Was this...I'm sorry. We have to change the tape.

02:30:00

End of Tape #2

TAPE #3

03:00:36

Q: You went back to Vengrov after you were liberated...

A: After I was liberated, I was hiding by, hiding by, before we were liberated and I went away to that good friend of ours, we were a month in a shack where they keeping...how do they say hay in English? Hay? Do you know what hay means? What they feeding the horses and the cows. They take out...the grass dries out and they, they put it back in the shack. They have it for the winter for the cows and the horses. So we went into...one place the farmer didn't know that we were there, we hiding there. But then he find us and he kept us for a little while. We paid him. When my brother died, he had gold pieces, which he was supposed to give to him, you know, like I said. Changing the money. So of course I had it with me. So we went in...I met...as a matter of fact, not that I met. That same woman, she was a good and very friendly to us...with the two daughters...the first one. She told me that there was some boys in this-and this-city going around the...you know, people used to go around at night and beg for bread or potato or something. So they probably used to come to her, too. She knew them. They weren't too far from her living. So she told me that if you want, I could tell those boys...there's one woman with them in Siedlce with a husband...so maybe you could connect with them and not being alone. So I was a couple of months with them, before the liberation. So that's what I know her, she was, she was so good. They were afraid for themselves and I don't blame them.

Q: After liberation, you first went back to Vengrov?

A: After I was liberated, the next day I went to Vengrov.

Q: What did you find there?

03:03:02

A: Coming in, coming into the city, I met a man. I didn't recognize him. I know him, because he was a customer by my brother's. He was...he get orders for the shoes but he had to make the bottoms. So my brother made the tops and he made the bottoms. So he recognized me. One of the brothers that he say they burned him. Mendel (ph). He said to me, "You know that Mendel's (ph) daughter is alive?" He had two sons and one daughter. I don't know how he knows. I never asked him how he knows. You had to be careful with everything, you understand this. But I asked him, "Where? Where is she?" So he told us that he heard...he didn't want to say that he knows for sure...he heard that she's with this-and-this people which they used to live in the same section where my brother lived. So my brother gave away the rest what he possessed, with some money probably, I'm sure of it. Because they wouldn't keep that money, that he should save that daughter. The sons were killed in Treblinka, two sons. So they kept her and she's alive. The reason why she is alive is, when I got connected

with my sister, I told her that my brother Mendel's (ph) daughter is alive and she...

Q: Your sister in America?

A: In America, sure. I didn't have another sister. And here in this country they had clubs, or whatever they call it, where they used to go out...what do you call it? I forgot how to call it. They had people where they, they used to take out people...Polish...take out children from Polish people. You probably heard about it, right? Did you? No, you were too young to hear about it. They used to have, you know, agencies where they used to go out to Europe to take out Jewish children from Polish people, where they survived there. So my sister find out, while she knew that her brother's, that my brother's child is alive, the daughter, she knew about it. And they had somebody who, he was a little bit macher.¹¹ You know, to go to Europe to take out the children from Polish people. So he got in touch with them. My sister then got in touch with them, through him and they took her away from her. They went there probably with an airplane. Otherwise, they didn't go, they didn't have any other communications to go to Europe, from America to Europe. They came with an airplane and they...she didn't want to give it to her, give away to her. She had one daughter, too, that woman. The Polish woman. So she said...she didn't have even an idea what a dollar is ...how much a dollar is. So she said she wants thousand dollar. Thousand dollar, she wants thousand dollars so they gave her thousand dollars. She said thousand dollars, they gave her thousand dollars. The, the girl, the daughter, took care on that...on my niece. I showed her to you, my niece. So while they took...and they took her first probably, they knew how to go on with this.

03:06:49

They took her first on the plane and they ran away. So she was acquainted with a lot of Germans. She used to live with a lot of Germans, you know. She was one of those nice girls. So she connected a soldier, a German, and they took her...they ran away to stop the plane but they didn't.

(William Schneidermann interjects.)

They were still Germans. They are living, they were living, what are you talking? They were still living while when they took her away.

Q: Ok, so what did you do next? You're in the town...did the town look the same to you...

A: What I did next, I didn't have money because I paid out all my money to that farmer where they kept me, you know. And he also told me that some family...I never knew that this... they carried the same name. Second name. But I never knew that they really family, you know. But they had the same name. So when he told me that my brother's daughter is alive and she's this-and-this people, he also told me, "You have some cousins, they survived. They

¹¹ someone who arranges things, has connections (Yiddish)

here." And they were in the leather business. Just the leather business they were handling. So I figured, cousins. They say that I'm a cousin. So I'll try to go in there. So I went in there and we were cousins. But I was like a maid to them. I had to wash, I had to cook, I had to clean to have food. And that was the rest of my life, until...

Q: Until what?

A: I met...I met him.

Q: You met who? He's not in the...we're not seeing him.

A: He's not in the room. I met my husband.

Q: How did you meet?

A: I met my boyfriend. From their city, they used to come to Vengrov. You know, they did a little business. And he got acquainted with that family. There was a...practically the whole family survived. Two girls, and brothers? What was it? The ketzalach.¹² Three brothers and two girls. I know there were two girls. Three brothers and two girls were in the family. And they weren't, like he said to you before from the big workers they didn't know, they were rich people, you know. They used to have a maid. So I was the maid. And that came to the end, until I met him.

03:09:37

Q: Now, when...I asked your husband and I want to ask you. When you think back about those years, what images come to mind? What, what are your strongest memories?

A: Strongest memories is why didn't America help? Why didn't America help? That was Roosevelt. He could've helped. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's my, that's my mind and that's my thought. He could've helped.

Q: Were you thinking that at the time?

A: We were thinking after the war about it.

Q: What about during the war?

A: During the war, we didn't have...we didn't have what I, I think, we only thought that we should live through the war and maybe we'll find somebody. And see how the life and the land goes on. How is the...the world goes on. How's the world gonna be now? How's the

¹² kittens (Yiddish)

world gonna go on now? What's gonna be with the Jews?

Q: Were you more religious or less religious after the war?

A: Less religious.

Q: Because of the war?

A: I don't believe in nothing now. I like to, you know, preserve like the bentshen licht,¹³ you know. Like, you do certain...cooking certain things with meanings. You know what I mean? Meanings for the holidays, cooking. This I like to do because it reminds you, myself. And so I'm not religious to bentshen licht but it reminds the shabbes.¹⁴ My father.

Q: What do you think got you through all this?

A: Luck. Luck got me through. I was sitting in the woods near the...you could hear the, shouting, shooting just like you were with them, so they couldn't be too far from me. It wasn't really in the woods, it was right out of the wood on the lawn. So that was near. It was, it was like luck. I'm the only one and the one who...that...those people what kept my niece. My brother's children. My brother's child.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say?

03:12:45

A: I was very attach with them. What I want to say? It's hard to remember all kind of things but. Also, I was, I was... when my brother died, I was there a nice couple weeks until we got, you know, we could go out. So I remember he had another brother. That...in the restaurant...he had another brother. And he was very mad on him because he was, he got so rich in the restaurant. That one was a plain, you know, farmer. So they weren't have a good life between them together. And he was squealed, somebody squealed on the restaurant man that he's killing too much. And when they came, the Germans came to try to find out, he had a...what do you call it in English? Where they keeping the ice. An ice-box. It wasn't an ice-box. It was ice, regular ice. So they said that he hid the meat between the ice. So the Germans came in and they start to ruin this, everything. And they find by him a lot of things what he wasn't supposed to have so much.

Q: He was...

¹³ blessing over the candles (Hebrew/Yiddish)

¹⁴ Sabbath (Hebrew/Yiddish)

A: They took him to Treblinka, they went to Treblinka, both of them. For a couple weeks, then they let them go.

Q: Oh, that, the couple?

A: The couple...from the restaurant. It was a different... that was that Treblinka, the other one what I said.

Q: Which one...the people at the restaurant?

A: The people of the restaurant, yes.

Q: Because they were slaughtering too many animals...

A: Meanwhile, also, while I...when my brother died, I remained by him by myself. And when anything happened, that the Germans are coming in to him, they threw me in right away in the, in the, in the bunker, where he made. So they came in and they...being that they found a lot of things, they start to rip up boards from the floor. And they came almost to the last board where I was laying, from the door which opens up I should come out. Almost the last board. I don't know. That was also mazel, luck. So one of the Germans, I heard him saying that nobody's here, okay, let's go. And they went away. They could've killed me right there if they would find me.

03:15:40

Q: So you had a lot of close calls?

A: (Nods yes) Wherever I went, I was by myself. And it was very hard. Was very hard. It's harder for a woman than for a man. A man has more energy to run, to go, to...but for me it was very hard. I didn't want to live. When I find out that Fishel (ph) is dead, I didn't want to live. What for? They all dead, what am I gonna live? How I'm gonna live? With no money, no nothing. And no home. While I was laying on that lawn near the woods, I was praying to God they should kill me. Before I went to that first woman.

Q: But you could have gotten yourself killed.

A: It shows you that it was luck.

Q: And some wealth.

A: I believe in God. Even though I was very emotional why I became a maid to those people. They used me. They used me a lot.

Q: But it was a place to live and you met your husband.

A: Yeah, I met my husband there.

03:17:25

End of Tape #3

Conclusion of Interview