

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Braunia Sztul  
May 19, 1995  
RG-50.030\*0329**

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Braunia Sztul, conducted by Randy Goldman on May 19, 1995 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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**BRAUNIA SZTUL**  
**May 19, 1995**

Q: I want you to start by telling me your name at the time and now at the present, your date of birth and where you were born.

A: My name was Bylash Sharf. I was born in East \_\_\_\_\_, March 22, 1929.

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

A: We were three sisters and a mother and a grandma, and we lived a fairly normal life, a happy life. I was going to school. Then when the war broke out, I was going to school in 1939, and in 1940, they started to talk that I wouldn't be able to go to school. This for me was the biggest blow, because when September came and I looked out of the window and I saw my friends are going to school and I had to remain home, this was a big pain for me. I could not understand as a little girl why this is happening, and everybody was worrying and there was such a panic and everybody was uncomfortable. Everybody was fearing, and they were talking that we should run away to Russia and to leave everything behind and my mother said, how can I leave here. I have the children and the family and whatever I worked all my life for and to run away to Russia, and we didn't.

Q: Let me ask you a little bit more about \_\_\_\_\_. How large a town it was, what was the size of the Jewish community?

A: The town was a small town. It was a poor little town. There were a lot of -- there was a trade like markets, they were on certain days, and there were stores. People going to school, the daily life, but there were a lot of poor people. We considered ourselves better off. We had an uncle in the United States, and he was sending us money and mother took pretty good care of us that we were well dressed and she emphasized that we go to school and to be educated.

Q: Were there a lot of Jewish people in this town?

A: Mostly Jewish people, yes. I think the population was around 2,000 people. There were synagogues and Hebrew schools. Just about the normal Jewish life what it was in Poland.

Q: And your family was traditionally religious?

A: They were religious, but not too religious. We observed the holidays, and I was raised as a Jewish child, but I was going to -- I didn't go to a Jewish school, so I was mixing a lot with Polish children, and I spoke only Polish at that time, and I was a blonde little girl. I think that because of being blonde, and I realized that being blonde and speaking well Polish at that time, that I had hoped that this will be an issue that I will be able to survive among other children.

Q: Did you feel a difference when you were a little kid. Did you feel that the Polish children didn't like Jews?

A: Yes, I felt even before the war started, so when you were crossing from one end to the other town, or you went out of town, someplace with your parent, you were always called "dirty Jew," "dirty Jewish little girl, or you should go to Palestine, you shouldn't stay in Poland why are there so many Jews in Poland?" This I experienced since I was able to understand.

Q: Did you make sense of that?

A: This is how it was. This is how it was. It came to a point that when we started to grow up and live a little better, so we had to hide if the Christian children didn't have as much as we had, we had to hide certain things like baked goodies or something like this, not to show off.

Q: But you had Christian friends from school?

A: Yes, I did have Christian friends, right.

Q: Did your mother work?

A: We had a little grocery store, so my mother had this and we had about three acres of land, and somebody took care of the land. We also had a little windmill that it was making flour, you know, so she was constantly busy. I suppose when my father died and when my grandfather died, my grandma came to live with us and she was the primary person that took care of us, and mother was the breadwinner.

Q: And your sisters?

A: And my sisters, right.

Q: You have a twin sister?

A: I have a twin sister and one almost two years older than I.

Q: You were fairly young, but do you remember were there

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political organizations, Zionist groups or anything like that?

A: Yes, they were, but I didn't belong. I guess I was too young at the time to belong to those

organizations.

Q: Were you aware of what was going on in Germany after Hitler came to power or were you too young?

A: When the war broke out people started to talk what was going on in German that Hitler came to power and he wants to -- not to kill the Jews that the Jews had to flee Germany or that they were not able to be educated. We started to read about and hear those stories.

Q: What is your memory of the beginning of the war? Did the Germans come into your town?

A: The first, the beginning of the war we were bombed. There were three bombs that came down on that little town, and some of my relatives were killed. This was the first initial fear that I experienced.

Q: This was when?

A: 1939.

Q: September?

A: Maybe it was the end of September or October. I don't recall which month it was, but some of the relatives were killed.

Q: What did you do?

A: We didn't do nothing. We went out with our lives.

Q: Now, did things start changing all of a sudden. Were there decrees or restrictions on you?

A: I recall that in 1940 -- as I said before Jewish children were not allowed to go to school. But I think the teacher -- not the teacher, he was in charge of the school. He liked us so much and we were very good students and he kind of overlooked this particular year 1940 and allowed us to go. But by 1941, we couldn't go to school anymore.

Q: What else couldn't you do?

A: We were not allowed to go outside the town, and people were just running and bringing in food, you know. Initially people were gathering in the houses and just listening what to do and how to go on with life. I had the grandma and I think there was

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an uncle that had two sons, and the parents were taken away and the two sons came to live with us. I asked my mother and my two sisters, we asked should we run away to a village to hide someplace and the grandma was ready to go with us. She was about 74 years old but she had from her son the other two children and she said where will I leave them. So, she remained. She remained and at that moment when we were ready to leave the little town for a village they started shooting. So, we run away quickly. We didn't know where we were running, but we run into a neighboring village that my mother was dealing with some of the people and we went into hiding into barns. They took us into barns and we couldn't go out during the day, only at night. We were there for quite a while and we were going from one family to the other. They took us for a while and then they said we cannot hold you because at that time, it came out a decree that if the polish people will hold Jews, they will be killed themselves. Or they gave them a prize, like five pounds of sugar to give out the Jewish person or the Jewish family. So, they were not able, even my mother's best friends, they said you know I would like to help you maybe by yourself but not with a whole family and you have to leave my premises. So we were wandering from one family to another. This was going on maybe more than a year that we were wandering from one family to another and this is how we lived,

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and then one day my mother went into a family that she was very poor and approximately her children were our age. How my mother came to the thought to buy or to offer her money she should go to the church and to take out some kind of documents that we should leave the place where we were born or the surrounding villages that they knew us, and she said she dressed us in very long dresses and scarves over the heads and we started to look like 15, 16 year old girls and at that time the Germans were catching people to go to work to Germany. You know we were working around the Germans, the Gestapo and nobody caught us. Nobody caught us and we were like disappointed. So, at one point my mother said she took the train, she brought the kids for the train and we went to Warsaw.

Q: Okay. I want to stop you a moment. I have some questions. So, you were hiding out in these barns and fields and did you have to pay these people something to keep you?

A: No. Those were the people that they really tried to help. They knew my mother very well and they respected her because there were times when they needed help my mother was always there to help them because we were a little bit better financially off than them. So, but there came a time when the rulings of the Germans was so that they were afraid for their lives. They were also afraid for their lives and of course they were ones -- I think once I remember that they caught my mother some place and

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they took away a ring from her and they said if she doesn't give the ring they will bring

her to the Gestapo or something like that. This was the people that she was raised with them. Some were very vicious and some tried to be very helpful.

Q: What was their reaction towards the Germans and the Nazis?

A: They liked them. The Germans -- in the beginning they brought in a certain prosperity. You know they were wheeling and dealing and selling things, I don't recall what kind of merchandise but there was a certain prosperity that arrived with the Germans at that time. The Polish population, they I would say that they were silently working together with the Germans. They were indifferent to the Jews. They wanted to get rid of these Jews. Poland had three million Jews before the war. This was the largest Jewish population in Poland, and the Polish people were 75 percent illiterate at that time and the churches had the big influence morally, politically whatnot and they knew, they were told that the Jews killed Jesus and the Jews are non desired to be there. So, like the rest of the world, they tried to overlook that you are human beings and when you are a Jew you

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have no right to live. There were very few of them, that they were real Catholics, and they really suffered from this point, that the people are getting killed like that.

Q: Your mother bought these birth certificates or identity --?

A: Right.

Q: She got them from these other children?

A: From the family the peasants that were there. She went to the church and she took out a birth certificate for both of us and from her she took her birth certificate from her mother. My name at that time was Bronislava Bershenska.

Q: And your older sister was with you also?

A: The older sister got the birth certificate from another family and her certificate was altered slightly, but she was traveling with this birth certificate, right.

Q: And these birth certificates said that you were catholic?

A: That I am a Catholic, yes. That I am a catholic, so where were we.

Q: I have just one more question for you and you were going to tell me that you went to Warsaw. As a young girl was -- at this time was there a sense of adventure about this, or was it frightening, do you remember?

A: Ninety percent was fear, but there was maybe ten percent of adventure. I think in moment of fear you cannot appreciate life at all. You were trying to run from one place to another, just to survive, just to sleep over the night, just for another day and to hope that someday this will end.

Q: Now, your mother's plan was to then go to Warsaw?

A: It wasn't her plan to go to Warsaw. She wanted to run away from the territories that we were known, or maybe we could be recognized. So, we went and we bought tickets, she bought tickets for all of us and we went on a train and this train was going to Warsaw. There was a lot of people that they were smuggling like food and other articles from villages, the food probably mostly, and she started to talk to somebody on the train and she gave an address to a German Volksdeutsche, that they needed help for their homes. The Volksdeutsche, either she was a Volksdeutsche or he, so they had certain privileges by the German government they received all kinds of goodies. I don't know if they received any money, but they were especially elite like, and they started to hire help. So, my mother was hired in Warsaw. I don't know where we slept. We probably got up and got off the train at night or in the morning and she got this particular address from the other women. She was a Volksdeutsche, and he had a wife and four children and she was pregnant with the fifth and she needed help. So, he hired my mother right away with my twin sister and this lady directed me to my family also a Volksdeutsch family that at the time I think I was approaching 14 already. This was in 1943. She hired me to be with her children I should go to park and to play with children or go with children and do for the children things. So, my main job was to help a little in the kitchen. I did some marketing and basically to play with the children.

Q: Where did they think you came from?

A: We told them that we run away from the territory of Lublin, that the Germans chased us out and they took away our possessions and they called us Fluechtlinge (refugees), we (were) chased out

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from our homes. And as I said, I emphasized that to speak very well Polish and to be from a small town, we thought we maybe assimilated as other Jews. In other words, our Polish language was so good that we could pass by that nobody should have a hint that we were Jewish.

Q: So, this was in 1943 when you got to Warsaw?

A: We arrived I believe in late 1942 in Warsaw. It was around November, in the fall, and the Ghetto started to burn the next year, in 1943. So, I was at that time in Warsaw. I was going for walks with the children and I have seen Jews going from place to place like



hundred Jews together. They were -- their clothes were torn. They had the yellow swastikas (means stars of David) on them and they were going from one place to another. I don't know where they were going, but I stopped and I looked at them and it inserted in me such a pain. In a way I was happy that I wasn't one of them. I could have been there among them, but the pain was unbearable. I turned away and I cried that nobody should see me that I was in such pain. When I was in this family, I think this was my mother's teaching that we should all go to church. So, I asked the family where is the nearest church, and I took the children every Sunday, and I dressed them and I went to church every Sunday with them. Around -- and this

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is how we lived. My sister had an incident the older one she was walking in the street and a woman from our place recognized her and she started to call her. So, she run away and we were told that. So, there was a period of time when we were afraid to walk the streets, you know, how big is whole Poland. There may be some people coming shopping and being on the street, somebody can recognize. So every moment, every step that you did, you had a certain fear in yourself. There was a fear of being recognized. At one point, my family, the husband of the wife brought up a girl and she had a document, she had dark hair, she looked like a typical Jewish girl, and he started to interrogate her and she had the paper and the seal was like of a penny, or a dime, and he started to question her and he took her away to the Gestapo, and he interrogated her in front of me. You can imagine how I felt at that time when he interrogated the girl and he did bring her to the Gestapo. But life was going on until about July when all of a sudden two Gestapos showed up in the

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apartment and they said to my lady, to the wife of this man, you have here "ein Juedisches Kind", you have a Jewess here. She looked at him, I have a Jewish girl here? This is not possible. And she opened the bedroom and she showed him Hitler. She said, Hitler is my god. How would I be able to hold a Jewish girl in my household. She denied it, and I will never forget this. I was peeling potatoes at that time, and I became almost stiff, and he was talking to her that this young girl has a mother with another girl, and so she started to swear to them that it's not possible that she's Jewish. Either her mother or the other sister is Jewish. She will swear by that. So, he said tell her and he spoke to me German but I stood with the back, not to understand from Jewish to German is very easily to be understood and I pretended I don't understand. So, she told me in Polish that I should get dressed and I should go to my mother. I had no other choice. It was July. It was hot, whatever I took and the two Gendarmes took me down to the street and I was going over to my mother and the fear in my mind what my mother will see if she will see me with the two Gendarmes going there. But while

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I was walking with them one to the other said, "Ich glaube nicht dass das ist ein Juedisches Kind", in German he said I don't believe that this is a Jewish child and this give me such a strength that I recovered myself of the initial fear and when I walked into my mother, my mother saw me, I saw my mother is pale and is dropping like she's falling and my sister and they start to talk to this man at the time, this wife of his just gave birth to the fifth child, and he happens to be home, the husband and he was a high official in Warsaw. He was an SS man, you know, he was working in Allee Sucha (?). Allee Sucha was like they would arrest in a criminal court. Once you go in there, forget about it, nobody comes out. So, his wife started to cry. She said how can I be left alone. She gave birth and on top of it she was very ill I think she had a lung infection, pneumonia, and she was about to die. I think she eventually did. And he said to the Germans, to the two SS people, you know, I'll go with them. I can swear by God that they are not Jewish people, but I'll go with them. And he emphasized also that they are going to the church with my children and he would never allow himself to lose his high position that the was a high ranking man and to hold Jewish people in his place. He dressed himself and he went with us to Allee Shukha. When I arrived there I did not know my older sister was already there. What happened with my older sister, she said that she's from a village some place, but she had beautiful underwear and she wore glasses and this woman that she worked for, she said, you know, you don't look like a peasant. You look like you come from a learned family and you wear glasses. Tell me, I think you are Jewish. So, my sister didn't say yes or no, but she started to cry. As soon as she started to

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cry, they arrested her. They also took two Germans and they also brought her to Allee Shukha. When we came there I saw her in a different room with two Germans and I and my mother they took us by train, a trailer car. I looked at my mother, and I knew that within a couple of hours we will be dead, that we are already in the hands of the SS. When we arrived there, they started to ask us about religion, if I know the religion the prayers, so I knew the prayers by heart. We were prepared for that, you know.

Q: Catholic prayers?

A: Yes, catholic prayers. So, one came out to me and he said in German, tell me you are really a Jewish girl. You pretend to be a catholic. I think he started to speak to me in Polish because when they spoke to me German, to us in German in general, we didn't answer. We were standing like dummies. So, when the same SS man started to speak Polish I told him, you know, if you will persecute us, do away with us, you will have on your conscience, innocent children. That's what I answered him. I was only 14 years old. I stepped forward and I started to speak to them. That man that my mother was working for, he also started to tell that this is not possible. He was arguing with them and give them all the details about us. So, they asked my mother, they said they will make a deal with my mother. That they will allow us to leave this place for three weeks and bring my

mother's marriage certificate, the death certificate of the

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father, the other documents which I needed, you know, and at that time in Poland I think I already had a Kennkarte and an Arbeitskarte, you know, so they released us, and I came back to the same family. She was glad to see me back, so did the husband of the sick woman glad to see mother back, also. And my older sister had no place to go because this woman that called the SS didn't want her anymore. So, she was a couple days with me. I went down and bought a paper. Imagine that at 14 years old, and looking for a job outside Warsaw. So, there was a farmer that wanted help, so we put my sister on the train and with the address of that farmer, and my younger sister went with her there and she remained over there. And the younger sister came back and within those three weeks that we were supposed to deliver all the papers and identify ourselves, we started to plan to run away. There was no other choice, just to leave the place. As ill as she was, my mother's lady, she was a very fine woman, but I guess survival is over taken everything and you run like animals at that time, and we started to make plans that one day

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we will meet at the main station and take a train and again to go into a place or maybe we will ask somebody where we will be able to work, or maybe we'll go to the Russian border and maybe we will be across the border to go to Russian that we shouldn't be under the German occupation.

Q: Before you go any further, I want to ask you a couple more questions about Warsaw.

A: Yes?

Q: You said that you walked this park and you saw the Ghetto and people coming from the Ghetto, did you have any contact with those people?

A: No.

Q: When the Warsaw Ghetto uprising took place in April of '43, what did you see, what were people talking about on the outside?

A: The Jews are burning. The Jews are burning. The feathers were flying all over Warsaw, -- feathers, smoke, a smell. We knew that the Jews are burning in the Ghetto. But I couldn't do nothing. I had no contact, and I would be afraid frankly to go over and to look. I knew I would lose my life. We were hiding away, but at the same time, this time I think already we knew and the papers were writing that Stalingrad has fallen. Stalingrad has fallen and the Germans are receding back. That they didn't succeed to take Moscow. The Germans - - when I was still in Warsaw, the Germans had black flags. When they lost Stalingrad

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they put out that this was the saddest day for them. The military people were writing articles that this is the worst day for them, that they lost Stalingrad. Privately everybody knew that once they lost Stalingrad and they started around back, that they would lose the war. And everybody hoped that there would come a day that we will be liberated. And you only lived with one thought in mind, to live one day longer than Hitler, and then to die.

Q: So you had a lot of access to what the German people, or the Polish people were thinking on the other side of the wall?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Anything else you can remember in terms of their attitude? They didn't care whether the Ghetto is burning or did they talk about the camps or anything?

A: You see, I was with that Volksdeutsche family. They were against Polish people and they were against Jews. I was too young I guess to go into politics with adults and I tried to avoid even to have friends. I started to develop a young little lady and boys started to try to talk to me. I was bowing my head and I walked away. I was afraid to talk to them. So, I was too afraid to talk to anybody except what I was reading in the papers. I was very much interested in what is going on in the world, and I bought the Polish papers which I was able to read and whatever I could make out as a 14 years old and to understand what was going on.

Q: So, you had information on the war and what was going on?

A: Yes, cover to end, prior that I left Warsaw, the Russians were bombarding already Warsaw. So, even that I knew that the bomb may hit, the cellar that I was sitting, I was going down with the children to those bunkers, you know, against the bombs, I was happy that the Russians are flying in the air over Warsaw and they are trying to fight the Germans.

Q: Your family had a private bunker?

A: In each house at that time had a bunker. They had bunkers,

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yes. So, they were like sirens, everybody was running to the bunker. In my heart, I was very happy that even if I get killed that I knew it was a Russian bomb, not a German bomb. I would think it was rather that.

Q: How much contact did you have with your mother and your sisters while you were in Warsaw?

A: Maybe twice a week, we met in the parks and we talked. We talked only on the outside about private matters about running away or something like that. Mother always said not to give way that we should hold up and maybe in the near future the war will end and we will survive the war and this was our daily hope.

Q: It must have been comforting that your mother was nearby?

A: Of course, by myself it would be much harder.

Q: You don't think your family ever suspected?

A: The family of me, that I am a Jewish child? I think at one time she said that I have a Jewish head on my shoulders. Yes. So, let me continue with what happened. I saw that Warsaw was burning and we had to run away. We went on the main station and we bought tickets and we were going further. We were traveling about eight hours by train. The older sister was already sent away to a farm near Warsaw, so we knew where she is but where we were going to be she wouldn't know, but we said that we will get in touch with her. We were traveling about eight hours. We were already tired and exhausted and on the train they said it's not possible to in Russian the border, it's not feasible because if they catch you on the border right away they will destroy us. So, we came off the train in a small village and we went to a family and asked for food. They gave us food and they asked who we are. At that time I think I told you I had an Arbeitskarte, I was no more a Jewish girl and my mother also had this document and I felt a little more secure with this document. She wouldn't let us to sleep in that house. We had to go to a superior of this little village to allow us to sleep there, and we went there in person and we presented our documentation what we had and he gave us permission to remain in the village. So, the first thing they said, could you work for me. I said yes, I can remain. I said what will be with my mother with my sister. She said, stay a week with us and we will find her something. So, I think I am talking about myself a lot, but this is true. I was going for the water, in the villages they didn't have yet water at that time in the houses so they had the wells, and somebody was passing by and I walked over and I said do you know somebody need help. My mother is looking for work. She said yes, there is a man that took over like a 40 or 50 acres of land and he needs some help in the kitchen. Do you think your mother would be willing to go there to take this job. I said yes, just give me the address. So, she gave me the address and the next day my mother and my sister went the eight kilometer, which was about four miles. He was a single man. He had a lot of step. It was I don't know how you should call it. He was in charge of a large

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piece of land, a big landowner. When my mother went there, he hired her right away, so she packed the little stuff that she had and she went away and I was very happy. I remained with this family for about another two, three weeks and they came an order from the Germans that from each family somebody has to go to work in the fields or somebody to collect potatoes or other -- you know you take down from the fields. I don't know how to express myself. And I went to work and they put a sack of potatoes on my back and I fell right away, and I saw that I couldn't work. I came home crying. I said I cannot go to work anymore. So, they gave me some other work, you know, in the garden a little fields, and I went with a cow here and there, and I said I cannot stay here. I have to go closer to where my mother is. So, I went around four kilometers and I was looking around, and I came in. It was a little town and it's called Sokolov ?Polaski. It wasn't far away from this place, and I went to a little store and I said do you have some work for me? She said what can you do? I said I can help you with whatever you like. I will do anything you will ask me to. So, she was having like a little bar, you know, and she was using me to bring in food or a

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little whiskey or something to carry into that little store and to help to serve the tables. So, I was there, and the store was like about two miles away from her home. She took me home and she didn't pay me, but I had food and I had a bed. She was also a woman by herself and she had an adopted daughter. She was also slaughtering pigs and making delis and she was selling that. She took me to the market to buy pigs and I fell right into this family and I was doing everything together. We went together to buy those pigs for the market and the illegal whiskey she was buying and selling and she was making a lot of money. The whole police station was there and I felt I am very secure there. She also had some a cow and some other things that had to be looked after and I did all of that. At one point, she said to me, you know you really have a Jewish head on her shoulder. When she told me that, I almost died inside myself. This was around December, the holidays came over and I had to look that everything I should do correctly when the holiday are there, and behave like a real Christian.

Q: A Jewish head, what did she mean?

A: I was too smart. I was so smart that I am thinking like a

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real Jew. So, she said this Easter you will go with me to the church and you will do the confession in front of a priest. When she told me that I almost died inside. I said how will I be able to do that? I went to the church. I was hiding someplace in the corner. I said the prayer, whatever I said, nobody was listening to me if I said correctly or not, and here I will have to stand in front of a priest and to say all those prayers, and she was standing right behind my back. I kneeled down -- again, I brought myself the catechism, this is a

religious book, and there was no electricity and I bought candles, and where I took the money from the candles I don't recall, and at night I was learning the catechism from the beginning to the end. And I must say I had a terrific head. I had a good memory. I don't know if this was out of necessity or I was young or I was brilliant, and I knew all those prayers. So, the holidays came closer and I prepared myself like every night and when she went to sleep I put on the candle and I was studying and I went in front of the priest and I kneeled down and I said you have to unburden yourself with all the sins that you committed during the year, and I was I think past 14 at that time, and I really was an innocent child, what could I have sinned. You know what I told the priest? That I was saying bad things about my mother which wasn't true, but I had nothing else to say. He looked at me and he saw such a young face and he gave me a prayer 30 times to say I should cleanse myself with those prayers and I went to the corner of the church and I said all the prayers, and I came out of the church and I was very, very relieved. Believe me, since then she never said that I had a Jewish head on my shoulders. This was around Easter time. I think around end of June I started to see Russian soldiers coming in, and they said that the Germans are running away already from the territories that I was there, but I couldn't believe it. They were dirty, they were torn. The uniforms that they wore they looked like they run away from concentration camps themselves. It didn't look to me like military people. I was sitting quiet but I was running over to my mother and I said you know I think the Germans are going. We have already the Russians. She said be quiet and sit still and don't talk to nobody. We have to see and wait what will go on. Then in August I don't know if I heard from people or papers, I saw that Lublin is already free. Lublin is freed by the Russian people. I went again to tell my mother this news, and she started -- I started to feel like you know she was stepping on me and I was doing a lot of chores and no matter what I did when she was killing a pig she needed maybe 50 pails of water and I had to carry it by myself and I just felt the evenings that I couldn't do this any more. She started to get very rude and I had the sense of feeling that I was already liberated in a way. The Russians are here already why should I perform such work and she doesn't deserve it. So, I went to my mother and I told her that I'm going to leave this lady because she became unbearable to me. She said sit another couple of months and we'll see what will

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develop. But I packed myself up. I can only tell you that I had only one pair of shoes and one little underwear, my whole thing was a little package, and I took this package one day and I said to mother I arrived at mother's place and said you can kill me here. I am not going back to that woman. She's a real witch, and I don't want to suffer any more. My clothes started to fall apart. You know as you grow you start to expand so I started to get holes in my clothes and she wouldn't buy me nothing. There was a certain resentment and anger, so I was working only for the food. But really the liberation and knowing that the Germans are going, I wanted to see what will be next. And when I said to my mother that even if she'll kill me, I'm not going back to the woman, she had no choice. So, she said okay you will sleep here. The next day I walked out into the garden and there were a lot

of -- at this Volksdeutsch, the man that my mother worked for, he run away already. There was no supervision over nobody, over the food that they have grown it was just like everybody lived by themselves. I met a man, listen to that, and he was an adult, I was at the time already close to 15, and he took me aside in the garden and he said I suspect that you are a Jewish girl and your mother too, with the other sister. I can tell you that in Lublin there is already the Jewish committee from America that they came and they established, and you are too young to live here in the villages and you will ruin yourselves. Go to Lublin and there will be new hope for you. I was afraid to tell my mother. I couldn't believe my ears what he told me. I didn't know if he wants to convince me that you know that I'm Jewish that I should confess or he really wants to help me. So, I didn't tell my mother that this guy spoke to me. But I told my mother that I heard that the Lublin there are Jews already, that they are congregating the old survivors are there, that they are running to Lublin. So, she said let's sit another couple of

01:56:

months. Don't talk to nobody that you are Jewish and we'll see what will happen. She was pulling time. She wanted to reassure herself that we shouldn't be too hasty to make a step forward that we shouldn't get lost. You know what I did. Once a Russian soldier spoke to me and I asked him if he can bring me to Lublin and he said he's going in that direction> I was fearless, and I said I'll go and I'll take a look by myself. I went on a big truck. He didn't touch me, you know I didn't think of it that he will abuse me or rape me or something like that. Somehow I was so innocent and I believed in the goodness of the people that they liberated me that he cannot do nothing wrong to me. I came to Lublin and I go on the street and I looked at someone that look to me like a Jewish person and I asked him in Polish do you know where the Jewish Gemeinde is here? So, he asked you are you Amkho. Amkho was Jewish code word for being Jewish. I couldn't answer him in the Jewish language because my tongue just couldn't speak any more Jewish. I told him in Polish that yes I am a Jewish girl. That I am one of the survivors and I am looking for the Gemeinde. When I came there, they met me there and they tried to talk to me and I told them that I have a mother left near Sokolove? Polaski, and he said that I should bring her here with my sister and they will be maybe able to give us some lodging and we will be able to start to live as Jews again.

End of Tape #1



Tape #2

Q: So, you arrived in Lublin and who are these people that you met?

A: You know when we arrived in Lublin, they had a place they called Dom Peretz. A Peretz was a famous scholar [writer] or I think that was probably related with the history of Palestine before the war, so there was such a home like an organization where they met. It was called Dom Peretz, or the House of Peretz. People went there daily to meet other people and to hear what is going on, just to communicate and how to live and how to organize our lives. So, my mother met there people that she knew from before the war that they had already an apartment there and they recommended a small apartment on Lubartowska 18 in Lublin.

02:03:

Q: I think we're skipping something. If I remember when we stopped before you were there by yourself. Your mother wasn't there yet.

A: Yes.

Q: And also, these people you met with, were they part of some international committee, the people in charge?

A: I don't know if they were international committee, probably some. The leaders were, but they started probably to employ people that survived or were capable or giving or lending help. They were partisans that had survived and I think that the Russians, the military was also involved to help the Jewish people. I told you that I arrived in Poland by myself, right. I went back, and it took me maybe four weeks to convince my mother she should come with me to Lublin. Finally she did. So, she packed, not with everything, but she took a little belongings and you know what happened? We went on the train to Lublin. I went down to ask really the directions is this train is going to Lublin, the train started to go and my mother went there and I remained on the station by myself. So, I took the next train and then I went to that Gemeinde, and I met my mother over there, and I think it was with my twin sister.

Q: And your other sister?

A: I skipped this part. You see when we were liberated already and I ran away from that lady and I didn't want to work with her, so and we were talking about Lublin so my mother took my twin sister and she bought her a ticket to go to the older sister where she was in Warsaw, and this is for the first time that she knew that we were alive and that she is alive and she was there and we brought her to us where we were together where my mother was when everybody was running away. I'm telling you there was food, plenty of everything because there was nobody to take charge so my mother was the whole

housekeeper there. So, my sister came there too, and then all of us we proceeded to Lublin.

02:06:

Q: When you got Lublin, you found an apartment?

A: Somebody recommended my mother found friends there from the prewar from a nearby town that they knew her that they already had an apartment and they recommended. It was a two or three room apartment, but you know they, the committee, put in maybe ten people into it. There were four girls in one room and the other ones were in the other place, but it was fine as long as there was a floor to put our heads, we were happy.

Q: Who were alot of these other Jewish people who were in this area what were they like? Where had they been?

A: There were a lot from the woods. They came out from the woods, the partisans, a lot of them they came out and also from hiding. My step father, that my mother married in 1945 he was in Sobibor, in the uprising of the Sobibor [camp]. You probably heard about it. He was one of the members that they tried to get rid of the Germans at that time and run away, but unfortunately about 600 people remained the people because the top people that were the guards, the top of the building, they couldn't reach them and they had the ammunition they were shooting from there all around. So, they almost killed all the 600 Jews. I think after the war from the 600 that were supposed to be liberated maybe 30 survived.

Q: Were there any people there from Maidanek?

A: At that time, maybe not yet, not yet. You know when I came to Lublin basically the people were there that survived the Polish territory. The partisans were hidden by the peasants or wherever. This was in 1944, but in 1945 when the concentration camps were liberated, I started to see those people from the concentration camps, those skeletons I started to see, and I just couldn't believe it that something like this exists because I was never exposed to something like that.

Q: Hadn't you had any idea what was going on in other parts when you were in hiding? Did you know anything about what was happening to the Jews?

A: No. No, I didn't know about the concentration camps at all. I knew they were being killed, but how and what and I couldn't perceive in my head you know to understand that something like this existed. In fact, in 1983 I was in Warsaw and this was for the opening of the synagogue in Warsaw. There was a lot of Jews coming from all over the world and I went just to be there as a survivor -- I lost my thought -- and I went for the first time they took us to Oswiecim, and they took us to Treblinka, and all those things. This is the

first time that I had ever seen something like that. I have seen those glasses, the luggage and the shoes and all those clothes over there and the hair what I have seen. I almost fainted. I have never seen while I was living in Poland in the Polish territory I was fortunate enough not to be exposed to those things.

Q: So, I'll let you continue. We're in Lublin, you found a place with some other people. What was that like?

A: Well, we started to live rather well and together with a family. We were able I don't know how we got our food. I think we got the help from that Jewish Gemeinde, and also my mother remarried in 1945 a man that she knew from before the war. He was a landowner and he sold some of his land and he started wheeling and dealing and he already was making business and there wasn't any lack of food or anything in the house in 1944. Around February 1945 I started to inquire about school. I went to the sixth grade in February and by June I had a certificate that I finished six classes of elementary school. With that in the fall I started to go to a higher education, a gymnasium. My mother wanted that we should go to a gymnasium. So, I needed seven classes of public school to enter the second -- the second class of gymnasium and I didn't have this so I went to the Jewish Gemeinde and they gave me a paper that I finished seven classes. It wasn't real, but somehow I wanted just to be there for a higher education. But you know I was sitting and when they started to teach algebra and history and geography which was forbidden even in that time at Poland when I was in the fourth grade, I didn't have the slightest idea of what a map was looking and I didn't know what algebra meant. I thought I was such a brilliant girl and all of a sudden I am standing in front of a professor and he's talking to me and explaining and I just couldn't follow. So, I went home crying and I said I am not going to school. I am not prepared. I'm not going to be a dummy there. She was a clever woman and she said we'll give you some help and she brought in help, tutors and I needed help in mathematics, this was a high education in mathematics already. Of course in English, my English was not on level and other areas. So, for three months the tutors came in and helped me to the level that I was supposed to be, and after three months I had the exam in the school and I achieved the highest report card.

Q: This was Jewish school?

A: No, this was a general gymnasium. But you know what happened later? The first month they selected me I should be the president of the class. The second month somehow they got to know that I was a Jewish girl, they took me away my position. They didn't like that and on top of it all we used to wear a uniform, black uniforms and white collars and on the back they wrote you are a dirty Jewish girl. This was after the liberation in 1945 or maybe beginning of 1946. In 1946 I don't know if you

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remember a lot of Jews were returning from Russia that run away from Poland to Russia

and then they came back home and those were the ones that were traveling by trains they were pulled down. There were two parties in Poland at that time. It was Army of Krajowa (AK) and it was the communist the Army of KKR was against the communist and the Jews went with KKR. The working together against the German government and because of that the AK which was the army which was against the Jews, and they were pulling down, in 1946 they were pulling down the Jews from the trains and killing them. So, they started to get against such anti semitism so some tried to run away, and at that time the displaced camps opened in Germany already and everybody was telling us that if you go to Germany to displaced camps, you'll be able to immigrate to the United States. This was everybody's dream, to run away to a free country not to be persecuted any more. So, one day I came back from school. This was again around Easter holidays and we had the Shochet, do you know Shochet, kill chickens for the holidays for the Jews to have kosher meat. I come from school as a liberated, feeling liberated after such a war, you know surviving Hitler and all of a sudden in the hallways they are talking about the Jews killed a Polish child and there were about 200 people standing in that hall entering that house where I was living. When I heard that I said it's time to leave Poland. No more Poland. I have to get away from there. Of course I knew already my husband, my future husband. I was going out with that young man. I think my older sister got engaged also to a man that he came from Russia with the Sikorski Army. Maybe you know about this that there was

02:18:

Sikorski Army. He came back from Russia and he was in uniform as a military man and she got engaged to him and she left in February in 1946 to Germany to West Berlin, and I wanted also to go. I didn't want to stay in Poland especially after this incident when I came from school and they said that the Jews killed a Polish child for Matza. So, I made my business and I made up at that time to leave. Either my mother will allow me or not allow me to go, so I told my mother and she said of course I cannot go. I was only 17. Yes I was 17 and she said you will go with that young man? I said yes I will go with that man. She said you are not married, you cannot go. So, I said so I'll marry him and then I'll go. So, she called up a couple of people witnesses and they put some liquor on the table and some cookies and candies and this was the whole wedding and the same night I went away to Germany. Not to Germany, I went to Breslau and I was there a couple of months with my husband. I married him already, and I became pregnant and the Jewish organization, the underground organization from Israel started to work to bring out as many Jews from Poland as they could. I think they approached us and we said yes and then one day they picked us up in the truck and we were crossing the Czechoslovakian border to Austria and as I said I was pregnant already. I was there six weeks and such a it was like a military barracks. This was Eichstadt near

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Munich, and I was there until my son was born. This was from November in 1946 until May in 1947, so I was in that Eichstadt camp, and my sister went from Berlin she went

into Salsheim. They brought her into Salsheim near Frankfurt am Main. There was also a DP camp.

Q: Let me just ask you about the first camp. What were the living conditions like?

A: It was terrible. Maybe ten women had to cook on the one little stove. There was no running water. When I gave birth, I went to a military hospital and of course they said a child is having a child and they gave me a military blanket and what kind of a dish something you know that it looked like I should be able to bathe the child, and I went back to this barrack. The barrack was divided with pieces of wood. When this wood dried out everybody was looking into the other, like you know to the bedrooms. It was terrible, the living conditions were terrible. They were like animals. Those people that came out from the concentration camps they behaved like animals. They grabbed away everything that you had. They had no manners. They were so...you know I lived through certain fear but I had a mother to guide me and I didn't see those barbaric things. They came out and they were literally stepping over dead bodies, so they didn't care if I was standing in the line for my milk or something or the portions to get my food so they pushed me and I was nine months pregnant or something like that. It was really unbearable. I was rather depressed because I started to look back when I was with my mother and I was really -- I was with other people that they knew me and they treated me very well as a human being. Here in the displaced camp I started to feel very

02:23:

very low, very depressed. Also, I missed home, you know. I left my twin sister and being in a strange place in a strange country and I didn't know what my future was holding for me and having a small child. There was no diapers, there was no food for the baby, very little. I had to stand in line for every piece of food that I was getting. So, it was very bad.

Q: This camp was run by the U.S. military?

A: I think so. It was the -- the barracks were U.S. military. I think it was also run by the UNRRA. The UNRRA was running it.

Q: Did you befriend any of these people from the camps?

A: Yes, I did. Some of them I befriended but my aim was to go to my sister where she was in Saltzheim and she gave birth also to a child at that time and we wanted to be together so they saw to it that I should have a room. It was a little house like in each house was a family so I came there. We were there in Salzheim about seven months and they discontinued this displaced -- the DP camp.

Q: What was it like up there?

A: We lived rather well. We didn't have good facilities, like one room was for every family. It was a little house we took away from the Germans -- I don't know if they took away or the Germans left, what facilities we had one room per family. There was also no water, no running water. I think there was electricity, but in general it was not bad. We didn't have to pay rent and we had portions of food. We got some clothes, so as young people I think we accepted this is not bad at all, but let's wait until we get to the United States.

Q: Was your husband working there or anything?

A: No.

Q: Were there activities? Were there cultural things? Did they start training?

A: They started to train some of the young people, you know like to teach them how to sew and other trades. I think they brought in the old to teach some trade to the people, but I didn't because I had a small child. My husband I think he was doing some dealing and wheeling, like buying a few pounds of coffee and selling and exchanging for some other food. This was his activities.

Q: What about the Jewish religion? Did you observe any of the holidays or the Sabbath or anything like that?

A: No.

Q: None of that?

A: No. This was far away. I don't recall even in Frankfurt when we arrived already everybody was a little bit on their feet and they started to live a more normal life that we started to go to synagogues. I don't recall it no. I was living among the Germans. I started to speak fluently German and by the end, the last eight months I even hired help for my child because I really didn't know if I was raising him properly or not. I did what nature told me to do, and when my husband started to deal a

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little more and he was selling those foods and we had a little more money, I hired -- she was a nurse. Actually she was a nurse. And at that time, I started to breath a little easier.

Q: Your mother was still where?

A: My mother came already. She left in 1948 and she came to the United States and she was held over in Ellis Island. Supposedly she didn't know that those papers were illegal and they wanted them to return to go back to Poland or there was at that time there was a quota to go to Cuba. My mother had a brother here and her whole hope was to come here

to see her brother but prior to her arrival he died. So, she was so disappointed that she wanted to go back to Poland, and the brother's children they tried to help her. They hired an attorney and she was sitting on Ellis Island for six weeks and she made a decision not to stay in the United States and not to go back to Poland but to go to Cuba. Actually, the attorneys I think advised her to go to Cuba, that she will stay for a short time. I think it was the attorney's decision that they should have them in Cuba and from Cuba they will be able to come to the United States in a very short time, but it took them two years. When they arrived in Cuba the living condition was also very, very poor where in Poland right after the war when my mother remarried that Mr. Mermelstein(?), he came from a very wealthy family and he sold off some land so he considered himself a wealthy guy, and they lived rather well. In Cuba they weren't allowed to work. Immigrants weren't allowed to work and my mother was so proud that there were kitchens that you could eat free food, so she went a couple times and when she got to know that this was charity she was starving to death and she wouldn't go. She was a very proud woman.

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Q: What was your situation? How long did you stay in the Frankfurt area and how difficult was it for you to come over here?

A: Well, we stayed there until we had the notices to come to the consulate and prepare ourselves for the immigration to the United States. I immigrated to the United States. Our arrival was May 9 in 1950.

Q: I want to back up a little bit because you spent several years pretending you weren't Jewish.

A: Right.

Q: And you had to learn the catholic prayers but I'm sure there were other things that you had to do to make sure you weren't caught.

A: That I wasn't caught, I don't recall what other things I could do except to go to the church and to act as a Christian, and you almost become a Christian. You become -- you don't feel Jewish after a while, except mentally that I felt that I am Jewish, that I was born Jewish. But in my speech the knowledge of the Polish language was typical of a Polish little girl. There were moments I'm sure that I forgot that I am a Jewish girl.

Q: Were there things that you had to do so you wouldn't give yourself a way. Were there ways you need to act or do things a certain way?

A: I was afraid to get close to a friend. I remember a young boy started to smile at me for instance, and he wanted just to talk to me and I run away from him. I was running away from everybody that wanted to be close to me except my mother and my sisters. I was

afraid to be close. I shouldn't talk to them. I shouldn't give away myself. So, I was always on the guard.

Q: Were there any customs that were different for catholics than Jews that you had to pay attention to, any lifestyle things?

A: Life styles, I couldn't eat for instance a meal like pig meat, how you call it, pork, and the first time they gave me pork

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with potatoes I couldn't tell them that I don't eat them, and I was hungry. But when I ate it, I threw it up and I pretended to be ill at the time. I didn't tell them that I threw it up because it was pork. So, those were the things that in the beginning that it wasn't acceptable for me, but I had to hide my feelings, how I feel and not to give myself away.

Q: Was it important that you worked, you were just a kid basically?

A: I was a kid. It was important, of course it helped me mentally to be with somebody, but there was a rule in Poland at that time that the Jewish family cannot live together. This was a rule that came out I believe in late 1941 that the Jewish family cannot -- they started to disperse and there was a time that you could stay with other Polish people but not as a family together. So, to work for somebody was a basic survival for food and lodging. This is the only way that I could survive. I couldn't stay with my mother. I couldn't have my own room and I wasn't able to take care of myself. I had to be with another family to -- this was only through my work and ability whatever I could do to help those families this capacity of course I wasn't paid much, almost nothing. When they gave me a piece of clothes, I was very grateful.

Q: But you couldn't have stayed together as a Polish family?

A: No, no this was too dangerous. And where would my mother get the income? We lost our house, the piece of land -- we had about three acres of land. We had like a grocery store and we had milk, you know we lost all of that. This was taken away from us. So, what were the other resources to survive, then to work or stay with other families.

Q: Did you ever have a hiding place of something that in case you were caught you would go to?

A: Prior that I arrived in Warsaw and we went on that journey to be caught as a Polish woman and to go into the Warsaw to travel to Warsaw we were hidden in barns, in barns the people

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knew that we were there. They brought us the food at night. You couldn't go to the toilet the whole day. You had to wait until it got dark. So, this was the only times that we were hidden. Each time a couple of weeks with another family and this was going on for like a year. This was the most painful experience because the whole day you had to be hiding. Only at night could you be free to go to the bathroom or something, whatever was necessary things to do.

Q: But in Warsaw, you didn't have an alternative plan or a hiding place or something?

A: No.

Q: Did you know or were you aware of other Jewish people who were hiding out in the Polish side of Russia?

A: No, and frankly I didn't want to know. I was afraid. I was afraid. You know everybody became for themselves. I was concerned about my mother and my sisters but I was afraid to get in touch if somebody even looked like Jewish. Not because I was hating the Jews, this was because of fear and -- of deep fear and suffering and not to be exposed to unpleasant things. In other words, if somebody was to identify me with a friend that is Jewish, they would automatically say why am I siding with the Jewish girl. So, if I am siding with a Jewish girl, I am Jewish also and my life was threatened. I was very much aware that I shouldn't get close to nobody.

Q: And you learned about the catholic religion largely on your own?

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A: On my own, and just by looking the way others did. How the children behaved, how the children of the people that I worked behaved, and I followed them or maybe I should use the word emulated them with great intensity.

Q: Did you resent being Jewish?

A: If I resented being Jewish, I don't know if I had the ability at that time to understand why I was born Jewish, but there were moments when I saw a cat or a dog and they were walking around freely, I envied them. I really envied them. I said why couldn't I be a cat. Why couldn't I be a dog. I should be able to move, but if I was angry with myself that I was born Jewish, I don't think that I understood at that time that this was part of history that I was born into. I don't think that I could think rationally like that like I look back now at this. That this was the period of history that it's unfortunate for me that I had to be born at this time.

Q: But you would have felt safer if you were born catholic?

A: Of course.

Q: So, you must have wished that you were truly catholic girl?

A: Yes. You know, when I was running at night from one place to another, and I saw those lights in the homes and sometimes I heard laughter or talking in a normal way, family to family, I was so envious that those people lived normal and I run like a beaten up dog with constant fear with constant such heaviness in my head. How will I survive the next day or the next minute. I was walking one night through the fields to another family to convey something, and they stopped me. This was the police and they asked me immediately what is my name. I told them Bernislava Bershenska and somehow they let me go. I was at that time afraid that this would be it. You know assume that I caught myself in such moments, I assumed that I will die very soon.

Q: When you got to Lublin and you could be open about who you were, what did that feel like?

A: I think we were very happy that our wish came true, that we finally survived Hitler. You cannot imagine the wish of young and old that they wished to survive only one day after Hitler is gone and I can die in peace. This was the children spoke like that, the adults spoke like that and this was a sense of freedom. A sense of freedom but also it brought our problems how to go on, what to do with this freedom. How our lives should continue. What will be next. How to reconstruct a life. The people were basically they were happy. They were concentrating with each other and we all became survivors as a matter of fact we became like a family. They were all practically -- most of them they

02:42:30

were young because old people couldn't survive and children couldn't survive. So, the young people they tried to get acquainted with one another to do things for one another to care for another. As a matter of fact, a girl knew a boy three weeks, this already was a long time. Let's get married. Everybody was seeking somebody to be close to, to be together, to function as a human being again. A lot of people were looking for the families and they couldn't find. Like my husband arrived with his brother, he survived in Russia and he went to his hometown and he saw nothing. He was very disappointed. He had I think three or four brothers. Nobody was alive. Not a sign of any life in his hometown, so he came to Lublin at that time also.

Q: Was it easy to get close to people?

A: To our own survivors, yes, but not to others. As a matter of fact, to this day I don't know if you know about this but all our survivors they stick together. They do business together, they invited each other to all the Simchas or whatever was going on in our life

as they would be asked in that family. This was

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such an enormous bond of the survivors that you couldn't even get with the very educated people here in the United States. I came as a foreigner with a very little education, what kind of contact would a young lady for instance like you with a higher education, with a normal life span, how would you understand my feelings. What I have been through. I tell you something that I must emphasize. When my child was here about in the United States six or seven years and I tried to learn about New York and the history through the children, so I was volunteering to go wherever they went like a planetarium museum something like that, and I dressed myself always very nicely. I was very presentable, but my English wasn't as good as they, so one day the teacher assigned me ten children to go to the planetarium I believe it was, and there was one child that he was abnormal in growth and I took care of that child and I had additional nine children. I was happy to go there. I remember there were like picnic tables

02:46:

on the outside, and the one teacher came over to me and she said would you like to share with me her group of children and my group of children the table. So, I said with pleasure. As soon as I opened my mouth, she left me. She left me by myself with the ten children at the table. There was plenty of room for her too, with her group. And I felt at that time that only because my English was so poor that she really probably didn't have pleasure to sit with me or talk to me about it. This pain I experienced and maybe I inflicted the pain by myself in my own mind. I am not sure, but this is at the time how I felt and I must tell you I will never forget this experience. It was very, very painful.

Q: Did you eagerly embrace Judaism again or did you --

A: My husband came from a Jewish family where he spoke only Jewish. Instead of Polish or English I took over the Jewish language. We went on the high holidays we knew that we are Jewish. We knew that the children were going to have to be bar mitzvahed. We sent them to school that they should have knowledge about Judaism but we should go every Saturday to synagogue, we did not. And we were injured in a certain way. We said we could survive a war like that and we saw small children being killed or heard about it, there is no God. But deep down in our roots and our minds we knew that we are Jewish that we have to have a sense of belonging that eventually it started with the children that the children grow up that we should send them to a Jewish school and they should be bar mitzvahed and they should continue a Jewish life. But we didn't emphasize too much on it. I think when I look back now I should have done more. It wasn't so important to us at that time. And the excuse was -- the reasoning was at that time there is no God. Where is God when you saw killings like that. If I didn't see it myself I saw it on the pictures or the pain that I have been through. Why did I have to suffer so much. Where was God to

protect me and the most pious people that they were sent away or were killed. So

02:49:

there was a big controversy in our mind why we should be so devoted to religion when there was no God to help us.

Q: Do you think that even after 50 years there is still a lingering impact from these experiences? Can you talk about that a little?

A: Yes, definitely. I lost my husband 23 years ago. I went to work. I succeeded in business, but I don't consider myself, I was pretty capable and very intelligent in certain areas, but those fears, those nightmares, the life that we went through as a younger woman and coming to the United States and trying so very hard to establish ourselves and now as we grow older sometimes I feel that maybe it wasn't worth it. Maybe it wasn't worth it. It's coming from the Warsaw Ghetto said our generation is dying out now. We are living now in the time that we are getting older and all of my friends are much older than I. I was a child at that time, so you can imagine now I am 66 and my friends are over 70 so everybody is in pain and aching and complaining and life as you go along brings certain disappointments so every period has it's own how shall I express myself, every age has its own good and bad.

Q: But how do you think that those years affected you in the long run?

A: The years and the experience in my life and the fear it made me more capable. I am more self assured. I am more assertive person because of those experiences. This was the lesson that I lived that you cannot be afraid to go on living. This is how I feel, but sometimes there are moments when you are thinking if it was worth it. Of course I brought two children into the world, but I am also disappointed in my life. I lost my husband 22 years ago and he left me with certain obligations and I did it quite well. I continued to go on living. I get it done and I have very nice children, but it's not easy.

Q: There must have been some psychological impact of all of this?

A: Yes, definitely. We are all very frightened people. In a way we are brave. There is one side that we are very brave. We think we can conquer everything and there's a certain amount of fear that we have in daily lives, which remains I think from childhood. Now that the population is aging you fear being alone, you fear getting ill. The structure of the family life in the United States as you well know it's not the same as maybe in other cultures. The children go their separate ways.

Q: Are these fears different than anyone else's? Those fears are similar to other people who didn't have your experience, don't you think?

02:54:

A: You see those people that they didn't have the experience, this frightening days and lost youth and not being educated, and trying so very hard, maybe they accept the life differently than I. You understand? I went so much through, I survived so much, I remained a widow and I started to go on living and to go on in life and as you're starting to age, sometime I express myself that it was a false gain. That the whole life is a false game. I don't know if this is a healthy expression or a healthy outlook or not, but this is how I feel. Because of this fear enormous fear that we live through and coming to a country without education, without language without any profession and to try so hard and you run and you run and you try everything and then you say for what? I don't know if this is the approaching age that speaks of me or maybe the fear of what I have suffered so much didn't pay off enough for me you know because I didn't have a wholesome life since my husband passed away. This is probably a combination of my feelings.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important?

A: I think it's very important -- you know I went to Miami this February, I attended the meeting of 3,000 people and I was so very proud of myself that I was among them. That the world and the history shouldn't forget not only us as survivors but also those six million innocent people that were killed. It's very painful to read in the paper and this day and to hear that somebody can write a book and to deny our history what happened. There is no humility in the human kind of something of this or people just want to get away from such times that we lived through which was so painful and people want to wash themselves clean and go away. I don't know if it's Germany or maybe any other nations they don't want to know about the Jews what happened and they want to forget. And this is really painful to hear that. That we are living in such -- we achieve so much technique in our lives but the basic human animalistic things I think remains even now, the way it was 50 years ago. This is my opinion. I don't know if I express myself right. Do you understand what I mean? This is very painful.

Q: Anything else you want to say?

A: I'm glad that you came to interview me, that maybe through this tape and my expression somebody will benefit by it and gain by it, but I don't with no one in the world to experience such fear and such pain as I have been through. This is all I have to say.

(Viewing pictures)

This is 1943 where I was working for that lady where she had a little store selling liquor and alcohol and I worked there with her. I was approximately there 13 years old. This is picture when I arrived in Saltzheim, I had already my son there. I must have been close to 19 years old and this is a picture of one of the i.d. in Saltzheim DP camp. This was a picture made in Warsaw. I need it for the Polish i.d. and my name was with this picture,

the i.d. was Bronislava Bershenska at that time. This was a picture taken when I arrived from Germany to the United States and I told the HIAS that the sister is waiting behind the fence so they called her out and this was our first meeting after three years.

Q: This was in what year?

A: This was in 1950, May 10, 1950. I'm on the right side.

End of tape #2

Conclusion of Interview