

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Sonia Heidocovsky Zissman  
May 25, 1995  
RG-50.030\*0332**

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Sonia Heidocovsky Zissman, conducted by Randy Goldman on May 25, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Lauderhill, FL and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

**SONIA HEIDOCOVSKI ZISSMAN**  
**May 25, 1995**

01:01:08

Q: I need you to start off by telling me your name, where you were born, when you were born.

A: My name is Sonia Zissman. My maiden name is Heidocovsky. I was born in a shtetl, Zcitel. Oh, I'm speaking Yiddish. Oh. I was born in a small town in Poland.

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

A: Before the war, my father came from a family of 11 kids, and my mother comes of seven children. Most of them, of my father's family was in our town. Nobody went anyplace else. My mother was different. She had two sisters in New York, and two sisters in Argentina. She and another sister was at home and they all got killed.

01:02:19

Q: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I had four brothers and I was one girl. My mother was a housewife. My father used to make the uppers of shoes. What else can I tell you? What would you like to know?

Q: Was it a comfortable life? Did you have a good time growing up?

A: I did not because we weren't that rich. So, my father made a living and that's it.

01:03:00

Q: Were you religious? Did you come from a religious family?

A: No, my father was sort of a liberal person and therefore I did not come from a religious home. Of course every Jew went to temple on Friday and Saturday and all the holidays and so did my father.

Q: Was there a large Jewish community in this town?

A: Oh, we were about 3,500 Jews and the rest were Gentiles.

Q: How many?

A: How many Gentiles? I haven't the slightest idea, but the Jewish people were about 3,500; 3,000, 3,500.

Q: I'm just trying to get a sense of if it was half and half?

A: Well, I don't know because I didn't bother asking or looking into it. But there was maybe two Jewish houses and then two Gentile houses and one Gentile houses or three Jewish, or vice a versa. So, in other words, we were living mixed with them, okay. And we were always, always friendly and so did they.

01:04:23

Q: Your school?

A: School, I went strictly to a Jewish school. It's a Yiddish school. Until I finished seventh grade. My brothers, two of my brothers went to the yeshiva and two were too small, so they didn't--they went to school. That's it. Also, my brother went to a religious school for boys, strictly boys, no girls.

Q: Did you experience any anti-semitism before Hitler?

A: In our little town, I would say no because we had actions with the Polish priest. He was very, very good to us and coming from where I was coming, this little town, he never let anything to do with the anti-semitism or whatever. Sure there was, you know, but basically as a whole we had none. I didn't feel it.

01:05:50

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born in 1922, October 6.

Q: What about the life there. Were there cultural activities? Were there political organizations? Tell me.

A: Yes. In our small little city we had three, four temples. Then we had the hebrew school for the boys beside, and we had a taubis (ph), that's a Hebrew school for girls and boys. Okay. Then we had a Yiddish school and we had the Polish school. So, we had a lot of schools. Our town most of the youth were educated, very educated. And everybody belonged to something. And I think as far as life itself, it was a cultural school, eh, city. Very lovely, and an exceptional city. We are all friends, even now. I know where everybody is and they know where I am even though maybe they don't call me, you know, or I call them once a year, but we know each other.

Q: What made it so exceptional?

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A: An unusual city, unusual people. Very good people, nice people. We stick together and this is what it was.

01:07:49

Q: Now were you involved in any organizations, any political organizations?

A: No, not me.

Q: Before the war, actually before even the Russians came in, what did you know about what was happening in Germany and Hitler and the Nazis. Did you know anything?

A: In the, what happened in the 30s, I don't think so. I didn't, as a kid. We didn't have radios. Maybe there were a few people that had radios so I remember my father or a other people, they used to stay on the outside from a house and a person had the radio. They used to put on the radio and everybody was listening what's going on in the world, otherwise you wouldn't know.

01:08:42

Q: Now, in 1939, did the Russians come in to your town?

A: They came in in 1940 I believe. '39?

Q: It is '39. What happened. What do you remember about the beginning of that period?

A: While the Russians were there? Oh yeah. I was still in school because I had to learn Russian. That's number one. Life was different and you couldn't do what you want. They tell you what to do, what not to do. That means the grown ups and I suppose the kids too. What can I say.

Q: What did they tell you you couldn't do?

A: I am talking couldn't do, meaning as the grown ups, you know. They had to obey whatever they did. My father was a shoemaker and they told him they have a business for him and they put him in a furniture store. What does he know about furniture, but this is what it is. Private enterprises was not longer. So, anyway, whatever you did you almost worked for the government. There was no more storekeepers that didn't belong to the government so this is the way life was.

01:10:26

Q: How did it impact your life as a young girl?

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A: Not much. No. I still went to school and came home, had lunch, or whatever, and that's it.

Q: Was there any change in terms of anti-semitism or not?

A: No. It didn't feel it.

Q: But your father still remained in the town?

A: Oh, yes. We all were in the town, yes.

Q: At what point, I remember you telling me before, at what point did your father didn't he have to go work in Wilno?

A: No. Vegodnik (ph).

Q: When was that?

A: That was before the Russians came.

01:11:12

Q: How come?

A: Because his father was sick and we had to take him to a big city where they had big doctors so my father sold his sewing machine that he used to make a living to take my grandfather to the big city. So, he took him and then he came back. I don't think he lived long enough and he died. So, my father was without work and in those days in little towns, everybody was independent. They worked for themselves. So, he had to go to a bigger city and get a job. He worked there and he used to come I don't know how often once a week, but once in two weeks he used to come home.

Q: Did you and your mother have to do anything to kind of help the family?

A: Yes, we used to sell in the markets produce.

Q: You grew the produce?

A: Yes. We used to sell it.

Q: So you had sort of a farm or plot of land or something?

A: Yes. We leased it for the season and she used to take care of it and I used to help her because father wasn't there. My two brothers were younger ones, and the oldest one couldn't do it. He wasn't home at all. He was in a sanitarium. So, this was how life was.

01:13:00

Q: It was hard. Did you have to work hard?

A: Huh?

Q: Did you have to work hard?

A: No, no.

Q: So, when, what do you remember about the German occupation? What do you remember about the beginning of that period?

A: Well, one morning, you got up in the morning and you find out that the Germans have you and that's it. That is the beginning. And they came in and in the beginning wasn't as bad until the SS came and that's when they started to do things and tell everybody what's going to happen, what's going to be, you know what I'm talking? But... They used to tell us to come on the market place. They took out x amount of Jews and they took them out of the city and they killed them. So, therefore people were afraid to do anything or say anything and this is how it went day by day. And then they started to ask all the Jews who's got copper, gold, silver, whatever they should bring it to them. If they knew that you have it and didn't bring it, they put you against the wall and shoot you. That's all there is to it. In front of everybody.

01:14:51

Q: So you saw this?

A: Yes. And then they, and of course they had -- when they came in was I think was in the fall, so they used to tell us, ask us, I mean tell us, better, to go and dig out the potatoes because it was already a fall and it was cold. The farmers couldn't take it out because the Germans wanted it. They needed potatoes. So, they used to come and whoever wanted to go went and of course I did, because I didn't want my mother to go. So, I went. That was in the beginning. Then when the winter came, they were taking people to clean the highways for them to go through so of course I went with my brothers. I didn't let mother or father go and we walked on the snow all night and when we finished we came home. I don't know how many months later, we had a ghetto. They made a ghetto, and certain streets were in the ghetto, some of them weren't in the ghetto. Like our house was not in the ghetto.

01:16:20

Q: I want to stop you before we get to the ghetto part. I'm trying to get another sense. When the Germans came in, they came in first, not SS? Just troops?

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A: No, just troops, yes, yes.

Q: This was when, the beginning of September of '41?

A: The 30th of June 1941 they came in.

Q: And then the SS came in a few weeks later?

A: A few weeks or maybe a few months. I have no idea. It's so many years ago I can't remember.

Q: The first troops who came in, were they mean? Were you afraid of them?

A: No, no in the beginning before they did what they did we were not afraid of them because it was the regular army and they were not bad, as bad, but then came the rest of them and that's when it started.

Q: And they were bad?

A: I couldn't walk on the sidewalk. We had to wear the lattis(ph), you know, the yellow and you couldn't walk after 7 o'clock on the street unless you have a permit. Then it started. Every few months, they used to ask for something else. We also had a Judenrat, that means some of the Jews, they were the responsible people for all the Jews from the town, and whatever they asked the Judenrat came to the Jews and said, "Look, we have to do that or else." So that's what the Judenrat was for. But, was there maybe the ghetto and also you had to have a permit to go out. They send you to work, otherwise you couldn't get out.

01:18:39

What else can I tell you. We didn't have it too good, believe me. One morning they told us to get out again, and the market place and they took out 120, 140 Jews and they killed them. Mostly was they were like teachers, nurses, more educated people. They had at least they know who to take out and that was the end of this. And also in '41, the end of '41 they made a shreta (ph), you know. They took everybody out of the houses and they are to go to the old cemetery. We had an old and a, a young one, or whatever. But the old cemetery. And they put us one by one and they took out the disabled, either kids or grownups. Some of them are half crazy or whatever it is and they just killed them, and then they brought in big trucks, army trucks and they took about a thousand of Jews. They dug a pit, a big one, and from one end of the pit to the other, a wooden board. A big one. They used to put you up there in the middle. Give you a shot and you fell in. Do you know what I'm talking. So, a thousand Jews they killed in that one.

01:20:46



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Q: Did you see this or people told you about it?

A: No, no, no. We know where they're at. My father was there and my mother and my two brothers. But I have an uncle that was making him for the Germans boots. All kinds of stuff. He was the best and therefore he was with them just like this day. So, he was happy. So anyway, he came to where the graves were. He saw my father and mother and my two brothers so he told the zundenfuhrer (ph) he was the head of the city and told him he needs my father to make the uppers, you understand. So they let him out and they came home. That was still the ghetto. What can I tell you.

Q: I have a question for you. All of these Gentiles you were sort of friendly with before the war, what were they doing? What was their role?

A: Nothing. They didn't do nothing, they didn't say nothing. It was a Jewish problem and this is what it was. They had nothing to say.

01:22:08

Q: Did you still talk to them?

A: Well, to a neighbor yes. Ask me a question. I don't know what you want me to say, what you want to know.

Q: So somehow you still maintained a relationship with your neighbors, a neighborly relation?

A: A neighborly, yes, sure. You said hello and they said to us hello and that's it.

Q: Now were you still in school at this point?

A: School? As soon as they came in there was no school for us. Jews could, will not go to school. They would not let them in. They closed up the schools.

Q: When did they decide you had to go to a ghetto?

A: 1942, the 22nd of February.

Q: What happened? Where did you go, where did you live?

A: Well, we lived with an uncle of ours, my father's brother. His home was in the ghetto, so we came down and we stayed there. In each room, and they had four rooms and there were four families, five families whatever it is. And we stayed there for the duration of the Ghetto or you may say for the duration of the Jews being in that little town.

01:23:55

Q: Four families to a room?

A: Yes. The more the better. Because they were only putting so many houses in the ghetto in other words, and the rest were empty.

Q: So your family was all together at this point?

A: At that point, yes, except for one of my brothers. He was sent to work and he was working somewhere in a little town so he wasn't with us. But I saw him later.

Q: What were the conditions like other than being crowded?

A: Food, you need food and it was crowded and the fear itself.

Q: What were you afraid of?

A: Any day they can kill you. What else?

Q: Did you, when you were walking on the streets, did you see, were the Germans in the Ghetto itself?

A: No,no, they were outside the Ghetto.

01:25:18

Q: Did you have your own police?

A: We didn't have any police. They were staying outside the Ghetto where the gates were and if you're walking, you have a permit they let you out and then they brought you back in.

Q: So, there weren't a lot of beatings or anything like that in the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto? Unless you did something wrong for the time being they don't have to beat you. They kill you right there and then.

Q: On the outside?

A: On the outside, yes.

Q: Was the Judenrat helpful? What did they do? What were their responsibilities?

A: Well, anything the Germans wanted they talked to the Judenrat and they tell them look we want so much of so much and we're going to get it. So, the Judenrat had to go to the Jews, to

the rest of them. Even the Judenrat was also in the ghetto and they used to discuss what to do next, whatever they want. So, this is how it was.

01:26:33

Q: Did you feel, do you remember if you felt that the Judenrat was trying to be helpful or whether they were bad guys or good guys?

A: From what I know or remember they were good guys because it was a small little town and everybody knew everybody and everybody had brothers, sisters, uncles, you know what I'm talking. So it was different like in a big city. We knew each other by name, so I wouldn't say they were working for them, but there were certain things they had to supply to them or they're going to take out 20 Jews or 50 Jews and kill them if you don't get it.

Q: Now when you described a few minutes ago some of your work assignments were those during the ghetto time or before?

A: Before.

Q: While you were in the ghetto did you have to work for the Germans?

A: No.

Q: So how did you spend your time every day?

A: We stayed in the house, that's all. We couldn't go anyplace so we stayed in.

01:27:50

Q: Were there any activities or any secret activities?

A: Well, before the ghetto specially the youth they were very organized. They used to get, they, to be like a Russian guy by the name of Vanka (ph). He used to come in between. He was a partisan and he used to come to our town by the ghetto and talk to some of the people, the young ones, not the old ones and tell them that there's going to be a killing and let them come. Most of the time everything was fine until the last time I remember he was like a double agent and he gave out some of the guys that were going to run away to the underground. One of them they caught and they killed him. But the youth were organized, not all of them, but alot of them, especially the boys, the men.

01:29:10

Q: Did you or your brothers know about this or were you at all involved?

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A: My brothers were involved. I wasn't involved because girls were not involved but I used to take notes. Somebody send a little note, we used to, my brother used to give me something. I should take it over to somebody else and give it to them. So this is how they were organized.

Q: So, you served as kind of a messenger, a courier?

A: That's right. We had, what's his name? He was a lawyer and he ran away from town the day before as soon as the ghetto started. They ran away about five guys or seven guys to the forest and they used to send the messenger or whatever it is, that we should come there, you know. Not me, but somebody else and they used to run away. See if you run away you were one person, two people, three people, they didn't notice it. So this is how some of them got out.

01:30:31

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

02:01:02

Q: So you were telling me there were small groups, some of them got away to the forest.

A: Yes, before the ghetto.

Q: That's before?

A: Um-huh. And that was Boretsky (ph). He was a lawyer. In Poland they didn't get an education. He went to Italy, I believe, or Germany and he became a lawyer. He was one child. The parents had a store for leather. He and another few guys they were the organizers for the partisans. They left first and they kept on getting a few guys here and there and every time there was a shkita (ph), you know what it is? A killing, they knew. They used to send a duancar (ph) to tell us what's going to happen. So the second, the second killing was in 1942 on August 6, 1942.

02:02:25

Q: What happened?

A: What happened is normally my mother used to give us packages, not with food, but she used to give us let's say a piece of material that you can make a dress or pair of pants whatever it is and a piece of leather which the farmers don't have it. Do you know what I'm talking? Therefore, in case there's a shooting and we have to run or split, you know, at least for that they'll give you a piece of bread, some butter, or some milk. Something. You'll have something to eat. And everytime there was an the alarm, you used to take this little package and I started running and it was like a false alarm. You know what I'm talking? The day that was really important because that was the day that no Jews allowed to be living in the town so they're going to make Judenrein. So how can you live there? You can't. So of course that morning I didn't take nothing. What I had on me, this is it. Everybody. So, my brother, he lives in Northbrook, in Illinois, he was with me. My mother, father and youngest brother were running one way. Me and this brother were running. I don't know where we were running but we were running and two houses from us was my uncle. That's my uncle that's the uncle that makes my shoes, you know. So, my mother went the other way and then she remember half way running to the hideout, she forgot, she better go back home and get a loaf of bread. She just baked fresh bread in case you have to sit a day or two so you have something. By the time she got to the house she couldn't go back. So, my father and my little brother, the youngest one, they were hiding in an attic somewhere with another few couples and after two nights I think, they ran away to the forest because the town was a lot of forest. As soon as you walk out of the city there were forests.

02:05:20

Q: You were saying your brothers ran out, the city was surrounded by forest?

A: And a lot of people are from farmers, from the little towns, the little villages, you know, where they got married in our town to somebody or vice a versa. So in other words, they knew the vicinity very well. So, my father, my brother and this guy and a few more, they went to the forest. I was sitting with my brother knowing what my uncle did last time when they were killing us that he spared his wife and kids and everybody, you know. So I don't know, something told me I should go there. I went there with my brother and they also had a hideout, you know, down and we were hiding there. We were sitting. The first day was very quiet except they came in -- the Germans used to come in with a ball, a round ball, you understand, and we didn't have carpet so they used to take the ball and roll it over the floor. You see, if you dug something underneath it would settle, do you know what I'm talking? So, the ball would have to stop. So it means that underneath there is somebody. You understand? Do you understand what I'm saying?

02:07:38

Q: Sort of.

A: On a straight floor when you throw a ball, okay, it runs until it stops by itself, you know. But here is not the case. You see if they dug underneath the dirt settled let the floor down. You know what I'm talking? Okay. So, it makes just like a dent, it's lower, the floor. So they put the ball and it stops in the middle of somewhere they figure they better check, you know. Anyway, things got..., everything was fine. Then my aunt she was the aunt, my mother's sister, her kids, four of them. They had two boys and two girls. We were all sitting. My uncle's sister, with the children, maybe ten people, or whatever, and my uncle comes back because the zungenfuhrer (ph) asks him, "Where is your wife and kids?" He says, "I don't know. I better go looking." And he told them he's going to try to spare them too this time. So they told me, he come to us at night and took his wife out and the kids and he says that the zungenfuhrer (ph) said he's going to let you live and he told us there's going to be Judenrein, no Jews, you better go away from here. Go somewhere else. So anyway the following day we heard that my aunt and the kids got killed. They killed them right away. They only let live my uncle and the son.

02:09:30

Q: How did you hear these things. I'm trying to get a sense of what it was like. You said, "we heard this." You said the following day "we heard that my aunt was killed." How did you get this information?

A: He came back. My uncle came back the following night and said they killed everybody except his son and he said we should better get out and that there was a little town that they had still our ghetto. So, this is what we did the night he came telling us. We ran away, I

mean I ran away. We walked all night and during the day we went somewhere. I don't even know, on a farm, in an attic where they had the pigs and the cows whatever. We saw the Germans from far but you know your heart is in your mouth and you hope you survive. So, of course after the night, after the day got dark a little bit and we went walking to that little town with the ghetto. So, we came to the ghetto.

02:10:46

Q: What was the name of the town, Sonia?

A: Dworitz (ph).

Q: One other question. When you left your ghetto, was it easy to get out that night? Were there guards or were you just able to walk out?

A: You could walk out, yes, because between shooting and killing so many people there was no more ghetto. So, they used to put x amount of people, I don't know the amount, we had a movie house and they stuffed them into the movie house and from there they used to take them to the graves.

Q: So, you got out, you slept in a barn or something that night and the next day you continued to the other town?

A: The evening. You couldn't walk during the day. Let's say if it was in the summer time, which it was, or in the winter time when the days are longer or shorter so by evening most of us knew how to go to these small towns because they were not, maybe they were ten miles all together. You understand. So, leaving there was no problem to go into a little town and know how to get in there, you know. So, this is what we did. We came there in the morning and all the people. My brother was also the same place in the market place but he was also making shoes so they let him out. I mean not they let him out, they took all the people, all the workers, what they need, and they send them over to another working.... It's like, a camp and the rest whoever did not make it they cut out with them. Some of them stayed in the hideout for four or five days because they had enough food.

02:13:18

And then the Germans sooner or later the Germans got them. So, the people that ran away to the forest which most of them are alive, and those that didn't, that was the end of it. So, when I came to Dworitz (ph), I found my cousin there that he came also from another town. My brother was in that working camp about 30 kilometers. And my younger brother, he was there too.

Q: In the town or the working camp?

A: In the working camp, not in town. So, I don't know how long it was, they went to the forest. I haven't seen him yet. I just had my younger brother with me. My father survived with the little brother and they came also in the forest. So, one of the guys heard that his sons are alive also in the same place where I was and he was also from a farm town so he knew exactly how to come. So, he came and took maybe ten of us, so he took me, and my brother, he took his kids. They were there too, in that Dworitz, that I'm calling that little town, and we went to the forest. Then I came to the forest I found my father, my three brothers and one I had with me, is four, you know, and what can I tell you? It was another time of life.

02:15:14

Q: Let me just stop you. So, the forests were near by and this was early summer of '42?

A: Yes, right.

Q: When you got to the forest, were there a lot of people, what was going on?

A: Well, it wasn't like a huge place you come in. No, forget it. He took us and he brought us where his wife and children are, okay, and he let us stay there. You stayed underneath the, the, the sky. I mean, what? You got a home there? So, anyway, we came with what we had. We used to make a fire at night to make something to eat because during the day we couldn't make it in case the smoke from the fire the Germans will catch on to, you know. So, actually the nights was ours. We were not afraid for the nights because the Germans didn't want to go in the woods in our territory because to them it's strange. You see? So, at night and of course the winter came, we used to make a fire. I slept in my coat and I woke up in the morning and they were burned out, you know. And what can I tell you? That's all we had. The following winter I think we made a tent, you know, like the army, I suppose, and that's what we slept. We didn't have anything, nothing. We became like this and that's it. So, the second year we were there and the Germans again started to kill us and made it again the same thing, a killing. They used to come and whoever they caught they caught.

02:17:49

Q: In the forest?

A: In the forest, that's right. So, they caught my youngest brother. He was eight years old. And what they didn't do to him. And then they killed him. You know, they cut you up and they mutilate you and then they kill you. So, we ran away, we ran away from that place to another place. In other words, we could move around in the forest but you still have to-- if there is a big highway, it's a no no because you don't know who's driving and who's going by, you know. So, we learned how to go this way or that way and we didn't have a compass or nothing. Compass.

Q: When they killed your brother, did they make you watch it or did you just hear about it?



A: They took him away. Where are you going to go looking for him?

Q: You just learned later what happened?

A: Yes, yes. The Gentiles were there. The people there they tell us what they did with him and that was it. So, he got killed.

02:19:11

Q: How many, I'm just trying to get a sense of how many people were in your group at this point?

A: There was no such a thing as groups. The partisans they were organized just like my brothers. The younger one -- both of them did but the younger one did by himself, he went back to the walking log(?), what's another name, and he and another boy they dug under the barbed wire and he already knew because he was there. He ran away from there and he dug it and he came in and he talked to an uncle of ours, they wanted winter boots. He was there with his son, you know, and he took up maybe 25 guys and he came back to the forest with them and went another time and took out my uncle, this one. The first time he took the son, and the second time he took the uncle and more people and they came to the forest. So, you see the people that were the partisans, they organized. We had nothing to do with them and they had nothing to do with us. So in other words if you take here families, ten families, one was living in this corner somewhere, the other one was living somewhere else. You didn't pay rent. You can move around. Nobody told you not to move around. You know, so we managed.

Q: How many were with you?

A: Well, in the beginning maybe three families, that's all. When I say families it could be two people out of the family, because the other ones they killed. You know what I'm talking? It depends who survived. Sometimes let's say you hear about, oh your sister is..., somebody told me that your sister is in this and this place. You know. They would pick themselves up, they had nothing anyway, and they would go there.

02:21:51

Q: So, from time to time maybe another family would join you or someone would leave?

A: Yes, that's right, but we had nothing to do with the partisans.

Q: Now, how did you get whatever you needed like food or supplies?

A: I'll tell you. We used to go at night to the farmers to beg. My brother went, I went all of us

went wherever we wanted to eat. So, we used to go in different places and some of them used to give us something and this is how we survived. Of course in the forest we had cranberries, blueberries, boysenberries, you know that grows in forests, so we used to go--mushrooms--we used to go and pick them and we had something to eat. Bread we used to get sometimes from the farmers. What can I tell you? We didn't have an oven, we didn't have nothing only the fire, you know, to make a fire that's all we had. Nothing else. Water, we used to dig a little hole and dig deep enough until the water comes up. When it came up we used to take it out and take a handkerchief and push it through, you know what I'm talking, the dirt because otherwise you're going to drink dirt. This is how we had water.

02:23:42

We didn't starve to death. Nobody starved in the forest, but we didn't have enough to eat, but we survived. It was enough. We used to go to the forest there, the outside and see potatoes so we used to take them out from the ground. Sometimes we used to bake them by the fire. Sometimes we ate them raw, potatoes. We didn't have salt. So we didn't, okay. But we did survive, you see.

Q: How did you know which farmers to trust?

A: We didn't. The only thing is if the farmers knew if they're going to give out a Jew to the Germans, especially on the forest, the next day the partisan will be there and going to put them, let them in the house, let them stay, take all the cattle and burn up the cows with them together.

Q: But you weren't working with the partisans?

A: The only -- my connection with the partisans is because my two brothers were fighting. My father had two brothers they were there fighting. My other uncle his son -- like I said it was a small little town so there was somebody that I went to school with, you know what I'm talking. So when I used to go sometimes if they stayed close to us sometimes, you know, but if it's far we didn't, we couldn't go, so they used to give us food. But the majority we had to go ourselves at night.

02:25:41

Q: Were you ever, well, you found out sometimes where the people you knew in the partisans were sort of a word of mouth in the area?

A: Sometimes we knew, not all the time and we wouldn't go risking our lives to go where they're at. Let's say if it's within a few miles we'll go to see them, but anything further or maybe I don't know we wouldn't go.

Q: But you might come across other people who would say to you I ran into your cousin?

A: No.

Q: How did you keep in touch at all? I mean how did you find each other occasionally?

A: Well, like I said it was a small town, whoever came settled down in here the other went somewhere else. So we used to go from one to the other place, depends. We didn't like to sit in the same place because in case somebody spot us, so we always kept on moving. But what I'm saying is not necessarily did we stay around the partisans. The partisans were different. So this is then in 1943, January or February my younger brother got killed. The white Pollocks killed him; him and another boy, and they brought the boxes.

02:27:26

He was strictly with mines and railroading and mines, you know. He had 21, 21 times he mined railroads or whatever it is. And my other brother lived through the war, the oldest one, and when the Russians came in they took most of the boys. Some ran away, and some did not have to go because if the Russian what, major or whatever he was did not want to take the partisans because they were not fighters, you know what I'm talking, not army people. So, if he was different he said, "No, I won't let you go boys." The Russian army wants him but you're not trained for war. This is what happened. My brother went, stepped on a mine and he got killed. So I was left with one brother.

02:28:56

And what can I tell you. We did have a doctor there.

Q: In the forest, in your group, or just in a nearby group?

A: No, no, he used to come from one place to the other. As a matter of fact the doctor lived through the war. He lived in Brighton Beach and all the people from my -- it's not only my town, there were people from other small towns, you know, they used to go to him as a doctor. He passed away. The partisans had a hospital, they had and it was camouflaged and the Germans never found the place, and he was the doctor. As a matter of fact, I had typhoid fever. Most of us had typhoid fever from all the lice. You didn't have anything to change off so you used to take the top shirt, whatever you were wearing, shake it over the fire. The lice should come out and get burned. You didn't have anything to wear. Nothing.

02:30:19

End of Tape #2

TAPE #3

03:00:49

Q: You were describing to me the fact that there was this doctor. What other, you had--

A: We had two doctors. One was an MD. As a matter of fact he pulled my teeth.

Q: In the forest?

A: In the forest, a medical doctor, so what? Now, the other doctor that I'm telling you, he was exceptional good, and we were lucky that our place where we stayed next to us was a rich family. Some people had money. So, he used to come because they were sick too. We were all sick with typhoid fever so he used to come there, but when he was already there and we lived next door to them, he came. He gave me comfer (ph). You know what comfer (ph) is? Okay, so, he gave me that. A lot of them died, you couldn't take--and there was no medication, nothing. But he used to go if somebody was sick he used to help out. A very nice man, but he's not alive anymore.

03:01:59

Q: What else did you have in the forest?

A: For, In the beginning they had a bakery. I don't mean a bakery like you buy, you know. It's the oven. It was a big oven, a baker's oven and when the boys came there and there was nothing to eat or whatever so they went to the farmers and got flour and they took it to the bakery. We called it bakery but it was just an oven, a baker's oven. They used to bake bread for the partisans so if they lived close to me let's say, I would go over and they would give me, because we were all one family. You know what I'm trying to say? I wasn't afraid of anybody there and they were nice. We were all in trouble. What can I tell you? But after that, the partisans used to go away farther, which way, either it was left or north or south. I wouldn't know, I'd never been there. But we survived, went at night and they gave us bread or flour or an egg or whatever it is, and we limited ourselves not to eat too much and what can I tell you.

03:03:40

Q: How did you spend the day time? What did you do?

A: If, when we were in the forest, where we were, in other words, as long you did not go out to the highway where somebody could spot you. We used to go for the mushrooms and the blueberries, you know. Now potatoes to go in the fields, we didn't go until it was half dark, that you could see where you're going because the Germans never came during the day, you understand. Toward the evening, rather. They used to start in the morning. So, this way we

were not worried. And we managed. We were sitting one time, we're sitting when the--I better not say that. My husband said it.

Q: You just tell me your own story.

A: The, the Ukraines when they came to the forest they're like the white Russians, you know what I'm talking. They're not afraid of anybody. So, the Germans got him and they used to go, the first one, to the small little passages in the forest. The Germans were afraid to go. They only went with the highways, the big ones. But this ones, we had the Bundlehofsitz (ph), for the, you know, my husband said to you. And we had the Lithuanians. They were another one, bastards. They killed more people in the forest, yeah, because they knew and they were not afraid to go in the forest, inside.

03:05:49

But at night it was much easier for us. Now, talking about the Russian partisans, you see, the head, eh I forgot how you say, groups, okay, of partisans. Maybe let's say 20 groups, 30 groups, I don't even know how many groups they were. Small ones, like, but they were groups that they didn't like the Jews. As a matter of fact, that lawyer that I told you, he was the first one, a teacher of ours and another, about five guys they went first. They didn't bother them because they spoke a good Polish and they did not tell them they were Jews, so they stayed before all of us came in, you understand. When we came and they find out the people, the Russian people, they killed them because they were Jews. That's why it's so--another one. For us, what you're talking family camp, I'm talking we didn't have any guns, we didn't shoot anybody. Some of the Russians, if Jewish boys, in other words.... We used to have this companies, the partisans had companies. If they went with some Jewish boys and some Gentile boys we didn't have to worry for nothing. But if the Russian soldiers, Russian boys, eh, partisans figured they'll come here wherever it was and they knew there were girls so they figured they're going to rape them a few, you know. So, we had a place where we dug underneath like a dungeon, but what we did is we put walls on trees you know, and we made the walls and then we had the slippen (ph) also from trees, the smaller branches, the thinner one, and we put on the hay, you know what I'm talking, the slippen (ph). Well let me tell you, I had a, we had a place underneath the bed, what kind of bed, like the barracks like you see soldiers sleep in the barracks. And some of the pieces of wood would come out. When we knew that the Russians are here a few and no Jewish boys we used to run in, in there and hide, too. So, we had to, we as family like you, you're saying. We were afraid for the Russians by themselves. We were afraid for the people that lived around the forest. We were afraid for the Pollocks that call themselves Poland without Jews. They used to kill even the soldiers. It doesn't matter. So, we had to fight everybody and be afraid of. So I mean, it's a miracle. I'll tell you that we lived through.

03:09:29

Q: You had a lot of enemies?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Was there any organization to your group? Did somebody sort of establish the order and who did what?

A: No, if you had a little tent you got the straw on the floor so you sleep on it and in front of that tent you make a little fire and if you have a pot, you put some flour in the pot with water with salt if you have it, and you have soup. So, there was no such a thing as anybody taking care of anybody. Everybody was for themselves.

Q: Well, but within your family, did you have a certain job that you did every day or anything like that? Were you responsible for getting the berries?

A: No, no, it's like, no. We were not responsible for anything. We couldn't be responsible for ourselves.

Q: Now, if some other people came along and they wanted to join your group, was that okay?

A: Yes. If you want to have a little tent there, it's empty, I don't care. Anybody can come.

03:10:57

Q: So, did your group change as time went on?

A: Oh, we had a lot of them that some had a sister let's say five miles from there. There was also a few couples that picked themselves up. They had nothing to take care with them, no pillows, no covers, nothing. So, they went away. That's it. So I mean, my husband he used to come. We had one neighbor, I call him a neighbor, he had a tent too, and he knew all the little passages to get in and out to the forest from the forest into the villages. He's also from my town. So there used to be a lot of partisans coming to him that he should take them wherever they want to go. He knew where to go. This is how we used to see somebody. Otherwise, it's only what we are the three, four couples or whatever it is and that's it. We even had a baby born.

Q: In your group?

A: Yes. A woman, look, yeah.

03:12:18

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: Well, that's how I met him. That man used to go with them for you know they go to get

some food too. They still go and get food, cattle. But with them it was different. They were men with rifles or automatics. My brother was wearing a, used to have an automatic and so for them it was different than for us. We were isolated from everybody. The only thing is, um, I, because I would, I had my uncles, my cousins there, so sometimes my brothers when they were going from one place to the other if they're passing by they would come and bring us some bread or some whatever it is. So, we used to see them. But others and that, they were on their own.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about how you met your husband, how that came about.

A: Oh, my husband? So he, one evening I was there in that, by the neighbors, or in the little tent, dungeon you want to call it. It was a dungeon, you know, and they came to pick up that guy. They should take him where they want to go. This is where I met my husband.

03:13:54

Q: What happened. Tell me the story?

A: What happened? Like young kids, girls, boys, you know what I'm talking. He used to come there often enough until we got acquainted and of course he was on one side of the wall and I was on the other side of the wall. I mean, he didn't come to see me. You know what I'm talking? He came because they needed somebody should take him. Him and some old guys, and this is what had happened. Then liberation came. I don't know where he was. But then somebody told me where he is and we got acquainted again and we got married.

Q: But in the forest you kind of developed a special friendship, or not?

A: He used to come to take that guy should take him wherever they want to go. And what, they couldn't do things because it, they have so much time in the night to take care of their business. So I mean no no, no. Not my husband.

Q: In the forest, did people start having romances or anything like that?

A: Oh yes, yes. That they had. Some, most of them had. One of my girlfriends as a matter of fact she lives not far from my town, Slonyim (ph). She lived in my town after the war, but she moved away to Slonyim (ph), it's a bigger city I suppose. He was the mayor of the city and he's a Russian soldier. My husband mentioned his name, Sergaibiele (ph). Dubakov (ph), sorry, Dubakov (ph). Was a very nice guy and she married him. And she stayed there.

03:15:55

Q: What about religion in the forest? Did you pray, did you in any way observe special days?

A: Nothing. What are you going to pray? They killed everybody already and you don't know if

even in ten minutes you're going to be dead so what are you going to pray, for what. No, we didn't pray, we didn't go anyplace. There was no place to go.

Q: What was, did you have any kind of plan or goal or anything while you were there or were you just there?

A: We were like dummies. We just lived by the day and see that we have enough, something to eat and survive that's all. Other than that nothing. First of all when we go in the forest he told us no Jews in Poland all together. We thought, "We are the only one survivors." We didn't realize that there are, were people surviving like concentration camps, you know what I'm talking. We didn't know. We thought we were the only one who's surviving. So when the Russian soldiers, when, I mean, the Russians came, liberated us, our part, you know because I walked with them just like you see the soldiers walking on the highway on both sides, you know, the tank or the pen, pensard (ph) truck, whatever it is, and they were walking and I was walking because they were going to my town. We came home and this is it.

03:18:06

Q: Okay, I want to stay in the forest a little bit longer.

A: I'm glad you like it.

Q: Did you feel there was any difference between being a girl in the forest and a boy or a man. Did you feel more vulnerable?

A: Not especially no. You see, most of the girls were looking for boyfriends or the boyfriends looking for girls. I didn't have to look because I had my father and my brother with me. So, the three of us and we had another family, I wasn't looking for that. But some, yes, it's like Harold said. You can make a novel out of what went on in the forest. There's no question about it.

Q: I'm just trying to get a sense because we really don't hear much about the differences between men and women but I suspect that there were, that women might have had a different experience.

A: There were girls that were fighting just like the men. And there were girls that stayed; they had parents, like I had a father. They stayed with them. But some of them had boyfriends. My husband is alive because he didn't accept an offer from another girl. I betcha he can hear. She hid, she--every boy she hid got killed or died, whatever you want to call it. See, she wanted him to get married there and stay married and he said nothing doing. First I have to live through the war and then we'll see. She didn't want it so she picked up another few boyfriends, you know, and they all got killed. I said to Harold it's a good thing you ran away from her. No joke. I feel that way. Somebody is unlucky.



03:20:22

Q: So what you're saying is that the girls in the forest wanted some sort of protection.

A: And they mostly went to the Gentile soldiers, or partisans, they were more safer with them. Because let's say if you are a pretty girl and you have a Jewish boyfriend, right, and there comes a, we used to call them Bostochnik (ph). That's the Russian, from west, you know, all the way from the eastern part. So, if they had their eyes on somebody let's say it wouldn't do anybody any good, any Jewish boy to go with that girl because he's going to be there. He can take a boy and kill him for that too, just to be able to go with that girl. So, there was, yes, yes, a lot of them.

Q: What about when we talk about the partisans you made the point that you were really very separate but you'd run into them from time to time.

A: Yes.

Q: You also said that sometimes you might make bread for them or they might bring you things. Was there any--

A: I didn't make bread for them. I told you about a bakery. When we came in they had a bakery, a baker's oven.

Q: Oh, it was a partisan bakery?

A: Right, right. So and we, the first year we were close, too, so I used to come like I said. I used to go into the kitchen and there were the girls with this one I went to the school and with this one was a neighbor of mine, whatever it is, you know, and they would give me food. This is what I was saying.

03:22:12

Q: So there was really no mutual help between your family and partisan groups?

A: No, they were entirely separate from us.

Q: Were you ever in a situation where somebody whether it was the local people or partisans or Soviet partisans who came and took the few things you had?

A: The only thing I remember is one of the Russian guys was chasing my brother because he had boots on and he wanted the boots. Yes, they would do things like that. That's why I said we had to hide from everybody.

Q: You never were really safe?

A: No.

Q: Did you have many close calls?

A: Yes, one time they were chasing me and the bullet went into the tree instead of me. Yes.

Q: Who is "they?"

A: Meaning Germans.

Q: They were nearby?

A: Oh, they came, they came to see us yes, in the beginning. See, we were inexperienced how to live there and what to do there, you know what I'm talking. To us, it was new. Well, how do you know how to, what to do and when to do. So in the beginning, yes they would. But later on they didn't. They send those other ones, the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians to do the dirty work. Oh, yes, we had it.

Q: So as time went on this got easier or you learned how to live there better?

A: No, the same thing, the same thing. Like I said we didn't think there was any Jews outside of the forest because they made every city Judenrein, no Jews, so where are they? We didn't know the concentration camps that they are alive or whatever it is. Sometimes the farmers used to come from the city and tell something, the partisans or whoever it is, you know, what's going on but other than that they didn't have radios.

03:24:40

Q: When you talk about, I think that's really interesting that you say you thought you were the only Jews alive.

A: Correct.

Q: How did that make you feel or what did you think was going to happen in the future?

A: I'll tell you something. When we saw the Red Army, this was it. Now we are alive, you understand. So it means the Germans are not here because the Russians are here so of course this gave us a big boost.

Q: But before that, when you thought we're the last Jews in Europe or in Poland--

A: Yeah, Poland, yeah.

Q: Did that make you feel -- give you more strength that you had to stay alive or make you depressed? It's a strange feeling isn't it?

A: Nope. You know why? Because we took it each day as it comes. We did not know what tomorrow's going to be and we knew that the Germans are here and how long it's going to take for them to kill us all. So therefore we didn't have any hopes, anything. No hopes.

03:26:12

Q: When, I guess in 1943 the Soviet army really took charge of the partisans did that make any difference to you?

A: Well, to me, no. But it made difference to everybody actually because they used to come with airplanes for the partisans not for us and send down whatever food or instructions so it was different. Sure, you felt a little bit like somebody's here to help. You know what I'm talking? They didn't. They didn't come to the bottom of the, you know. They used to turn down from the sky sort of, you know, and fly away. They never came to land. They did not land.

Q: But you would find out about this through the partisans?

A: Nope. You see they, I'll tell you why. Because they had a certain place where there's no trees. It has to be a big place, okay, so they already knew where to come and the partisans knew where to wait for them so they used to drop whatever it is, ammunition, medication, whatever it is and they went back up. But at least we knew that Russia knows that we're here. You understand? SO, it gave us a different feeling. But eh...

Q: I know, but how did you know that if you didn't have contact with the partisans? How did you know this was happening?

A: Because it happened in this part of Vivorg (ph) exactly then, you know, and what can I tell you? They had to have a field where to drop it. You should see how the sky was lighting up. You can, you wanted to dance and sing, but you couldn't do nothing. But this, this is all.

Q: So you saw it?

A: Oh, yes with my own eyes. Yup, that I did.

03:28:32

Q: Okay, that's what I was trying to understand. What do you think was the hardest thing about living in the forest?

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A: The hardest thing is survival. This is an answer, I don't know. Survival was the hardest thing.

Q: What was the most difficult thing to do in order to survive?

A: God should be with you.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

04:00:52

Q: How long were you in the forest?

A: About two and a half, three years.

Q: That's a long time. This is the Lipitrani (ph)?

A: Yeah, Lipijanskipusch (ph). We didn't have toothbrushes. We didn't have soap. We had nothing.

Q: Anything else you can tell me about the life in the forest or being on the run.

A: Well, most of the time we did. We stayed in one place and then we run away to another place and then we came somewhere else and then we come back here because my father didn't like to stay either in one place.

Q: Do you remember being nervous or ever having a nice day or anything like that?

A: I didn't think of anything.

Q: So, did you have a sense when you thought maybe liberation was possible; it was going to be soon?

A: All we knew is that they caught a partisan and they hung him. You know what I'm talking? They found somebody, they hung them. That's all we remember. That's all we knew.

04:02:19

Q: You were very aware that there were Germans around. Were there bombings or anything like that?

A: No. I was saying to my husband. I don't know, they had the airplanes, the Germans, why didn't they bomb us. He has no answer, I have no answer. Do you have an answer?

Q: Tell me about your liberation, what happened? When was this?

A: In 1944. Uh-huh, 1944.

Q: The summer?

A: Summer.

Q: What happened? What do you remember?

A: Oh, I walked with the soldiers until we got to my town.

Q: Wait a minute, you didn't walk with the soldiers. They had to find you somewhere. How did you know you were liberated?

A: Well, we saw them. That we did. From where we were, we saw the highway and we saw the Russians and the Russians had, the infantry used to come to the bushes also and a lot of times you know a lot of people got killed from the Germans because the Germans they took over their uniforms and they walked through the same forest that we were. So, you had to be very careful. The first thing we saw, the, the Russians. First of all, we spoke Russian, so that was no problem as far as the language. When we tell them from where we are they saw us, you know. So I have no problem. We walked together all the way until we got into my town.

04:04:10

Q: Was this pretty exciting? I mean did you believe this?

A: How could it be exciting? You are pleased that you are alive and came back to town, but we had on both sides of the city two big graves that they made in the first time when the killing was and the last time, so how can you be so happy. You were pleased for the time being. I didn't know what was going to happen.

Q: What, do you remember what you did first now that you were free and you were back in your town?

A: What I did?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes. We saw each other, all my friends and everybody who ever had a house or the parents had a house, they moved into the house. The Gentiles did not have our houses yet. That's another story. So, we came there. Some of them were happy to see us and some of them were not happy to see us. But I, me personally, my father since he was making the uppers for the shoes he gave his sewing machine, he bought a sewing machine afterwards and he gave it to a Gentile who used to be a customer of his. And he came and got back the sewing machine. So, he started right away to work. So, they found us. He was the only one left, alive. There was no other ones so they used to come and ask him to make them something. After all, they didn't have the leather because where are they going to get? So, if the guy is from the farms used to have the leather or whatever they had. They used to come. My father used to make him the shoes and they used to bring us butter and milk and flour and oil. You

name it, and fish, everything. We had food up to here.

04:06:27

I had a baker's oven. Of course I was already 17 years old. I wasn't a baby, you know, but I used to make pancakes and I used to make things and I used to bake and if the Russian soldier were coming, you know, from one side and to the other side, I don't recall from where they came, I always had food to give. Even when my husband told you about the girls that he was running around, you know, the three or four girls, they were not in their town because they had nothing there. When they came to ours, our house was open. Each one got to eat. They can eat whatever they want. We had enough of everything. That I did. I have a girlfriend in Texas, Houston, Texas. We were together in the same hideout in the forest. She and her brother used to come -- her brother went to school with my brother and I went to school with her and I used to make two, three meals a day and they came. They had no mother, no father. They had a house but that's about all, but they had no access to anything and they had no money. You need, I don't think if you can get something with money. But, so, as far as that food, economical I had no problem.

Q: What was left of, was the town in pretty good shape?

A: Yes, the town was almost the same as we left.

Q: Did you start going to the synagogue again after the war?

A: You can go, you know, what the Russians did with the synagogue? They made it into warehouses.

04:08:47

Q: This was before the Germans came in?

A: They made it before and when they came after the Germans it was the same thing. Warehouses, not Temples. We couldn't go any place.

Q: Did you find an alternative way to practice your religion after the war or was that not important?

A: The Russians wouldn't let you. They'll arrest you, you're not supposed to.

Q: So not even secretly?

A: No. If you want in your own house if you want to say a prayer I suppose nobody can tell you not to, but outside forget it.

Q: So how long did you stay in your town after liberation?

A: In my town I stayed... We came, what? '44 in June, July, somewhere, in '44 until May the 27th or 25th of 1945. We got married in '45.

04:09:59

Q: How did you find each other?

A: Well, I had a girlfriend in a city, Baronovitch (ph), from my town, but her mother married into somebody from the other town so they lived there. She was with me in the forest too but she was in a different little forest or whatever it is. So, she was telling me, that Harold, my husband, is here in town, you know. So one time she caught him, she saw him, she talked to him and I came out. I stayed with her and we went to see him and he said hello and this and that and that's when it started. I used to and then in '45, yeah '45, we got married. I used to, I worked for a newspaper. I was a setter on the newspaper. A little paper from our town. He worked for the KGB. So they didn't let him move into my town and they didn't let me out to go to his town. So then they had the Russians said any Polish citizen that wants to go home can go, except my husband. So, my father went and registered him in my town. But they found that out. And they called him in and said, "Hey, what is this?," you know, and I couldn't go there. Well, anyway we ran away from there. We left my father and my brother there. My father was waiting for his brother that's coming from the front lines because he was being taken in the army. So, Harold wanted to leave so the second time around, he registered in a different way and we got out. They were chasing us, but we got out. Yup.

04:12:31

Q: Where did you go?

A: We went to Bialystok and then we went to Lodz. From Lodz we went to Austria.

Q: What was the plan here? You kept going to these different cities. Did you have a plan or --

A: No, you go. However you want to go you went.

Q: One day you said I think we'll go to Lodz today, no idea why?

A: No, there was organizations, you know, and they have stops here and there whatever it is. In the beginning when we came to, from Lodz, yeah, from Lodz, we went to what do you call it? Hungary. See we were supposed to travel as Greek Jews because as Polish Jews where are you going? You understand? We already passed up Poland so you cannot do it. Now what are you going to speak? There is Russians a lot and if you speak Russian they'll find out that you should be going back, you know. So anyway we were going as Greeks. You



see, so, we came to Hungary and the Jewish community there, it was very nice. They put us up where to sleep. They gave us food and we were supposed to go to Romania but the illegal, eh, the illegal, route to go to, eh, Romania, to go to Israel was closed. They couldn't do it. So, we went from Hungary, we went to Austria.

04:14:35

Q: Now, were you planning on going to Israel? Was that your goal?

A: Yes, we were going to go to Israel. And from Austria we walked to the Alps, yeah, yeah, yeah, with the packages, whatever we had left and we came into the English side and they put us up to sleep and then came the Israeli, it was the English Fifth Army, but they were made up of Israeli Jews. You understand? Okay. So, they were waiting for us by the border of Italy and they took us out from that little camp where we were and in closed trucks, you know, army trucks and they took us to Treviso. That's the first place we were in Italy. And when we came there let me tell you. That was a sight. They set up long tables, long, long tables with all kinds of gems and scrambled eggs and butter. We ate like pigs. We were hungry, you know what I mean for the people that came in Israel, eh, in Italy. And after that, they started to assort us where somebody wants to go or doesn't want to go, where they want to stay, you know what I'm talking. They had places where we could go, stay, you know. So, we chose to go in one place and this is how we came to Italy. We liked it there. It's very nice country, beautiful people.

Q: Were you traveling with other people or just you and Harold?

A: No, a whole group. Oh yeah.

04:16:42

Q: So, how long were you in Italy?

A: Oh, we came in in May, the 27th of May 1945 till 1948.

Q: Where were you living in Italy then?

A: Well, we were first if I tell you in a little place, Nonantolla (ph), Bologna, Modena. We were in Venice. We were in Milan, and my husband was a madrich. You know what a madrich? A head of a kibbutz. Then of course I got pregnant. They had a place in Florence that was like a little clinic. So, downstairs was the clinic and the upstairs had let's say, five rooms, ten rooms. I don't even remember. We had a nurse, Theresa. She used to take care of us. The doctor used to come once a week I think and see the women, pregnant women. No other women, but only pregnant women. And we stayed in Florence until we got a visa and we came to America.

Q: When you were living in Italy in these different cities, were you living in an apartment? Were you living in a community, a camp?

A: Villas.

Q: Did you meet up with other refugees, people who had come from the camps?

A: Oh sure, sure, there were a lot of people.

Q: Was this a surprise to you?

A: Well, I'll tell you something. We came in in '45 they just let out the concentration camps, so we knew that they are liberated, were liberated just now and we were liberated more than a year before. So it wasn't a-- I was surprised at that late, you know. Of course if the Russians wouldn't come to us, we would have to wait for the Americans. Who knows if we would be alive all together.

04:19:06

Q: So you met some of these people that came straight out of the camps?

A: Yes. And you had tables with people sitting at tables taking your name, who you are, where you are, where you're going, when you're coming, you know. So, and this is the way it was.

Q: Did you befriend any of these camp survivors?

A: No, because we were going from one place to the other until we didn't come to Italy. We didn't have any friends. Of course in Lodz, yes we had my cousin. He came there, another one came. I see, yes, I did see a few but not too many.

Q: But in Italy you saw them?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they in pretty bad shape?

A: No, they were not. The only one that was in bad shape was my uncle's brother that I recognized; I don't know how I did it. He came from Mauthausen and I told Harold, "There is my uncle's brother." He said, "You must be crazy." I said, "No Harold." He lived in, he got married in a different town so he used to come to my aunt. Once in a while if I was there I saw them, and sure enough it was him and we got together and he didn't walk away from us for nothing. After all, his brother is my uncle, so.

Q: It must have been pretty special to see him.

A: Let me tell you, in the camps, what they brought in from the concentration camps there were people that they were guards in the camps, you know, and they used to call them kapos. You heard the name kapos? They used to take -- the partisans used to take those guys and clobber them. That's right, and then they would give them away to the American soldiers and let them handle them. Yeah, yeah.

04:21:33

Q: This was in Italy?

A: In one place we must have slept maybe 500 people were in one room, a big one, a real big room. It was in Bologna or in Modena, I don't remember, and everybody slept on the floor. All 500 and somebody had to go to the washroom so they went, but then on the way back they don't know where their bunk is. Sometimes they came to the wrong place.

Q: So, for a while you were in a camp, until you got your villas?

A: Yes.

Q: You did stay in a DP camp for a little while.

A: Yeah, I don't call it a, yeah, a DP camp.

Q: Some sort of camp?

A: Yes. They gave you food to eat, you know. Yeah, they did.

Q: There you were with a lot of these concentration camp survivors?

A: Yes, we were mixed all together. I mean, there was no different --

Q: They had a very different story than you did?

A: Of course they did.

04:22:42

Q: Was it surprising to you?

A: No. Knowing what Hitler can do, I wasn't surprised of anything. But let me tell you one thing I know and I tell it to anybody, if you would not be fighting in a way, even though I didn't, I personally didn't fight, or some other people, but if it wouldn't be for the fighters, we

would not survived. They would have killed us one by one. That's why I believe that people should be ready and don't call me a, a killer. It's like, my husband says to me, "You're always afraid, even for a mouse. But you're not afraid for me. A fly you're afraid of, but not for me." That's how much but no, no, no. If you're going to sit and do nothing, nothing will happen, nothing will come good.

Q: How many of the people who left your town and went to the forest, did most of them survive?

A: No. No they didn't. Some of them got infections, gangrene, and died. Some of them had the typhoid and died, and some of them got killed in the battle fighting. So there it is.

04:24:20

Q: Okay, so you were in Italy, your original plan was to go to Palestine, but you came here.

A: My husband has, had two uncles, three uncles and an aunt in Chicago so we changed our mind and we came here.

Q: Let me ask you just a couple of questions.

A: Yeah, go ahead.

Q: After all of this, is it important to you to be Jewish? How do you feel about religion after all of this?

A: I am, I have mixed emotions. I really mean it. Why were we killed, for what? And if you ask the rabbis that were sitting along the highway to wait to be killed, yes, ask them, they used to say we are the fortunate because they are going. We're going to have a tough life left of us, you understand. So, that's why I said I don't know. Sometimes it's good and sometimes-- now I'll say that much. I'm not a worldly person. I'm not educated to the point, you know, where you can make a difference, but I think we Jews make our own problems. I got, even though I'm wearing glasses, I can see very far and very good. I really mean it. Tell me something. Now I'll ask you a question. How come three million of the Jews were from Poland? Hungary started in '43 they started to take them. Now why?

04:26:47

Czechoslovakia didn't have it as bad either in comparison to the amount of Jews they had there. Didn't die as many as by us. They didn't kill them as much. How come Poland's got three million and all the rest of the thirty little countries has three millions? Can you tell me? That's 31 countries. Well, that's a good question, can you answer me that? Well I don't know. I'm not that smart and if, maybe I'll tell you. Maybe this generation. See Polish Jews were different than the Jews from Russia, even though they were locked up. We were

different people, Hungary, Romania I don't know. Still better than Poland. Polish Jews I think are different all together, and I have a feeling this is why they killed three millions out of the Poles, Polish Jews. How come all the camps were in Poland? Most of the camps were in Poland. You tell me why? And why they did not take from our sides, from Ukraine and Byelorussiatat, you know, that part. They didn't take us to concentration camps. Some of them fell in so that by I don't know by what. They needed so many people or something and they took them from one place and then they shipped them somewhere else so that maybe they wind up in a concentration camp, but they did not come to this town and take out so many on a train or whatever it is and send them to concentration camp. They used to make in every city. You take Wilno, Pana (ph), Babi Yar, they killed them. I don't, you tell me why. Nobody can give me that answer.

04:29:05

Q: We have just a very little bit left on this tape. Is there anything else you want to say, you want to add to this?

A: What can I tell you? We Jews are used to the pogroms, and pogroms, and pogroms. All of Europe, you know. That's why we ran away from Europe all together. We didn't want that part. Italy was a beautiful country and they were very nice to the Jews, even during the war. If anybody had a business and left their manager run the business and if they did survive, they got back the store. What did you get in Poland? And everybody -- Russians are in Poland, Germany, what for? I would make it a cemetery there. It is. Anyway, a Jewish cemetery might as well be their cemetery too. Maybe I'm saying it wrong I don't know. I'm not so smart but that's the way I feel. I don't like violence. It's not good, but if somebody goes to kill me, I want to make sure I'll kill him first. This is my belief, but like I said. Nobody can give me an answer why three million Polish Jews got killed.

End of Tape #4

Conclusion of Interview