

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Bella Mischkin**  
**July 12, 1995**  
**RG-50.030\*0340**

## **PREFACE**

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## **BELLA MISCHKINSKY**

### **July 12, 1995**

Question: Why don't you start by telling us your name, your date of birth, where you were born, and perhaps you should give me your name at that time. If you want to also say I am--.

Answer: Okay, my name was Bella Maschinsky at that point, but I was born Bella Berger on September 9, 1922. I lived in Lodz, which is the largest industrial city in Poland. I had a little sister. My immediate family, father, mother, little sister and a whole slew of uncles, aunts, cousins and so on. And, I was going to school in Poland. I felt pretty much comfortable in Poland. Sometimes I wondered whether I was more Polish than Jewish or those things were parallel and did not have an affect personally on me. Also, I knew about anti-semitism and Poland did not touch me personally. I was going to school. I had lots of friends. I had Jewish friends, non-Jewish friends, and I was never directly involved in Judaism. Also, my grandparents were very religious. So, I felt okay in Poland, even knowing that there is anti-semitism, because Poles were anti-semitic from day one, probably before they are born they are anti-semitic. But it was not an obvious kind of thing I personally experienced. Until 1939, let --

Q. I just want to ask you a little more about your family life before we go on to the war. What kind of business you father was in?

A. My father was working. He was an insurance salesman. My grandfather had a factory which made bricks and my uncles were very involved in textiles. They were fairly comfortable off, not rich, rich like a lot of Jews in Lodz were, but they were comfortable. Politically, I was exposed to the discussions of my aunts and uncles. I had about four or five uncles and three aunts, and they all belonged to a different political group. They were zionists. My father was a \_\_\_\_\_, so Israel was not something he would think about or Palestine, at that

particular time. He felt we should be happy where we are and the whole \_\_\_\_\_ idea. He was the only one of the whole lot. I had one uncle who was very hasidic. You know, had the long \_\_\_\_\_ and the whole bit. So, I was always exposed to those discussions, even as a little girl. Not that I participated, I was not a joiner. I was not zionist, I was not a \_\_\_\_\_. I was just a happy go lucky young girl with friends and school, and that's how I related to life in Poland.

Q. Before 1939, were you aware of Hitler and Nazism?

A. I was aware of Hitler, oh, I would say '38 when the first surge of German Jews were just packed on the border of Poland. And the Jewish community Lodz, and I imagine some place else too, was very attuned to it, very charitable. So, they were trying to place those refugees from Germany, open kitchens, those people were dumped on the border without anything, just whatever they could carry. So, they tried to place them in homes and opened kitchens to feed them, and that's when I really became aware that that's what Hitler is doing. I heard about the crystal night, but I wasn't terribly into it. By end of '38, '39 I became petrified of Hitler because all of a sudden the anti-semitism in Poland, which was pretty dormant, flared up. So, we started to be called names and it became very uncomfortable and not reassuring to be a part of it. So, yes, that's when I really became aware of it, and before that I was really interested in Polish history. We were taught Polish history five times a week. Piercutsky (ph) was hey, God. When he died, I remember we had stay salute the portrait of him and tears were running down our eyes because oh, how her father almost died, which was an illusion, but I guess I was not that sophisticated at that time. So, I was aware, and the closer it came to '39 or the middle of '39 the more aware I was of it. Until the last week in August I was in the country with my little sister and mother and then we had to rush back to Lodz, disguised as non-Jews to our home because it

became very dangerous. By September 1, when war broke out, Hitler immediately ordered his troops, immediately overrun Lodz. It took two days and here they were. The Army I was so proud of, you know, the calvary with their white gloves and the beautiful pasture with the horses was disengaged and here we were under Hitler. And one law after the other followed in immediate succession. Schools were closed. People were dismissed from their work. We could no longer walk on the streets. We had to walk on the sidewalk. We had to put yellow stars on both hands and then fires broke out everywhere. And I can still smell, almost smell the synagogue burning and the Germans rounding up the men on the street, especially the ones with the beards and pafpins, we had a lot of them in Lodz. And they had to dance around and the Germans and the Poles were just looking at it with such joy and glee that it just shattered my mind and made me a very, very frightened person. All that was going on. I stayed under German Nazi rule in Poland until December of 1939, and at that time, the whole feeling was let's escape, let's go where he isn't. Poland was divided, at that time, in two parts. One part of Poland the Russians took over and one part the Germans took over, so the idea was to escape the part where the Germans are and go to the part where Russia is. So, one night we were sitting and people were just knock at the door, knock at the door, and men were taken out, women were taken out. It was just a fearful, fearful situation.

Q. What was going on in the streets? I mean did you pretty much stay home and hide out?

A. They couldn't because they were rushed out of their homes by the Poles and Germans.

They might come into a house and say all Jews out. Then they would surround the men and some of them were never heard of. There were men going to work, with pails of water cleaning the streets, and we were very easily recognizable because you had to wear a Jewish star. You could not go to a store and buy anything because it wasn't being sold to Jews, so there was a little

bit of hunger already. The predominant fact was the fear. Is my father going to go outside and ever come back? Am I am going to go outside and ever come back? Are they going to surround our apartment. It was the unknown of what they're going to do, but it was known that they were gong to do something.

Q. Was there obvious brutality in the streets?

A. Yes. The Hitler \_\_\_\_\_. We had a lot of Germans in Lodz, and the youngsters. "You there, you there, you there," you know back and forth with clubs, especially for the man it was worse than for the women. They were just using sticks, throwing stones. It was a free for all. There was no one to protect the Jews. We kind of became immediately second class people, not even citizens or a part of the community. By December we had a kind of family meeting and I just felt that I could not stay there. On other hand, the feeling was well, that's your home. You have a roof over you. You just don't walk out of the house, not in '39. People did it later, but not in '39. So, we made a decision that father and I are going to go on the other side to the Russians. We're going to find quarters, send for my mother and my little sister, and we'll establish some kind of roots away from the Germans under the Russian occupation. And that's what we did. That was middle of December '39. So, my father and I didn't look what they call the term, I didn't look Jewish. We took the stars off and we set out to go to the Russians. It wasn't a unique idea. Thousands of people had the same idea, and proceeded to go like that. Also, the Poles tried to go to the countryside rather than stay in the city, so you were facing moving sidewalks. People, people, people, moving with bags on their backs. Suitcases, horse and buggy, but it was just a moving stream of people, so we set out and our first direction was Warsaw. Now, I don't know if you're aware of how Poland was divided. But towards \_\_\_\_\_ that was part of Russia. So, we went in that direction, so our first stop was Warsaw Ghetto. We did not have a

Ghetto yet in Lodz so we were living in our own homes. When we got to Warsaw, found out that all Jews lived in a Ghetto. We sneaked into the Ghetto and it was a horror. Dirty, hunger, they were so much worse off than we were, and there was no place for us to stay or did we have a desire to stay. So, after being there two days, we sneaked out of the Ghetto and continued our trip to the Russian side. As we walked towards, not knowing exactly where we were going, but general directions, and since we were not unique, and there were hundreds and hundreds of people, you start talking to people. We found ourselves close to a family and they say well they are going to the Russian part too, and they have a maid who lives not far from the Russian border. They are going there and she is going to bring them over. We are free to join them. Well, that was a wonderful opportunity, since we didn't know where we were going, and so we joined the group of people. Sure enough, we got to the house of the maid which was not far from the border.

Q. How long had you been walking?

A. Oh, maybe two weeks. Maybe a week, something like that.

Q. In the winter?

A. Yes, well it was December. We get to the farm house and the maid greets them and also us with warmth and they have it all ready. They had a room ready for all of us and they were going to sneak in because it was still German occupation. They were sneaking in food for us in the evening, and then the first opportunity they have that they feel the road is clear, they are going to bring us over. I was observing the whole situation and it became very uncomfortable for me. I say, why does it take them so long. Something isn't right. And I was not wrong. We were there about two days and then in the middle of the night there is a knock. The doors from the place where we stayed on that farm, rip open and here is a German patrol escorted by the

maid and the rest of her family. We were in just one room, completely surrounded and the first thing was your money, your this, your that. So, father and I very quietly kind of went towards the door, and as they were so busy plundering the baggage, suitcases, we sneaked out, but I had nothing but the clothes I was wearing and so did father. We just blindly headed for the forest. It was dark, it was cold. We had no directions. I turned around, there is no father. So, I found myself in that forest not knowing quite where I am going but heading for the direction away from the farmhouse. I must have run all night. First I tried to find father, which was almost impossible. Well, I never did, and when daylight started I found myself on the outskirts of a little town. It was cold. I was hungry. I was upset. Putting it mildly, I was desperate, when a woman approaches me and she must have sensed that I was not from that part of town or country, whatever I was. She approaches me and says why are you on the street at that hour? That's not allowed. And I said, I was just attacked by the Poles and Germans and I was running. Where am I? She says, "Come with me." And she took me to her house. She was a Jewish woman who went to fetch some water and took a chance to get some water when the Germans and Poles aren't out, that's why she was on the street. She took me to her house, her home, if you can call it such. It was a one room house, one room living quarters, and she had three little boys and a very pious Jews, sitting there praying and she gave me a little bit of food. Put me right next to the stove and tried to find out from where I am, what am I doing and so on, and I told her that that's what happened to me. My intent is to go over to the Russian part of Poland. She says, well that's very hard, but I'll see what I can do for you. She evidently was -- I don't know what her position in that little town was, whether she was a rabbi's wife, but knew the community. She went at night, she went over and she came back and she says I'll give you a way to go over

to the Russians because I know people who do it all the time. They are smugglers. That's the trade they have.

Q. Were these Jewish smugglers?

A. Yes. I had nothing. I had no papers, no money, nothing literally zilch. She brought me over to the smugglers. They looked me over for some reason they say okay, we'll take you with us. So, I was very fortunate without the help of those strangers who stretched out their hand because they felt sorry for me or I just looked different to whatever they were, I can't explain it. But they were so kind. The smugglers took me with them. What they did were they were smuggling shoes, but just to assure themselves that nobody is going to grab from them what they grabbed from someone else, they first carried all left shoes, and then made the next trip with bags of right shoes and then the two bags got together and they had hundreds of pairs of shoes. But they worked with the Poles and Germans, so when they came around, the smugglers and I and the shoes went to a little \_\_\_\_\_ where German patrol was standing and under their direction we went over to the Russian part.

Q. Do you remember the names of these towns?

A. I don't remember the name. At one point I did remember and I wrote it down. It's \_\_\_\_\_ or something like that. It's a very small kind of town, and that's how I find myself on the Russian front.

Q. Now, being that there were all these smugglers and here you were an attractive 17, 18 year old girl, was that an advantage or did they try --?

A. No, I don't think they took any advantage of me being a pretty 17 girl at all. As a matter of fact, nobody did, in all of my encounters. I found kindness in a certain -- I don't know. They kind of spoke to me differently like feeling sorry for me and that's very unusual because you feel

sorry for someone when there is one, two, three, but there were hundreds of people like me. Maybe not all alone, but so I only had kindness from them. Then they had a place on the other side of the river where Poles were waiting and they collected their shoes, and then we parted company. The Poles even offered me to stay with them, and you know, you don't have to go any further, stay here. But, I wasn't trusting anyone. I took advantage of their kindness but never trusted them. So, then they went about their way and I continued. Now, I was on the Russian site, but I still had no money. I still didn't know where to go, and my recollection was that as we were still at home, my uncles took the route before us, and they were mentioning the city of \_\_\_\_\_ . So, I said I have to get to \_\_\_\_\_ , and maybe some how, some way, I had no address or no names of people, I contact them, find them. It's not unusual to meet people on the street, because everybody was walking. It took me two weeks to get to \_\_\_\_\_ . There was no transportation. I had no money for tickets so when a train was moving, I tried to jump on top of the roof and get a little ride and then people were always helping me. When I did get to \_\_\_\_\_ , it was a terrible disappointment which I could not understand it there, but I understood it a little later. Evidently, \_\_\_\_\_ was a central city, where all the people from the German part of Poland used to congregate. So, the city was over run with \_\_\_\_\_ so called. And they had no place for them. They had no heart for them. So, you couldn't get a glass of water if you did not pay for it. So, I spent a few nights on a bench. Finally, somebody said there is some people from Lodz congregating in that house and I run there and I couldn't stay there because again, for a little place on the floor you had to pay money, and I had none. So, there was a woman who said oh, I'll tell you, I just come here for business, but I live in a little town about 17 miles from \_\_\_\_\_ , and I am sure that you can go to school there because schools in Russia are free. That's what I wanted to do. She said come with

me, I'll take you there and you find out, maybe things will be easier for you. Since I had nothing to lose, I said okay. Not that I knew her before, and the transportation I remember clearly my journey from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. It had to be done by sled. There was no other way of transportation. By then it was January, and it was very, very cold. Sled rides, the people who were running the sleds, that's how they made their living, but they offered to take me without money. But, my legs were all frozen. I didn't have enough warm clothes and they were frozen for about seven, eight years until I got rid of it. Anyway, I get to that city of \_\_\_\_\_. She took me her home, and she says I'll introduce you to people who might help you and at that time that was the Russian part now.

Q. Is she a Jewish woman?

A. Yes.

Q. And at this point, you had lost all contact with your family?

A. Well, I had no contact with my mother and sister who were in the German part. I had no contact with my father whom I lost in the woods so I was all alone. So, when I got to that little town of \_\_\_\_\_, she right away, a small town, they say, oh there is a little girl who came from the German side. So, there was quite a congregation of people from that little town around and then there was one person who said I introduce you to the Russian commissar who is in charge of all the stores and his wife is taking care of children who have no homes and maybe somehow we can work something out that you can go to school, maybe find a job, and I had no place to go, I say okay I'll stay another day.

Then the next morning, they brought me into that Russian officer. She spoke Russian. I spoke Polish. The people around me spoke Jewish. I did not speak Jewish, but I understood it. So, he had a lengthy conversation with me the interpreter and he says, you stay here don't you travel

any further. I see what I can do for you. You come to my office tomorrow morning. And I said, your office, I don't speak Russian. I don't know really nothing. He said don't worry. So, I stayed another night at the household of that woman, and the next morning I got into his office and he said, okay, put me at his desk, wrote the Russian alphabet out for me and says you learn Russian and in the meantime I'll give you a salary. So, it was just unbelievable luck. To make a long story short, I stayed in the city of \_\_\_\_\_ until the German liquidated the Jews, but that's getting ahead of it.

Q. Why was he so nice, and how did you know who to trust?

A. Well, I trusted them as far as when I had no other choices. When I had choices, I did not trust them. Why did I trust him? I had no place to go, so why shouldn't I.

Q. And he was just a nice man?

A. He was just a nice man. He introduced me to his wife, to his children, and they were very helpful at their later day in that respect that the Russians were sending out all the people who got into the city of \_\_\_\_\_ after a certain day to Siberia. She put me on her list of the children who had no parents and didn't belong any place and that's how I was saved from being taken to Siberia.

Q. So, what did you do in this small town for all this time?

A. After a very short time, I learned the language and I worked for Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. That was the name of the guy and became the cashier of all the retail stores. A very prominent job. I got paid. I could afford to rent a finished room. I could afford to buy my food, and I was quite comfortable. The only thing is the Germans closed the borders between the Russian occupation part, and so I had no contact with what happened with my mother. I had no contact with what happened in Lodz. I didn't know what happened to the Jews. Nothing. We were just

completely shut off from any information. After all, the Germans and the Russians were buddy, buddy at that time. So, I was just all by myself, and I was working and except not knowing and not having a way to know life kind of stabilized for me. I couldn't go to school because that's true, school was free, but board and food and everything else was not. So, I stayed in that town until \_\_\_\_\_ when Germany invaded the Russian part of Poland after they had that pact. And again, the Germans marched into \_\_\_\_\_ in a very short time it's true, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ said, "Bella, we are skipping town. We are going further to Russia. Please do come with me. Come with my family." And I said no. I had the memory, or so I thought, of what it meant to just travel from city to city and not having a place. I didn't think I could face it again. So, I was not willing to give up the room that I had. The Germans were not there yet. Memories are sometimes short. So, I opted not to go with him.

Q. One question. When this area was under Russian control and you were living there, were Jews allowed to be Jews openly? Was there any problem with that?

A. Yes.

Q. And they knew you were Jewish?

A. Oh, yes. That was never questioned. The only thing, since it was so close to the actual Russian border, they did not want refugees there, that's why I was not sent out because

\_\_\_\_\_ took me under his wing, but a lot of people were sent out into deep Russia.

Because that was not a very good element for them, and they wanted to get rid of them. So, I stayed. But then on June 21, when the Germans invaded the Russian part --

Q. 1941?

A. 1941. So, I would say I had a year of fairly comfortable living. I made friends. I met everybody. Everybody was nice to me. I had a salary. I had a job. It was lonely but I was free

of the Germans. Until that June 21, the Germans came very fast, very swift. The second day they were there, they surrounded all man of the little city. It was a \_\_\_\_\_ get a shovel, get some food for three days. We have to build roads. Almost everybody just signed up, so it became a city of women. All men left and were never heard of again. As I was sitting in my room, there was a very kind lady who said, "Look, the Germans are here. You cannot stay by yourself. You come and live with me." I knew her son. I never met her but I knew her son, and I knew her daughters and I said, "No, I cannot do it. You have --." She said, "I don't want to hear any different." She was a very energetic person. She says, "Come on. Get your possessions." I didn't have much, so it wasn't a problem of sorting what I take, what I leave. I had very little, and she took me to her household. Her name was Mrs. Pollock. She was just the most wonderful, wonderful person that I have ever met in my life, and I met lots of people, and lots of people who are helpful to me, but she was just wonderful. She had lots of contacts through the farmers. She used to put her babushka on and get into the farm and bring some bread and share it with me, like she shared it with her daughters. There was never a difference. She was just great.

Q. These were Jewish people?

A. Yes. As I was working, I made contacts with non-Jewish people too, and they were very nice, very helpful, very friendly. Most of the people were always very friendly towards me.

Q. When you refer to this as a city of women, you're talking about just the Jewish area?

A. Well, we weren't in the Ghetto yet.

Q. But the men who were taken away were just Jewish men?

A. Just Jewish men. Well, I don't remember exactly the period of times we could stay in our homes, then it comes that all Jews go to a Ghetto in \_\_\_\_\_. There was no question

for her that I go wherever she goes. So, we had about a week's time I think to find quarters.

They just gave us a few houses separated them and then all the Jews from spread out towns had to go to a Ghetto. That was my first experience and exposure to a Ghetto.

Q. About how many people were in this Ghetto?

A. I would just have to take a rough -- maybe 8,000. I wouldn't want to be quoted on it because I don't know, but it was a small town to begin with, and the Jewish population wasn't that tremendous. There was not an outright anti-semitism felt because it was spread out. So, I really don't know, but I do know that she found quarters. Every family had to find where to live, so she found a house where there were two sisters living and they had two rooms and a kitchen and then she had a mother, Mrs. Pollock. So, it was her mother, myself, her two daughters, and she, we all moved into that two room apartment. Life in Ghetto wasn't terrible because the people who were in charge of the Ghetto had a certain kindness about them and a certain understanding. So, those are Jews in the Ghetto and then there are Germans outside. They have to abide orders in order for the Germans not to storm the Ghetto. But their idea was how to help the Jewish population who was there. So, yes, we did have police and we did have a Judenrot, but they were a part of the Jewish community of the Ghetto, which was not true in other Ghettos. We were supplied our food from Wilno, the Wilno Ghetto was our main headquarters, you could say. We stayed in the Ghetto and I found a job for a German commandant of \_\_\_\_\_ as a cleaning woman or cleaning girl, but she did have a German who took care of his needs. I was just a helper of the German soldier, and he too was very kind. I never felt any abuse or anything like that.

Q. You went outside of the Ghetto every day?

A. Yes, I went outside of the Ghetto to work. Lots of people did.

Q. Was this a sealed off Ghetto?

A. It wasn't closed. It was sealed off but people were going to work and coming back from work so there was contact. Of course there was a lot of barter, and it wasn't a very strict kind of situation. There was also hunger already creeping in. We had to give all our possession, the gold, furs, whatever the Germans collected that. Somehow, I found amazing through my whole experience, they demanded that they give all your jewels away, and it was hard to part with it so you gave it away. You wouldn't think of flushing it down the toilet or anything like that, but it was yours and you couldn't do it. At that point, we knew that the Wilno Ghetto had a lot of actions, that a lot of people were being killed and taken away and the Judenrot had to submit the people. The Germans never entered the Ghetto. They just gave the Judenrot a list, today I need 100,000 people or 10,000 people, whatever the transfer was. And one day, I remember clearly, the Wilno Judenrot put a request towards \_\_\_\_\_, that the Jews of \_\_\_\_\_ have to supply 1,500 people, and the Judenrot of \_\_\_\_\_ said no. We are not doing it. So, after two days, the contingency from Wilno Ghetto came to \_\_\_\_\_ and said, look, we just struck a bargain with the Germans. Instead of 1,500 people you give us 400 people elderly people, whatever. You give us a list. We want to grab them and then we continue our life as it is. Well, they did get 400 older people under the pretext that they're going to be relocated and not far from \_\_\_\_\_ they put them all in not a barrack, but a farm house -- a barn and just set fire to it, and all the 400 people were burned. Now, those were people that we all knew, but that was the only time that they got any people from \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. How did you get information about what was going on in Wilno and \_\_\_\_\_?

A. Well, people were kind of sneaking out, coming back, going, and so it wasn't a very precise information, but things started to filter through. Most of the stories were not believed.

So, we did get kind of a feeling what was going on in Wilno. Not precisely but one day we got a decree that \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto is being liquidated. It's time for \_\_\_\_\_ to become \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. About when was this?

A. '42 probably because '43 I was in \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. Was it liquidated in April '43, does that make sense?

A. When I got to \_\_\_\_\_, I thought maybe April '43 yes because I was in Wilno a short time.

Q. But you're saying in the \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto, you really didn't have actions and all sorts of reprisals against the people and roundups?

A. No, because the Judenrot -- the only roundup was the 400 people.

Q. So, you felt moderately safe there?

A. Yes. Kind of life took it's own tone so to say.

Q. Were there any activities in the Ghetto? Were there schools for the children?

A. No, it was a small community. If I said 8,000 maybe I exaggerated the amount because there was a lot of people coming in from the neighboring little farms. They were all put into \_\_\_\_\_, but I made some friends. So, people were going out to work, coming. It was not-- you didn't feel the Germans' hand very strongly, and people were helping each other a lot. They were just such unusual kind of people that it's unbelievable to describe. But I have such warm feeling towards every one there. They all embraced me. I embraced them. We used to after work, get into somebody's room and talk and it wasn't any special activity. There were small grounds, but kind of life progressed day by day. Mrs. Pollock used to go out on the farm at night, come back bring some flour, get some bread. Never did she make me feel that I am taking

food away from her children. Not for one second. There were times, before I got my job, that they were saying we need 100 girls to build roads, she would send her daughters instead of me. She felt I'm too delicate for it. I mean she was just so terrific.

Q. And the Jewish police who are guarding the Ghetto, would let people come and go?

A. Well you had to have permission. It wasn't just free-- because we were not allowed to walk the streets.

Q. Not even in the Ghetto?

A. In the Ghetto, yes.

Q. But you said this woman would go out at night to the farms. Did she sneak out or the people just didn't look?

A. She sneaked out.

Q. And if the policeman saw her, they turned the other way?

A. She made sure nobody sees her.

Q. When you were working for this German in town, did you learn anything special that you might not have learned otherwise?

A. No, just the Jewish star.

Q. You didn't hear them talking about anything?

A. No. I was treated decent, but I was not a part of -- I very rarely had any contact with the commandant I was working for. That was not my place. I wasn't a member of that family. I was just doing the work, and it did give me an opportunity if I was to go and bring water which was in the next house, we didn't have running water, and then they were friends of mine, the Poles, and I used to sneak into their house, and they used to give me a slice of bread which I could bring back to the Ghetto. So, there was still some contact with the outside world.

Q. Now, you said you were learning little by little what was happening in Wilno. Did you have any knowledge of what was happening in the camps in Poland?

A. No, not at that time. So, when they liquidated the \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto, what they did is they took the Jews from the \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto and send them to a different so called camp. I don't remember the name of it. It was not a barn, a big house. It was clean, clean barracks, but I found so confining, no freedom to move, no way to escape. Nothing, so I discussed it with Mrs. Pollock and said, "Look, I can't stay here. I feel choked. I am going to go to the Wilno Ghetto." And the people who were going to the Wilno Ghetto to bring products for that camp, \_\_\_\_\_ was the name of the camp.

Q. This is before the Ghetto was liquidated or right after?

A. No, no. Right after the Ghetto was liquidated we were sent to \_\_\_\_\_, and I stayed there about three days. There was no distribution of work or nothing, but it was like living in a big open place and no where to escape. I was always fearful of putting my whole life in one kind of place. Even before the Ghetto \_\_\_\_\_ was liquidated, I worked with a gentlemen during the Russians, a Pole, an elderly man. And when he heard that the Ghetto is going to be liquidated \_\_\_\_\_ he came to the gates when I was going to work and he said, "Bella, please come with me. I settle you. My cousin's farm far away from here. Nobody would know. I'll just introduce you as my niece." You see, I spoke perfect Polish. It was very hard to detect that I am Jewish. And I was thinking back and forth, and back and forth, and then in the last moment, before we were sent out, I said no. Again, I would not put myself fully under any family's control. So, I just went with Mrs. Pollock to \_\_\_\_\_ and then I made contact with the guys who were going for provision to Wilno and I said, "Hey, buddy, would you take me to Wilno?" And they said okay, but you'll have to be very quiet. We'll put you on the

bottom of the truck. We'll put straw over you and then we'll sneak you into Wilno. So, the next morning, early in the morning, I went on the truck, and I went to Wilno. As luck would have it, at that particular time, the German officers were at the gates of the Wilno Ghetto, and they poked the truck and here I come out. So, the Wilno police, who had no idea, kind of whisked me away from them and brought me into the Ghetto and put me into that jail. Somehow I got away from the Germans thanks to their alertness or whatever. So, I was in the jail for about a day and a half, and I was interrogated. Why am I coming here. What do I want here, and so on and on and what am I going to be, and what am I going to live on. There was Jewish police woman and she was from Kovno. She said, "Oh, let her go. I'll take her to my house." So, again, luck was just unbelievably with me. She did take me to her quarters and kind of took me under her wing. She was a sweet young lady. She had a mother and two sisters and a little brother and I certainly was not welcome in their house, because I took another little space away.

**End of Tape 1**

## Tape 2

Q: I'm going to back track a little and ask if you had any knowledge of the \_\_\_\_\_ group who were operating in that area?

A. Yes, I do, I did. At that time, because history was repeating itself, the same kind of Germans I saw in Lodz. The same kind of groups were entering the city of \_\_\_\_\_, surrounding houses. Everybody out, men out. They were wearing those black uniforms, and they were a petrifying force. You know that if they leave and you're still alive, just count your blessing. It's your happy hour. There was never any assuredness that once you are surrounded them that you will escape from their clutches. It was never your choice. They either had enough people, or got what they wanted and left, but you really had no control over it. If they were looking for men or they suspected somebody was hiding, they didn't hesitate to enter the homes and bang around and look around and you're just standing there like a little mouse, or a big mouse, whatever.

Q. Were these organized groups or just bands of thugs. Were they all Germans?

A. Well, no. They were pretty organized, very disciplined, very impressive and their posture and their self assurance. I mean they were the Lord and Masters. What they were before, we had no knowledge. We just found out what kind of people were there, but they were the heros of the world. They had the power over that bundle of nothing, because the Jews became nothing. See, we stopped being human beings. So, yes, we were aware of them.

Q. How did you know these were the \_\_\_\_\_ group, and did they have local auxiliaries?

A. Well, the soldiers were not in the city. Soldiers were fighting the front. Those were special groups with one purpose, round up the Jews. They were wearing different kinds of uniforms. There was one group which was wearing the brown uniforms. That was a \_\_\_\_\_, they were working on construction of roads. When they used to come in, and ask for people, you were pretty much assured that you are just going to go for a day, work on the roads and come back. When the \_\_\_\_\_ group came, you didn't think you would ever come back.

Q. Did they have local support?

A. Not in \_\_\_\_\_. They had it everywhere else starting from Lodz to whatever, they had full local support.

Q. How did you learn what happened to these people who were taken away?

A. Well, first of all, many a times they used to take another group of people from the Ghettos. That became more clear in Wilno than in any place else because that's where the mass destruction took place. In \_\_\_\_\_ it was just a group of men, you know. But somebody had to dig the graves and somebody had to cover the graves, and the Germans weren't going to do it. So, people were called to go to work and sometimes sneaked back they were telling tales and to us they were just tales, because no that couldn't happen, wouldn't happen, didn't happen. It took quite a few years until the real idea penetrated to everybody that that's what the Germans do. That they were such masters in psychology because sometimes when they round up people for work, the people really went to work. Sometimes when they round up people for work, the people were going to killing grounds. You never knew what's what. So, they kind of dulled your senses and there was always the hope, so you'd just go like cattle to the grave. That was that massive in Wilno-- in \_\_\_\_\_ that it became very pronounced in Wilno.

Q. In \_\_\_\_\_ were you aware of any efforts to the people to get away to form a resistance group, anything like that?

A. No, not really in \_\_\_\_\_. Resistance towards what? Get away where? It was not that time to escape so where do you go? Who is going to help you? There was no place to go.

Q. In all the time that you were there, you've now been away from your family a few years, what went through your mind?

A. Through my mind that my family is probably no longer is alive. That's the more I was exposed to the politics and the behavior of the Germans towards the Jews, the more I knew that the chances for any of us to survive are not tremendous. So, I really didn't think that my family is alive, and I really did not choose to have a picture of how they died because it wasn't very clear in my mind either, how. Did they come and round them up in Lodz like they did, the people when I witnessed it. Did they take another turn. I had no idea. I didn't know much about the Lodz Ghetto, either. I knew about the Warsaw Ghetto. I was there, but not the Lodz Ghetto. Interesting that after the war, and I'm ahead of my story, I found out that almost each Ghetto was operated on a different wave length. There were different methods with different people, different way of administration, it was just not known to me then. I knew how the Wilno Ghetto operated because I was there. I knew how the \_\_\_\_\_ operated because I was there, but I didn't have a scale of comparison at that time. So, lots of the things especially of other Jewish communities and how they handled their killing grounds and their being alive, I found out later but not then. I still am talking about Ghettos, which is quite different than concentration camps.

Q. This is probably a strange question, but by thinking that your family was probably not alive any more, did that free you at all from having to worry about then and think about them?

A. No, it did not free me from thinking about them, but it freed me for independent action. I can move around. I can hide in the doorway or not hide in the doorway. I don't have to worry well if I hide and my little sister and mother are in the room upstairs, I have a certain responsibility, So, yes, I was free. There were a lot of people who had family. I was more lonely, I was more not belonging, but I was freer. And I used that freedom later on in many occasions. Yes, and I probably used it in \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto. Would I be with my family, Mrs. Pollock wouldn't take care of me. She wouldn't find a place for me. Maybe my family would, but we were not natives of that particular place, so I can't weight it, but if you can put it in those terms, there were certain advantages of being alone if you found helping hands from other people. I was not just an island by myself. I could have never done it without their help of strangers, who really didn't want any reward.

Q. So, you went into the Wilno Ghetto?

A. I went into the Wilno Ghetto, and that young lady befriended me. What I didn't do in the Wilno Ghetto, which was required, I did not register. So, I wasn't on any lists, but by now some people who are \_\_\_\_\_ before and they were living there so I was kind of a free agent, but I did not register. So, when the actions came, I was not on the list.

Q. And you knew this? This was intentional?

A. Yes. And I knew at that point enough people who would say there's going to be an action. I knew a lot of policemen because young men or women were policemen and some of them were more devoted to the cause very important were their jobs, and other ones just let functionaries because it's necessary. So, I remember at least three or four actions where people were lined up and I was warned they're going to round them up. Twice I stayed in the city because I had a job outside the city. I stayed not on my job. I couldn't do that, but I knew there

was an empty apartment in the building where I was working. So, instead of gig back to the Ghetto, I just crawled under a bed in that apartment. The next day I just crawled out and was back on the job. I couldn't do it if I would have obligations towards my family. Would I rather not have a family and have that freedom? No, but that wasn't my choice. At other times there was actions in the Wilno Ghetto, and they were very often. Anyway, it worked. The Germans gave the commandant, \_\_\_\_\_ was the commandant of the Wilno Ghetto, gave him a list that many thousand people he needs today, next week, next month, whatever the case. I was hidden in a policemen's room when he was on duty, I wouldn't say room -- cubical, but I had to be a quiet as could be because that place, the other Jewish police would not come because it was the policemen quarter. So, I might lie under the bed for two days. Again, I was lucky, fortunate at one of the actions, especially the last liquidation when the police had no control I watched the Germans when they finished with one building, I kind of got into the building where they finished getting everybody out. So, no, it wasn't a calculated kind of action, it was spontaneous, whatever the situation was, and I was getting away with it. Lots of people did not.

Q. You were doing this on your own?

A. Well, I had nobody else. Well, when I say on my own, yes, but there was always someone helping a little bit. Like if I knew someone who knew there was going to be an action that particular day. I did what I did on my own.

Q. You didn't hide with other people?

A. No.

Q. Were there actions all the time? I mean was it a pretty fearful place to live in Wilno?

A. Very. Very, very fearful, very insecure, and I really didn't belong any place so I didn't have a permanent place so to say. Yes, so it was very fearful and I had no money. I didn't know

influential people, and that always helps. There was a lot of it going on. I imagine you could buy out your place on an action. I was a newcomer to Wilno and again, the same policy, let's get rid of the Jews who came later here, who came from the surrounding areas. So, yes, it was a very fearful place to live. There was also a group of people from \_\_\_\_\_ in Wilno who were very involved in the resistance of the Germans. And, I guess it was a fairly large group, but the majority of the inhabitants of the Ghetto did not want to rock the boat as long as somebody else goes out of the Ghetto, let's not get the Germans in because then we are all going to be destroyed. Well, they had different views of it, and it was even argued then. Is it right for \_\_\_\_\_ to get his police to round up that many Jews because the Germans wanted and they assured you the choice of who was going to go will be yours and not the Germans at random, or should we just the hell with that, fight it out. The majority of the population of the Ghetto did not want an uprising.

Q. They supported \_\_\_\_\_?

A. Yes. And they opposed the groups who wanted to arm themselves and they really opposed it because that was a fear. The Germans find out, they enter the Ghetto, and we'll all going to be destroyed. So, I am not passing judgment. I'm just telling you what the mood was.

Q. Were you involved in any resistance?

A. I personally was not involved in any resistance. I was involved in nothing. I was just trying to survive without harming anyone, but I knew a lot of people who did.

Q. The people that you knew who were involved in resistance activities, what sorts of things were they doing?

A. First of all, they were trying to get out of the city and bring ammunition in to the Ghetto. When the Ghetto was in the process -- very shortly before the whole Ghetto was liquidated, they

-- I don't know if I'm going ahead or not-- but anyway, that group set against -- you compile your lists if you believe that that might save any Jews but don't touch us. And they all collected in one building with all their ammunition and it was a known secret to everyone that that place belongs to that so-called underground. It no longer was underground, but that's where they sat and they set the guns if the Germans ever come into that building and touch that house, we let loose. The Germans respected it. They didn't touch it. Well, eventually they did. They had all the time in the world, you know.

Q. Was this a fairly large group?

A. I wouldn't think so. Not enough to do more damage to the Germans. I have to die, if you Germans would die, but there was a much larger group that did not want to resist the Germans knowing how hopeless it would be. And I believe against this, and probably other commandants too, that as long as he can keep the Germans out of the Ghetto there is a chance of saving one, two, five, twenty Jews. But \_\_\_\_\_ was married to a non-Jewish person, and really could have stayed there. He eventually was killed, but two or three or days before the Ghetto was liquidated they called him to headquarters and evidently said they're coming into the Ghetto if he doesn't supply whatever, and he said enough is enough, so they just got rid of him. Then they stormed the Ghetto.

Q. Daily life in the Ghetto?

A. That depends on the times. When the actions were going to take place or were taking place or shortly after they took place, there was a very depressing mood, very frightened, very scared. Then, as I say the Germans were wonderful in allowing your feelings. Life was kind of normal for a Ghetto life. You used to go to work. You used to come home. If you were a young

group of people, there was a cafe on the corner and the young people used to gather together and sing some songs, until the next episode would take place.

Q. Were there cultural activities?

A. Not organized cultural activities, not that I was aware of, and I certainly have no claim of knowing everything that was going on in the Ghetto. I was I imagine a pretty narrow minded person myself, but from what I knew it was rather spirit building. We're still alive, we cannot sit still and think, not the younger people. And if I remember correctly, there was in that little cafe was a I remember the number was 31, the name of the street probably will come back to me, and it kind of lifted your spirit up, because none of us really believed that we are going to survive it. So, there were love affairs going on. Whatever normal does in normal circumstances under abnormal circumstances. The ethical standards were not the same. There was no code of ethics. There was none of that.

Q. Why do you say that? What does that mean?

A. It means that things you would do when you were brought up in nice homes before the war, there were things you wouldn't do. You wouldn't make love so easily.

Q. What else?

A. I don't know. Just the whole outlook of did you hear that was taken on an action, this one -- it wasn't as bad as it became later. So, there was still kind of a measure, can I help you, or this one instead of that one justifying witnessing certain actions. That was not normal behavior. So, you tried to keep some feel of sanity knowing that it's not the same as outside. I mean you don't buy your life for money. I mean you don't do that outside. You might very easily do that in Ghetto if you can help it.

Q. Did you steal from other people, tell on your neighbors?

A. Sometimes you would do that, yes. It became much more pronounced later on. Ghetto still had some semblance, and I use that word very cautiously, of family life. So, yes, there was a police over you. There were some zealous policemen if you were not supposed to have onions in your house and they found a piece of onion on the floor or a crumb, yes, you would be denounced. You would be punished. Is that normal behavior, you know? So, other ones tried to say-- but there was still some family life. I didn't have one. I belonged no place, but lots of people did.

Q. You had a social life?

A. What social life. I was just floating around. I had no roots. I had no responsibilities, and I did not get involved in any underground, so I went to work and said well, what do I do tomorrow. How do I escape the next day or how do I survive the next day. So, it was a very selfish kind of existence.

Q. What about institutions in the Ghetto, like hospitals or soup kitchens, did that kind of thing exist?

A. Not in the Wilno Ghetto. Not to my knowledge.

Q. It didn't have the organization that some of these other Ghettos has?

A. I don't think. I am not aware of it, and I think I would have been aware of it. Who would support that soup kitchen? There were no supplies coming in. There was no funds.

Q. What about hunger, disease, things like that?

A. Yes, hunger was becoming more and more pronounced because as I said it was semi-normal. A lot of products were brought into the Ghetto by the people who did not live in the Ghetto before and there was a lot of bunkers and people were hiding things. But then there were people who just got the normal rations and they were not very big. So, yes, hunger was there.

Q. Were people sick?

A. People were sick. People were hungry. People were unhappy, their heads were always down. It was just how do I survive. How do I survive every day living and how do I survive the outside world.

Q. I'm trying to picture this. If I were looking at the streets of the Wilno Ghetto, not during an action, but just on a day, what would I see?

A. You would see people milling around and moving around. Just lots of people small quarters. Wilno Ghetto was not tremendous and not necessarily dressed up, and not necessarily friendly and not necessarily -- just different needs and when you would go on the Wilno streets outside the Ghetto, those were lovely streets, lovely people. And you occasionally might see Jews because when the Jews were going to work, they were going through the streets of Wilno, but not on the sidewalks. They all wore stars. They all were being led by someone. So, you did see it, so whoever tells you we didn't know just is lying. You could not not know. So, that's just a cop out and the majority of the population believes this statement. I just read an interesting -- it's not my own quotation, but somebody wrote it in a book. That when you hear today or heard after the war how helpful the outside population was, how many thousand helpful people there were, it is very surprising that even one single Jew was killed.

Q. Was there much observation of religion in the Ghetto?

A. Individually, yes. People became a little bit more religious looking for help. There was no help from the outside world, so they were looking for help from God.

Q. Was this done in families or were there actually prayer houses?

A. No, families, as far as I know.

Q. What kind of work did you do when you were living in the Wilno Ghetto?

A. When I was in the Ghetto I was working in a household, cleaning. That was usually a very good job. It was not on the street, it wasn't in a factory, so those were plum jobs.

Q. How did you get it?

A. I knew someone who needed ten people because he was in command of and he said, "Hey Bella, I'll put you on that." I said great.

Q. So you were working for a Lithuanian family, a German family?

A. I'm trying to remember because I didn't work very much because I had no connections so occasionally I used to get a job. It was a German family.

Q. How long were you in the Wilno Ghetto?

A. A few months. Not very long, but I was one of the last ones to leave the Wilno Ghetto.

Q. How did the end come about, can you tell me?

A. The end came about when \_\_\_\_\_ refused the last remnants of the Jews.

Q. How many people are we talking about that were still in the Ghetto approximately?

A. I would say approximately 2,000. Then the Germans came into the Ghetto and they started rounding up Jews at random. At that point, I tried to avoid them, found myself in some bunker. People were building precautionary places. I found myself in a bunker. I stayed there overnight until the next morning when the actions were going on upstairs, I was downstairs, and the next day everybody was chased out. We were brought to a big market, and we found there people who were chased out the day before right there assembled. So, we were the last remnants of the Ghetto. I saw the trains ready marked for Auschwitz, cattle cars ready.

Q. How did you know Auschwitz?

A. Well, at that point, we're talking about 1943. We knew about Auschwitz. We knew about Pornaty. I don't know whether you know what Pornaty was. Before the ovens were

working, and before it was beautiful organized mechanized, they used to get people from the Ghetto. They had a transport bring them to the forest of Pornaty. Those dug their own graves and then they had to line up and were killed there. All of a sudden the Germans found an enemy. Not from the dead or the living, but the whole grounds lifted up. They could not absorb all that blood and whatever, so those thing had to be dug out. Those were the Jews from the Ghetto were brought in, dug out the graves and put some petroleum and burned it. We were fully aware of what Pornaty was.

Q. As people came back?

A. Some of them snuck out. Some of them were killed, stayed there in the grave for two days until they dug themselves out until they got back home, the Ghetto. So, at that point we were fully aware that there is only one way for the Jews, that's gas chambers. And that was after the \_\_\_\_\_ conference, after the solution of how to take care of the Jews. So, there really is not much hope. There certainly wouldn't be much hope that anybody is going to help you.

Q. You got information about this?

A. Right. That was at that point and when the first people came from Pornaty and told us what happened, there was total disbelief. No human being can do that to another human being. No human being is going to allow them to do that. So, illusions. So when the Wilno Ghetto was liquidated, that must have been September '43 I think, those people were all -- it was warm, hungry, thirsty, frightened, Germans were all around with their dogs, and then they marched through the gates started. Came my turn, there were two SS men pointing left, right, which is standard procedure as we're going. I happened to be pointed to go right. Just the same, there was a small group of very young girls, the majority was going left and was put on the trains and

off they went and new trains came and off they went, and we just stayed there. Then we were put on a truck and that was my last view of the population of Wilno.

Q. How many people were with you?

A. 200 out of 2,000, 4,000. Why me? I don't know. We didn't know where we were going, but you were just going. Whatever he said, left or right, that's where you went. You were brought in on that truck and then after a while we were loaded into a cattle car and the doors closed and we were just taking off. We had no idea where we were going. The doors never opened. We weren't fed. The situation in the cars was horrible. People became just wild. No air, no food, little human dignity left. You know, two or three days -- once they stopped the cars and brought some buckets of water in, and that probably was a bigger disaster than not having water. I don't know, because the worst element of your personality was coming throughout. After about three days, I would guess, of that voyage, the doors opened up and everybody \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, so you just jump out of the cars and I was faced, and the rest of the people with me was faced with a group of German soldiers with bayonets and some kind of a forest. Now, my thought was knowing what happened in Pornaty, that that's the end of it. Now, they're just going to get rid of us. They didn't. After everybody was out, we all of a sudden see some people in striped uniforms, and they speak Jewish and they say don't worry you're \_\_\_\_\_. They brought us that group of people, which they brought on the train, the cattle car, they brought us to a barn with straw then all of a sudden this creature comes through the barn, starched white blouse, red kerchief, black pants with a whip in her hand and here we are a bundle of nothing. I mean, just unbelievable impression. Well, we did get to \_\_\_\_\_ to the concentration camp of Heidelberg, unknown to me at that time, but made known to me later that as we were on the Wilno grounds, the commandant of the \_\_\_\_\_ concentration camp called

the commandant and said, "Hey, I killed all my women in \_\_\_\_\_ and now I have 200 hands to work. Do you still have some available?" And he did, and I was one of them, so I got myself to \_\_\_\_\_ instead of Auschwitz.

Q. So you arrived in \_\_\_\_\_?

A. Right. And that whole group, they were only women, no men. The next day they wrote our numbers and that was the point where I stopped being a person and became a number. The whole set up life changed. There were no more family units. It was just a group of inhabitants, or a group of Jews, eventually for slaughter. We stayed in that barn for about two days, until we were named, and in the meantime a group of people were selected for work, and the type of work that all suitcases was closing had to be sorted and put away. I was chosen for that job too, so it was a group of I don't know, twenty girls, something. Then, the next morning, the ones who were there the day before were selected for the same job. And that eventually became my job.

Q. Was there any particular way you got chosen for that?

A. I would say it would be random. In the meantime, once we all got numbers, and I remember mine like today, it was 5633. We were put into barracks. Everybody was assigned a place, and our clothes were taken away. We got striped clothes and we became full fledged inmates of a concentration camp. There were other people in that camp, people that got there before us. They were not \_\_\_\_\_ women because they were killed off. There was some German women and there was some German men. Then the selection of work started. Again, you had an entirely different hierarchy. No longer did you have a Judenrot. The people in charge of us were Germans -- not Germans, soldiers, but prisoners of war, criminals, people who were sent to concentration camps for crimes committed, and all of a sudden they became the elite

of the --snapping their fingers. They could do whatever they pleased. Power thirsty and just brutes, real honest to goodness brutes.

Q. In what way?

A. Abusive, beating, snap command because they were dealing with vermin, not human beings anymore. They were just outright criminals. The guy that was in charge of the camp, Mr. Ickes, was there for killing his wife and her boyfriend. There were other ones. Some of them were political prisoners. They were nicer. The difference with them was they were all wearing little triangles, the black triangles designated one crime. Then we had the commandant who was a German SS. We had some German SS supervising some internal functions of \_\_\_\_\_. And then we had some Jewish supervisors supervised by German guards who were working outside the camp. \_\_\_\_\_ really was not a camp, it was a collection camp. They used to bring Jews from Germany. It was an interesting place when you learned later about geography and happenings. \_\_\_\_\_ was a very important place. The Germans did not do their killing on German grounds. They exported the Jews and the minute they left the borders of Germany, they no longer were German citizens and they just joined the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Jewish work. So, anyway, we had columns of people going out to work, different kind of work. There were factories in \_\_\_\_\_ who needed cheap labor. There were all kind of things, and then there were places where the Jews who came into \_\_\_\_\_ were selected and sent to other little concentration camps where they slept and ate and again were under other supervision, but they all belonged to that \_\_\_\_\_ headquarters. I stayed in \_\_\_\_\_ headquarters. That became my home. I was not sent out to work. I had a permanent job in the so called \_\_\_\_\_. I used to take mostly care of the German uniforms, which were cleaned and darned and then they used to come and exchange their

uniforms for uniforms. It was part of the big \_\_\_\_\_ who used to get all the suitcases if you equivalent to the Auschwitz commando. It was equivalent in the way of work. All the Germans used to be brought in Czechs who came by car and suitcases and under pretense of paradise, all their baggage was taken away and was sent to \_\_\_\_\_ and we used to sort the things. Put valuables separate, ladies clothes, furs, and you know when you go on a voyage and leave everything behind, you take the very best with you. So, the people in Germany had a hey day because all those things were taken by the Germans and sent to their wives, their lovers, their whatever. So, anyway, that was the assignment I had among other people.

Q. So, in doing this, how did it feel. Sort of strange going through other people's lives in a way?

A. Yes, very strange. Heartbreaking, if you had a heart left. When I say there were different standards of viewing life, that was one of them. What pride. There was only the strongest who tried to keep on resemblance of a human being because the Germans did everything possible to destroy it in you and then you are \_\_\_\_\_. So, and you did see it over and over among the surroundings of the Jews in camp in the barracks, how they behaved. How some tried to keep clean no matter what. Others did not. Some tried to walk with a high head, others would just --it's awful. And then there always were some people above you. There always was that fear, that anxiety. So, it was not easy to keep your dignity about it. There was nothing to feed it on. But still we managed. I think that was one of the biggest victories that the Jews showed, that they did remain with some dignity in spite of so many losing it. And to me, every survivor is a hero if they could withstand all that and then join the world and become useful citizens. So, heroism isn't necessarily groups of soldiers attacking and doing. That wasn't heroism because hunger was rampant. Actions were taking place. You had to separate from your loved ones. If

you came together, men went one way, women went another way. Children went the third way. They still came with children from some places and then you being separated and so that's what concentration camp was. But, I think in that particular time you don't compare. I didn't know about other ones and I thought that was hell. I find out differently, but I had -- talking about my luck being at the right place at the right time is just unbelievable. I was working in the \_\_\_\_\_ and just before Christmas '43, I would imagine, fire broke out in the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ burned down. Now, I was working there, and I was one of the last ones to leave the place and the next day I was summoned to an interview with Doctor Longer, and if you're familiar with the literature of the Holocaust a bit, he was one of the biggest sadist in the establishment of the SS. And when my name was called to be interviewed by him, everybody who knew me was sure that was the last they'd see me. He interviewed me for two hours. I don't know if I was dumb, naive, stupid or something, I don't know what he was fishing for, but I didn't have to avoid what he was fishing for because I had no idea what he was fishing for, but he interviewed me in a very kind way for two hours. He dismissed me back to camp. But those were the ways of the Germans. Now, he's known to be the biggest brute. He was in charge of all the Jews in that part of Europe. All the camps, little camps, small camps and so on, the biggest sadist ever.

**End of Tape 2**

### Tape 3

A. Well, I would say I was privileged. I didn't have to go outside the camp. I stayed in camp. My job was pretty protected. The weather did not affect me. I could be choosy in some articles of clothes, I had either access to it. Oh, yes, I think it was a privileged job.

Q. When you say you had easy access to certain pieces of clothing, what did you do with them?

A. You steal them, and you use them or you sell them. I did not sell them. It wasn't something that I wanted or needed, but occasionally I would see a sweater that was pretty so I could put it on, and the people who didn't have access to it, could not.

Q. But didn't you have to have this uniform? How could you have this sweater?

A. You wore it underneath or you know, and since I was working inside, that's part of the privilege.

Q. What about trading these clothes for extra food?

A. Lots of people did that. When they had access to it, lots of people did that. It was just an instinct in some people. I never needed very much, so I had no need to do it, or desire, or was too scared. I might have just been scared.

Q. Now, in working in this \_\_\_\_\_, you probably had a good idea of transports coming in?

A. Yes, we did. And there were lots of transports coming in and some of them were sent out to work. We had no gas chambers around, so either the people were shot or they went to other places to work. So, that was a fairly mild concentration camp, I would say, on a scale of comparison.

Q. Where were these transports coming from?

A. Mostly Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. As time progressed and more and more Jews were sent out from Europe, that's where they were coming from. And there was a little sleepy station, a \_\_\_\_\_, and God is that clear in my mind, all those SS standing there when the doors opened and those hundreds of people giving out and I did visit that place after the war and it was just mind boggling. Peaceful, quiet, what Jews, what transports, what Hitler, what Germans, none of that.

Q. Were there children at \_\_\_\_\_?

A. There were transports coming in with children. The children were not very long there. They were sent out.

Q. Was there any resistance?

A. In \_\_\_\_\_, no I don't think so. Not in \_\_\_\_\_. What was happening to me personally let's say in \_\_\_\_\_, I found since we no longer have any home life, any home things, that we were just individuals bonding and developing of new families was fabulous. I still have now -- it's 55 years later -- I still have friends in \_\_\_\_\_ who we see very often, meet very often. It's like family. And such friendship did develop I think much more in \_\_\_\_\_ concentration camp than any place else. I don't know about other concentration camps, but we had very strong ties to people whom we didn't know before.

Q. You would help each other?

A. Oh, morally, it was just and I have about five, six, seven friends who are just wonderful. I met some wonderful, wonderful people. I met my husband there, not this one. I met him to, but another one.

Q. When you weren't working, how did you and your new friends spend your time?

A. Just sitting on the wooden planks talking. There was no entertainment. There was no stimulation of -- there was nothing to feed your mind or expand it or look what happens outside. We were completely cut off from the outside. There was no communication. So, you just bonded with yourself, trying to remember, keep strong, that's not what you're going to become if you ever survive. That was my thinking. Now, that's not the way to behave. All those little things. There was nothing to feed our minds and develop us. Some Ghettos had schools and what not. Concentration camps did not. My concentration camp did not.

Q. What did you dream about?

A. In camp, I imagine freedom. That was a farfetched dream. I know what I'm dreaming of now, it's concentration camp.

Q. When you were in camps, did you think about what you would do if you got out?

A. As a profession?

Q. Just your life?

A. I didn't know what I'd do with my life, but I knew I was not going to carry my education from concentration outside concentration camp. I'm not going to slam my fist and say you owe me. If I want to become a part of society and evidently if I want freedom, that's what I want, that I will have to adjust and nobody else is going to adjust to me.

Q. You thought this at the time?

A. Yes. And that was my firm conviction. Maybe that's what you are talking about.

Q. Anything more about just the physical conditions at \_\_\_\_\_?

A. \_\_\_\_\_ physical conditions were not too bad. There were three barracks. Two for women, one for men and then there was an extra barrack for non-Jewish workers.

Q. How many in a barrack?

A. There wasn't so many in \_\_\_\_\_, so it couldn't be too tremendous. But my husband built \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. Your husband now?

A. No.

Q. Your former husband?

A. Yes. He built \_\_\_\_\_, so he was an excellent architect, so he built it well.

There was a lot of stealing of material from the outside so we had washrooms, which is just not the usual feature of the concentration camp. So, that's why I say \_\_\_\_\_ was not the worst. Once you survived, once you're there, once you worked, it was not worst. We used to take walks. I remember my girlfriend and I we were 17 or 18 and we walked for hours around, around, and around talking about our families. I had a sister and I had mother and I had a this and how was it. And that friend of mine, she's very interesting. It was in \_\_\_\_\_ that she was sent out on what we call \_\_\_\_\_, different locations and she was brought to \_\_\_\_\_ and the woman, the SS woman that I told you about, the young chick with the white blouse, she recognized my girlfriend. She was a shoes sales girl in my girlfriend's home town and was fitting shoes on Trudy. So, she knew the family and she recognized her, and she was very kind to her, to Trudy, and I was Trudy's best girlfriend, so she was kind to me too. So, that's like an extra bit of privilege you pick up here and there.

Q. You said you met your husband in this camp? You were allowed to socialize with the men?

A. No. But you never asked permission. First of all my husband had more freedom of walking around since he was taking care of the barracks and the camp and the buildings and whatnot. No, we were not allowed to socialize but that didn't stop us from socializing. It was

one of those unwritten laws. You go to work, boy meets girls, you know you don't have much to live. You get acquainted. These kinds of things. I think that's the hardest part for people who are not in camp to understand it, but it was a part of social life, if you wish. The encounters were very brief. You just looked through the barbed wire and waved, you know, that kind of thing.

Q. Were people able to have sexual relationships in camp?

A. I don't think so, but I'm sure too that was done. I would not like to put it that kind of thing, life wasn't so bad, no it wasn't that way.

Q. How long were you in \_\_\_\_\_?

A. I got to \_\_\_\_\_ in '43 and was shipped out in '44, so I was about a year there.

Q. How did that come about?

A. That I was shipped out?

Q. Yes. At what point did you leave, what happened?

A. I stayed in \_\_\_\_\_ until the Germans were starting to lose the war, and the troops were coming back and the Russians were coming closer and closer. There was an order to kill every Jew. We don't want any traces. My commandant of \_\_\_\_\_ decided now wait a minute, I lose my camp, I go to the front. So he decided to take his Jews, his machinery and bring them to Germany and open a little camp on his own, and that did not make him go to the front. That's what his intent was. So, he went to the harbor, when the Russians were coming closer and closer and closer, went to the harbor, bought off a captain, who threw off the German soldiers coming back from the front, and put his Jews on it.

Q. So he transported you to the harbor?

A. He went with us on the ship and we were heading to Poland.

Q. How did you get there, by truck?

A. No, we walked.

Q. What was the commander's name?

A. Seller (ph.) and that's how we got to \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. How many went with you?

A. I don't quite know. It was a boat full.

Q. Several hundred?

A. Yes. Everything was liquidated from \_\_\_\_\_. The whole \_\_\_\_\_ went there plus people who were on outside commandos, which belonged to -- Hank was there, I was there.

Q. So, maybe thousands of people?

A. Yes. And then we got on that boat left \_\_\_\_\_, and got to \_\_\_\_\_. First we went to \_\_\_\_\_, the waterway and from there were transported on barges to Studthoff.

Q. What happened to this Mr. Seller's camp?

A. Nothing.

Q. Tell me about your arrival at Studthoff?

A. We get there on a beautiful Sunday afternoon.

Q. When was this, do you remember?

A. Yes. September.

Q. September '44?

A. Right. A beautiful Sunday afternoon. The sun is shining and we were just facing beautiful forest and little homes with little flower boxes and the music is playing. The further we march, the grayer it gets. The forest disappears. The music disappears. The houses disappears and it's just grey, grey, grey. All the stretch of barracks and that was Studthoff. So, if I ever

thought I suffered and went through horrible times, nothing prepared me for Studthoff. We came, why it was important that we came on a Sunday afternoon, because they expected our transport. They lost patience, most SS was out so we did not go immediately through the best process, so we had our clothes on, the ones we brought with us from \_\_\_\_\_. That was good. Then we were put into barracks which were horrible, and I guess the longer I will talk about Studthoff, I will use the word horrible describing all kinds of situations, because it just beyond any imagination. It was miserable concentration camp, or home or Ghetto, it was just a horror. We were put into the barracks. I remember I was placed in barrack 20 where there was only one after another those -- what do you call it -- slots, what they call beds, four high, three that way, just assigned a place somebody else blanket, no straw no nothing. And some woman who was in charge of that barrack, one was Jewish and one was Polish and I don't know who was worse. They were horrible. They reduced us to just almost completely void of any human feelings. We're thrashed out on an appeal stood there for hours, thrashed back to the barracks. There was no work. The chimneys were working. You could smell the burning flesh.

Q. You knew what that was?

A. Oh, yes. You could see it. There was nothing to do. You were just standing outside. Food was despicable. There was no food. Starvation, lice, going to the bathroom, bang, bang, 2 o'clock at night everybody out. 2:05, everybody back. Sickness, dysentery, lice, just awful. That's an indescribable place. The selections and what not the ingenuity of the Jews is unbelievable. Couldn't break our spirit. We all of a sudden I get the message. It's funny to get a message in those circumstances. There were ways of communication. There were always gutsy people who used to write a note. I get a note from my husband telling me register on the \_\_\_\_\_ transport. I said to myself, okay there is one person who lost his mind. How can I

register on what. There was a note back, sorry I am not on that transport. So, the people who are going on the transport to \_\_\_\_\_ were selected from different barracks. There was about 200 women. Well, I wasn't one of them. My girlfriend was. In the meantime, just as a side story, one night I get a message it said Mrs. Pollock is in Studthoff and would I need her help. Those were the wire fences and that was all electrically fed and so on. I sneaked out at night to that fence and on the other side is that woman, and then she says to me, "Bella, catch." And she throws me her ration of bread. She says I am going to the gas chamber. You still have a chance. And just disappeared in the night. That was the last time I ever saw her. That's the kind of a person she was. Going back to \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. Your future husband?

A. No, my first husband.

Q. But you weren't married yet?

A. Yes, I got married in the \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. Oh, you didn't tell me that. You got married at \_\_\_\_\_?

A. Yes. You know marriage doesn't necessarily have to have a canopy with candles and fancy dresses and feasts and whatnot. It was I'll call it an official ceremony, whatever was official at that time. There were witnesses and so on. Not very many people were privileged to go through that kind. Anyway, my husband sends me a note, you're going to go on the \_\_\_\_\_ transport and I had no idea how or what that \_\_\_\_\_ transport was in the process of leaving Studthoff. About ten days back and forth different reasons either they had no trucks or they had no cars. There was a war going on. Germany was fighting the war. There preference number one was destruction of the Jews. There was a transport of people leaving for \_\_\_\_\_ and as they got them transport out of the gate, I was added to the transport. So

were ten other girls, my girlfriend. Unfortunately unknown to them they were German born and in the last second, they decided not to send the German born people back to Germany. I was born in Poland. And they documents, they had papers, they had registrations, kept precise records. My close friend \_\_\_\_\_ stayed behind. Well, I did not stay with her, I left.

Q. How long had you been in Studthoff just so I get a sense of the time?

A. Probably not longer than six weeks?

Q. You didn't work there or anything?

A. There was no work. Probably couldn't survive more than another week or so. That's how terrible conditions were. As a matter of fact I know now people who survived Studthoff.

Q. Was it a big camp?

A. Yes. It was a destruction camp. It was not a work camp like Auschwitz was some times. Studthoff was not.

Q. So most people that went to Studthoff --

A. Did not survive, except at the earlier stage when they needed working hands for the farm, and those younger people who got out on the farm, some of them survived because they were not in Studthoff. But at that time when I got there there was no need for workers any more. It was just a matter of how fast can you get rid of what you have. How fast can you get rid of the Jews you have.

Q. Most of the people who were there were Jewish?

A. All of them were Jews were we were.

Q. There were women and men, mostly women?

A. There were mostly women. Men were on the other part of camp, but mostly women.

Q. What did you do during the day?

A. Probably stood outside on an appeal plots, supervised stay, jump.

Q. That's it?

A. There was illness, the sickness, diarrhea, dysentery. As a matter of fact, we were the last transport to leave Studthoff, because once we left \_\_\_\_\_. So when we did get finally to \_\_\_\_\_, we were \_\_\_\_\_ for two weeks. But I could not have survived Studthoff and I don't know anyone who did who was not sent out by some sheer luck before. So, I don't know. I'm not aware that there were people liberated in Studthoff.

Q. Did they give you food in Studthoff?

A. Very, very little. A thin slice if you weren't killed before, dirty water, so that to me it was probably the worst concentration camp ever. Something puzzles you?

Q. What was the effect of these conditions on the people who lived there? The inmates, did it bring out the worst in them?

A. The very worst, except if you had some very dear close friends like I had my friend but usually they were all strangers. I mean if you lie on those pieces of benches and you want to move, four other people have to move. You don't even know them, and they stink, and they're full of lice and --

Q. Did you have lice on you?

A. Yes.

Q. When you say it brings out the worst, what does that mean?

A. It means I don't care about you. If I want to go to that bathroom and you're in front of me, I don't care. That kind of just to make it descriptive to you since you weren't there so other things would have a hard time visually it, you know.

Q. Stealing?

A. Sure. Whatever you had, and you didn't have much and you could hear screams in the night. Somebody attacks you. Hunger is a terrible, terrible thing and can do to you no matter what your principles and morality is. I mean hunger, I don't mean just being hungry, but hunger. So, yes, again, I was fortunate to get out of \_\_\_\_\_ and get to \_\_\_\_\_, which really was not a concentration camp. It was a part of the concentration camp just like \_\_\_\_\_ had different places where they send the Jews. We were a part of Buchenwald and there was an ammunition factory, and that's where they needed some labor. They sent them the front, they needed people to produce work, so they just took some from Studthoff and that's where we got to \_\_\_\_\_ and worked in an ammunition factory. It was not the normal set up of a lot of SS, there were no gas chambers. There were places they could send us but that was not the set up. So, we worked. It was fairly clean and again you formed groups with most of the people you came from Studthoff so you were already had a family. We already belonged together. Same upbringing so to say. Until the Americans --

Q. Wait, before we get to that, I want to hear a little bit more about \_\_\_\_\_.

A. Okay.

Q. You were able to see your husband there?

A. Yes, he did not work in the factory. He was an inside worker. He was a civil engineer by profession and he was older. He was more experienced and kind of out of respect, so he never worked in the factory, but he was freely communicating between the camps.

Q. What were the general conditions? Were you in the barracks. Did you live in a barracks?

A. Well, we were living in the barracks, had the same wooden kind of pieces. Food was given out by the you know they had a set many rations of bread and soup. We kept it fairly clean. There was not that constant fear of SS storming in, so it was a much more relaxed

atmosphere. And then we used to go work in the factory, you did mingle with the Germans because you all were involved in producing ammunition. We were just additional help. So, you could move around. It wasn't that tight supervision by SS. That lasted until January '45 when the first wave of American bombers attacked \_\_\_\_\_ and three quarters of the city was bombed and fire and there was no work because the factory was not destroyed. It was very careful bombing. The camp was not attacked. The factory was not attacked. Three quarters of the city was in rubble. We were used to go out and help clean the city. That was the assignment. As a matter of fact, we never worked again in that factory because if the factory was almost ready to be workable, one plane came and dropped one bomb on the water supply and just got the factory out of circulation.

Q. So you were out on the streets?

A. Well, there's more going out on the streets, cleaning the rubble and cleaning up the street and waiting until we can go back to work and continue. So far they did not send us back to Buchenwald because they did expect to have the factory working again. They never did. And what would you like to know next? How did we get rid of the Germans?

Q. Well, a question about this \_\_\_\_\_ it seemed like it was a little bit easier than \_\_\_\_\_?

A. Oh yes.

Q. Was there any sense of normalcy?

A. When you mean normalcy --?

Q. Did people have a social life, anything?

A. No. It was still just a barrack and when night comes and you come back from the night shift then close the door and that was it.

Q. The guards weren't as horrible?

A. No, there wasn't that many guards so it like on a scale of comparison, that was paradise.

Q. Now, when you were out cleaning up the rubble and cleaning up the streets, did you come in contact with the local people?

A. I didn't do it.

Q. Oh, you didn't do it?

A. I personally did not.

Q. So, what were you doing at this point?

A. Mostly we were sometimes sitting in the barracks and waiting. Sometimes we would go to the factory and clean up the factory. Mostly men did the cleaning up.

Q. In the factory you were working with German civilians?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you ever have any conversation about what was going on in the world?

A. Politically?

Q. The war?

A. No.

Q. The Jews?

A. No.

Q. You just worked side by side?

A. Yes, and one of the co-workers of mine, denounced me when I was just that short of being liberated.

Q. You want to tell me about that?

A. Sure. Well, as the war was getting closer and closer and closer, and that must have been April, now I'm back to April. From January to April it was off work, on work, and so on. Americans were getting closer and if you want to know about \_\_\_\_\_, it was located on the \_\_\_\_\_ and it had a historical meaning because that's what our friends were supposed to get together and throw arms around each other and declare peace for ever after. That was supposed to take place on the \_\_\_\_\_, and we were right there. On April 14, 16th something like that, the order came to get the Jews out of \_\_\_\_\_. Bring them towards Berlin. We cannot leave them for the Yankees. So, that's what they did. they lined us all up and we were ready for our march towards Berlin. An SS woman comes into camp and announces that the Americans are in town. So whoever guarded us and wanted to go with us to Berlin, just took off, and here we were in front of the gates without any SS the Americans are here, which really does mean you're free, and all we could do is stare at each other in complete disbelief. What the hell's going on. What do you mean we're free. What's free? Until we realized that we really have no Germans watching over us. No SS, and what do you do with freedom? You turn right back and go into camp. We didn't know the city. We didn't know who was going to do what. That was home so everybody went -- almost everybody went back to camp and plundered the supplies and had a party and celebrated freedom. Except my husband, myself, my girlfriend and her boyfriend. My husband said, "Hey, I did not see an American. I am not going back to camp." So, we left camp. We marched outside, didn't know the location. The Germans had little houses where they took care of their gardens. We went there and found a house. Went into the basement and sure enough Americans did not enter \_\_\_\_\_ yet. Later on we find out Eisenhower said "No, No, wait for the Russians. That's our agreement." So, the troops were there and they did not enter the city. The Germans pulled together and surrounded the camp.

Everyone out, told them to march to Berlin. So we were some place in the fields in \_\_\_\_\_ . We were there for about four or five days. The Germans were looking for the Jews because they knew that some Jews just escaped some place and they fished us out and we had some people who were not Jewish who worked for \_\_\_\_\_ , the so called \_\_\_\_\_ . They had different rules and regulations than we did. My husband was in very good standing with the Russian generals. So, when they fished us out and the girl said he's not Jewish. So he didn't have to go with the Germans, and he dragged me and that was fine except that German meister I was working for said "She is Jewish. She worked for me." So, that was the end of that. My husband went with me. We were going towards Berlin and the night was terrible. It was shooting, storming. You could feel the woods just going through you so the next time we got into a ditch, including the Germans because they were petrified. When the shooting stopped, everybody got up. We stayed in the ditch and went in a different direction. We didn't know where we were, but went in a different direction, but it was such a bad night -- and if we saw a patrol they spoke to us German. We spoke to them German and we just continued and find a place again in one of those huts that the Germans had. We stayed there for a while until the German population of that place came over. We could hear them coming, looking for Jews. We decided it's time to leave that place and find another one. We didn't where to go. Looked at the name of the street--and again people were walking because some were caught in one part of the town, other ones were caught in a different part of town so we were just walking. We saw a name of a street and a direction and we decided that's where we're going to go. I was shaking like that. I really couldn't put a straight step, I was so petrified. This is what we did. We just walked and walked and walked, and all of a sudden we see something which looks like a \_\_\_\_\_ off a German patrol, but it was too late to turn back. So, we just

boldly continued. The guy stopped us, leather jacket, not uniform, but leather jacket and he says where are you folks going, and we told him that we were going home to \_\_\_\_\_. He said well the Germans left that establishment last night and I found a wonderful desk which I'd like to take home, but my wagon broke, so if you're not in a terrible hurry could you help me carry that. I will give you something. I don't have much, but a little sugar if you help me carry that desk. Hey, sure. We didn't tell him who we are, and he did not suspect.

Q. You weren't wearing your camp uniforms?

A. We no longer had --what we had striped clothes like that and I had a kerchief. My husband had a regular suit which he prepared, and my girlfriend had a kerchief. We spoke fluent German. When he took us to his bombed out house, we helped him carry the desk he wanted, and we started talking a while and my husband and my friend said to him, hey there are so many other good things there. He said yes but how am I going to carry them. He said, okay we don't care. We'll stay here a night and help you tomorrow and it developed into a two week stay at his house. Things were a little touchy because he had a girlfriend who had a niece and she socialized with the German soldiers, and they came at night to visit, so we had conversations and they told me why don't I come to their barracks, they had food left over. It became a little sticky. And we hear the Americans entered the other side of \_\_\_\_\_, and now we are divided by the \_\_\_\_\_ river. So, we decided to go over to the Americans, we found some German uniforms. I became -- my husband became a lieutenant I don't know, and my girlfriend some kind of ranking German official, and we decided to go as prisoners of war to the American Army. So, we found a boat, made some oars, and hooked up with seven other German soldiers who are sick and tired of being treated like second hand citizens as they had no intentions of going to the front. When they found out that we are going over to the \_\_\_\_\_ they were

too happy to join us. So, we had seven German soldiers, two Jewish men and two Jewish girls. We took a trip around 6:00 at night and they had their revolvers all ready. If there is a Hitler they are going to shoot at them and they are going to shoot back and we had a white flag ready. We got over to the other side of the \_\_\_\_\_-- the first thing we did was push the boat back into the \_\_\_\_\_ if the Americans get any brilliant ideas to send us back, we have no transportation. We walked for a while with our white flag and there was no American in sight, but neither was anybody else. So, we just walked and walked and walked and finally come across two Americans who said hi and I said to my girlfriend how are we going to tell him that we are not German. They're Americans. They speak English. My girlfriend said, "Don't worry. I took four years of English in high school, no problem." So anyway they are bringing us as prisoners of war and I said, "Bessi tell him, tell him." And she said nothing. So, we were taken as prisoners of war to the headquarters of the Americans. It was May 1. Getting upstairs the two girls separate and the nine men downstairs. I said wait a minute, American headquarters. I am used to the Polish discipline, the German discipline, and here are the headquarters. Here are the guys sitting in a room with their collars open, feet on the desk and American headquarters. Now, we go through the process of telling them we're not Germans. We sit down, show them, they don't know what the hell I'm talking about. They never saw a prisoner. They never saw a concentration camp inmate. It's a fighting line. It's a fighting soldiers. It took I'd say about an hour because they brought every soldier speaking every language to try to communicate because we sounded so urgently trying to tell them something to finally someone who speaks Polish in that room. I said well, they just went wild, literally wild. They didn't know what to do with us. I said the first thing you do is get those two guys out of the basement there because they are the real Germans, which they did. They all came upstairs and those soldiers really did not know

what to do with us. They had a concentration camp, but they were the fighting troops. They were still fighting the war. The war was not over. They put us on a jeep. Found us a place, you know lots of Nazis left town, established, brought us a house and then were bringing us everything which there kitchen had. Every two minutes a truck load of food came on the table. I mean just talk about unbelievable happiness, and that's just a side story because when we were brought into that house with all that food, I remember what I said to myself. If you're ever liberated, you're going to be a human being right from minute one. So, I asked the American soldiers to give me a white table cloth and some dishes. The three of them were ready to kill me. They were starved and I said, no. And then we set the table and had some candles and had our first meal as liberated people.

Q. With your dignity in tact?

A. Right. And that's how we were liberated.

Q. How long were you at this place before you felt free -- were you free at this point to just move around and do what you wanted?

A. We could, but we didn't. It was very shaky, very uncomfortable. But then we got used to it. We got a nicer house and we contacted lots of people who were liberated different ways and we had party. So, we were free. We really were free. There were no Germans and we were under the American occupation.

**End of Tape 3**

### Tape 4

A. We were liberated May 1 in \_\_\_\_\_, and it was the outskirts of \_\_\_\_\_ and eventually the Americans were so wonderful and found us a home, a house, when my girlfriend and I and my husband and her boyfriend lived. Then we went to town to \_\_\_\_\_ and found out other people who survived different ways, they kind of congregated more in two or three houses in the center of the city. So, we didn't see too much of them, but we knew of them and stayed there until the rumors headed that the Russians were coming. I think that was the sequence of the events. And no way would we stay under the Russian occupation. So, we just stepped left of \_\_\_\_\_ and again towards the American zone, Frankfurt. At that time, we had a car because this on the lighter side. As the Jews were cleaning up the city of \_\_\_\_\_ from the bombing, a friend of ours discovered a car in the garage. The house was burned, the garage was not. The car was standing there so after the war and we needed some transportation he said to my husband hey I'm going to sell you that car. So, they went to the American authorities got a permit to dig out the car. He posed as a German some executive. They dug the car out and then my friend sold the car to my husband. They went to the American authorities, got it all stamped and now we owned the car.

Q. Was there gasoline?

A. No, but we got rations. Then we left \_\_\_\_\_ and went towards Frankfurt, I think. Anyway, so it was some sets of different friends. I think Hank was with us on that journey.

Q. Hank your present husband?

A. Yes, but he was a very good friend of the family all those years. He was really a good friend of my husband. I'm not clear. First we went -- as we were leaving \_\_\_\_\_ we

were driving along and we came across a beautiful location and I read in German that that was a French zone. So, we stopped on a Saturday afternoon and we said we are refugees from camp and we need some quarters and soon we got a house designated for us. WE took our car and took possession of the house and in that beautiful town of \_\_\_\_\_, and we stayed in that house in \_\_\_\_\_ for about six weeks. At the time, Hank registered himself as a Frenchman. So, here we lived very happily in \_\_\_\_\_ doing nothing, acting like imbeciles. Laughing, having fun playing games, complete now all of a sudden a notice comes there is a Frenchman who doesn't want to go home. Well, that Frenchman did not want to go home, so we had to pack up and leave \_\_\_\_\_ and go someplace else when they don't want Frenchmen to go home. So we just left \_\_\_\_\_ and went to Frankfurt. Frankfurt there is a funny story about the car but it's really of no importance, so anyway, we got to Frankfurt and we went to \_\_\_\_\_. That's where Jews congregate. Salsheim was a place where D.P.s were coming from all around so when we got to Frankfurt we too went to Salsheim.

Q. Wasn't there some sort of informal network so you knew about Salsheim and you knew about certain places?

A. Well, not officially. There was no network. You just used your common sense, well where it would it be. Headquarters of the Americans would be Frankfurt. Salsheim is where the D.P.s are, so that's how I got to Salsheim.

Q. Now, it's been I guess a couple months, two or three months since you've been liberated, right?

A. Right.

Q. Was there any effort to figure out whether you had family still alive?

A. Well, that's where Hank comes in. There was a tracing bureau opened where you asked about your families. D.P. camps, where you registered and so on, so there was an effort to find out. And that's what Hank did.

Q. But up to this point you weren't able?

A. No, there was no mail. There was no rails. There was no transportation. There was no telephone. There was nothing.

Q. And you hadn't thought about going back to Poland?

A. Not me.

Q. So you went to Salsheim?

A. I went to Salsheim. I got a job in the office and we did register people who were looking for relatives and now the next thought is what are you going to do with the rest of your life. You don't want to stay in Germany. We knew that we wanted to go to the United States. There was a very strong push of having displaced persons go to Palestine and there were a lot of single displaced persons and a lot of them did go to Palestine. So, I had a house in Salsheim and we lived there. I worked in an office.

Q. What were the conditions like in the camp, in Salsheim?

A. Barrack life.

Q. You lived with other people in the barracks?

A. Yes. But we did not. We rented a house.

Q. With what?

A. I worked. I worked in camp so I got paid so first I rented a room and then I got a better position because I worked for the \_\_\_\_\_ so I rented a house and paid with px cigarettes.

So, we were the older couple. My husband and I more mature and in the meantime I met my sister. No, she met me.

Q. How did that happen?

A. Unknown to me, she went through a different way. I didn't know she was alive or not, but she had her sister must be alive, so she left. Mother, who had a boyfriend at that time in Poland, and ventured out to dp camps to find her sister. And one day I walk in Salsheim on the premise of the camp and, what I was doing was going to camp to get some hot water because I had a beauty parlor appointment. You had to bring your hot water with you. And I didn't have the facilities at home so that's where I was going, and passing a group of friend stopped me, and I chatted for a few minutes and then they say hey before you take off, how about saying hello to your sister. I looked at her. She looks at me. It was five years since I didn't see her. So, from a little girl she grew up. So, that's how she found me. So, I didn't go to the beauty parlor. I went back home and I said to my husband, "Hey, you married a girl without a family, here she is." Now, he was fully aware of her because I spoke an awful lot about her.

Q. And she told you that your mother was still alive?

A. Yes.

Q. What happened to your father?

A. My father was killed.

Q. Nobody every saw him again. Three out of four.

A. But she had a boyfriend and she married him and she lost him five years ago and life stopped existing for her and no way. We tried to take care of her, but it got difficult. And my sister just go adjusted to life in the United States. She graduated nursing school. She got married, had a wonderful son and two grandchildren, comfortably off.

Q. So, in Salsheim you worked in the office?

A. Yes. And then one day they said \_\_\_\_\_ he opened the door and he says, "Wow do I have a deal for you?" He met a man from the United States and Hank is very friendly, so started talking to the man and the man was desperate. He needed some help. He is from the highest immigration department of the United States and the quota will open and he wants to get refugees into the United State. He cannot do it all by himself. Hank says, okay I will help you, and then it became too much for Hank and then he just said to me hey, Blondie, do I have deal for you. I know that man who needs help so that's how we started working for the \_\_\_\_\_. I quit my job in the office and that was a much more prestigious job.

Q. Was this actually within the camp or was it separate?

A. It wasn't camp, no. It was in Frankfurt.

Q. What were you doing with them, for them?

A. Collecting future applicants and \_\_\_\_\_ was a very knowledgeable person about the immigration in the United States and he said I know that the year ends and then the quota will have to be filled, so let's prepare papers. When the open the consulate, I want to be able to get those papers in and say here, so that's what we were doing, collecting information. And it was a very complicated thing. There were no papers. There were no records. There were no pencils, no pictures no nothing. So, we worked very, very hard almost from door to door to a displaced person to a displaced person. Finding a photographer. Paying with our cigarettes which we got in the px. That was the best money available. So, we had a folder, a complete file when the immigration opened, and I would say probably 70 percent of the applicants were submitted by us to the department of immigration. The \_\_\_\_\_ started working on it an other organizations, but we had the whole file ready.

Q. Anything else you can tell me about \_\_\_\_\_ about your own experience, the conditions in the camp, the way that people started trying to reclaim their lives?

A. It was a temporary kind of quarters. I don't think it was bad. It still was communal living and that did not stop until people started to disperse. It had a hospital. It had social activities.

Q. Job training?

A. No, there were no jobs. Everything was in ruins, but it was like kind of step by step to a normal life trying to find relatives. Trying to find out where I am going. Groups formed, social groups formed so and the Germans were trying to get you into the gas chambers. That was the thought of enjoying life.

Q. How long did you stay in the Frankfurt area?

A. Until the first boat left for the States in '46, and I also put an application to go to the United States like my husband did, but my boss felt that he could not spare us if we went with the first boat, so he got permission with the State Department here to still go under the old quota go with the next ship. So, I left in July.

Q. Of '46?

A. Yes.

Q. Who traveled with you?

A. My sister, my husband, plus all the other refugees who were entering the United States under quotas, affidavits.

Q. Do you remember the trip over and how you were feeling?

A. Yes, I felt lousy. I was sick as could be. The voyage was not a pleasant one, but we came in make shift boats. I didn't take the trip very well. So, I was an escort.

Q. You were an escort?

A. For the other people. It was kind of American -- uniform.

Q. When you arrived, do you remember your first impressions?

A. Yes. My husband had a cousin here whom he didn't know who met him at the boat and took us to their house. They were lovely people and kind and good, and we stayed there for a little while. My husband had a sister in Peoria so naturally that is where we were going, my husband and my sister and I. We got to Peoria. She had just lost her husband and there really wasn't very much for us to do unfortunately. We didn't speak English. Their community was very willing. They were so happy to finally have refugees and do something for them, they were willing to give us money. Well, money we did not want. We wanted to learn English, get a job and so on. That was very tough because let's face it, I had no qualifications. They finally got me a job in a sewing factory. Princess Peggy's they used to make frocks or something like that. I worked there for a whole two weeks, but at the end of day every day, the girl who supervised the work, came over ripped out what I did, because I didn't know how to use a sewing machine. So, if you have to put fancy things on it, you know, the material went and the other part went. I really could never master that art. I didn't know how to speak English, and I was very unhappy there. Then my mother was coming to the States, so my husband says okay, I go to New York and pick up your mother and you stay here. That's what he did. Then he told me he's not going back to Peoria. I said fine, I am coming to New York. So, we left Peoria behind and got back to New York.

Q. What were your first impressions when you came to the United States?

A. As far as people?

Q. Was it some sort of a culture shock at all?

A. No. I remember my first ride in Central Park, and when I looked at the tall buildings and each building had a light in the window and I said to myself, there is a family living every place behind that light. That was very impressive. Life was not very easy to get adjusted and make a living here.

Q. What do you think gave you the strength and the courage to get through all of this the way you did?

A. I really could not answer that question, I don't know. I just thought that's the way I should behave.

Q. Did you think you would get through it?

A. No, but did I really give up hope completely? Probably not.

Q. Is there anything that you can think of that kept you going?

A. No, honestly I don't think it's a desire I have to survive to let the world know, I didn't think so. I don't think that's what kept me going. I think it was selfish reason to survive and to live.

Q. It's interesting when you told me you got married at \_\_\_\_\_, it strikes me that here you were in a concentration camp, without much hope, some man you've just basically met --

A. Oh, but he was so terrific.

Q. Okay, maybe you answered the question. Why in these conditions did you get married?

A. Why not? I mean, it's answering a question with a question, why not? Well, I'll tell you, if I wouldn't have gotten married to him, and that wasn't a pre thought idea, I would have never gotten out of Studthoff. I only got out of Studthoff because I was his wife, and me made a deal with a guy who was in charge of work division. He gave him his raincoat and my husband felt I

have nothing to lose. He can take it any time he wants to but he didn't. He said you have my raincoat and you put my wife on that \_\_\_\_\_ transport. That was not the reason I married him. But somehow that seemed that would be the better way to do it if we ever wanted to stay together.

Q. So there was a thought that maybe there's a future there.

A. I said there always was otherwise you wouldn't just do what you did. You just didn't know how you were going to escape.

Q. How important, if at all, was religion?

A. None to me.

Q. Were you resentful of it?

A. No.

Q. Sorry you were Jewish?

A. No, no problem. I was amazed and probably happy for some people who had that belief and were going to the gas chambers with their hand and eyes to God, it's his will. No, religion was of no importance to me.

Q. And after the war?

A. Nothing.

Q. The other thing that we had talked about a little, do you think that the experiences were different as a woman or as a girl than they were for boys and men?

A. The experience maybe were not but how it affected the experiences of men or boys but for women there was a difference. I think some of it is probably their upbringing of women always take care of someone, of something. And even if the someone or something is just themselves, but it's just taking care of. Men, the majority was brought up that someone takes

care of them because there was nobody to take care of them, they let themselves go much faster. Women bonding with other women because they need that camaraderie probably more than men did. That's my observation, my explanation of it. So men when they lost their pride, they became nothing. There was no support group, whereas lots of women did find support groups somehow. Even the term was different, but just that whole idea of you have to be clean, you have to fight a little, you have to you know, and here is a little girl who needs help and so yes it depends on the woman. It just isn't a flat rule going for all womanhood, but it was a certain trend of doing that. On the other hand, I saw women who went very willingly on the bus train, whatever, car load, if their child was taken away from them. They didn't have to. I didn't see men doing it. That doesn't mean they didn't, but I didn't see it.

Q. What about the way you were treated? Were you treated differently by the guards?

A. In certain respect for women? No.

Q. Or disrespect?

A. No.

Q. Was there an opportunity to women to use their sex to get favors?

A. Sometimes. I don't think there was the same opportunity for men because whatever they presented would not be very attractive to the SS women that have everything. There were opportunities.

Q. And that happened?

A. I'm sure.

Q. This wasn't a first hand experience of yours?

A. My first experience, no, but I know that it happened. I don't like to prove my point by names and what not and having opinions about it or judgment.

Q. I'm just curious as to whether it went on and whether people were able to use that to their advantage?

A. Sometimes they did and sometimes people did and could not. And it wasn't always possible. There were times that it was possible. The will to life was very strong.

Q. When you talk about the bonding between women, the relationships that were formed that really helped sustain you, were some of those relationship sexual as well?

A. No, not that I know. It's not fair for me to say. Not that I know. Just loving someone and everytime I think of my girlfriend who stayed behind in Studthoff and lost her life --.

Q. When you think back, and I'm sure you think back often, what images stick with you the most? What haunts you the most.

A. What hurts me the most I imagine the images of seeing people loaded on trains to destination destruction and murder. I think that's probably -- the rest kind of disappears. So there was hunger so people were dead. That hurts the most. There was just no way out of it except luck.

Q. What sort of long term impact do you think this has had on you and on your life?

A. Long term impact? Nightmares, waking up in sweat and fear until you realize there is nothing to fear. There are no trucks and SS and barracks and chambers and what not. I think nightmares and thinking of all the ones who are no longer here. It's not guilt. I did not trade their places and vice versus. It's just they were not as lucky as I was. Most of it is luck. It wasn't the armies helping to liberate the inmates of concentration camps and all of that. There was no country who really reached out to help us. So, it was luck, mostly, and if you call being at the right place at the right time, that's a part of luck, so I don't know really why I am alive and somebody isn't, but that is what the greatest impact is. There was a very sad and those terms are

all from this world, and I am referring to the other world, after the war long after the war, the past four years, my husband Hank and I traveled to the eastern European countries and I did go to Wilno and I did go to Pornaty and I did go to \_\_\_\_\_ and I did go to \_\_\_\_\_ and all those famous places, and what I saw was a quiet peaceful world with all those lives disappearing to the ground and burned and out of memory and nothing, just nothing. That was painful. When I went to \_\_\_\_\_ and I visited a very famous monument built by the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, a beautiful monument to the hundreds of people who were destroyed by the Germans, non-Jews, every half of minute the bells are ringing to remind people. Well, that kind of hurt. What happened to the six million Jews. The same way the Russians were probably helping to destroy. One crime doesn't justify another. It's just the memory. Those were the bells every half a minute chimed and what happened to the six million Jews. I can speak for them, that's all what's left for the world not to forget them. That's sad. I can do the best I know how. I think not of six million, but the very dear ones I came across through my life.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A. I hope the world will not forget those people who died and don't consider every holocaust the same kind of holocaust. Death is the same, murder is the same, but the motives and the way it was done, the way it was done by civilized people, it's not the same as every holocaust. It was a group of people who's crime was to be Jews to burn and to disappear with a nod of the whole civilized world. It's not the same holocaust and killing. Any war is horrible, but it was done by an intelligent, educated, bright people, to take a whole nation and say vermin we are going to make the earth clear of you and have everyone participate. So, it's a different holocaust. Holocaust doesn't only mean kill or murder, and I think that's why the Jewish Holocaust is

different. And it should just make people aware that that can happen to any group of people by other people. Then the Jewish holocaust wouldn't be unique, theirs would be unique. It still would be unique, but what I'm saying is remember hatred does not justify that kind of human attitude. And how do we teach people not to hate? I don't know.

Q. Thank you.

### **Conclusion of Interview**