

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Sulamif Shreyber Zhabinskaya
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PREFACE

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SULAMIF SHREYBER ZHABINSKAYA
August 17, 1999

Beginning Tape One

Question: Let's just begin if you say your name at birth.

Answer: My first name?

Q: Both names.

A: Yeah, my first name is like in the Polish papers, I'm Sulamita. My last name, my maiden last name is Shreyber. Then in the Russian papers, I was Sulamif. And now, I want to be my real Hebrew name, is Shulanis [indecipherable] depends if you are saying it in [indecipherable] Ashkenazi Ishlanis.

Q: And your married name?

A: My married name is like a Polish name, Zhabinskaya. It's a long name and very difficult for -
- for English people to understand -- to -- to pronounce, I mean.

Q: And you also have a nickname.

A: I have a nickname, Luda.

Q: Okay. Can you tell us where and when you were born?

A: I was born -- I was born in Wilna. Wilna was Poland when I was born, belonged to Poland, on the 23rd of January, 1928.

Q: And where did you live in Wilna?

A: I lived on the street called Polnarska, Polnarska 33. And we had a -- a house, and I lived there with my parents and my brother, and a German lady who was like a help to my mother.

Q: And what was --

A: She was not a maid, but she was like a part of the family, but she was helping my mother, too, to cook, to clean the house.

Q: Can you tell us something about your family, your mother and your father?

A: My father was a engineer. He was educated in Russian school, and the Russian university. So family was not religious. I would say assimilated Jews. We spoke -- at home we spoke Russian and on the streets we spoke Polish. My father was born in Wilna to aristocratic family. When he was young he belonged to a sor -- not a communist, but a social revolution -- revolutionist party, and he was even expelled from the last grade of gymnasium. But because he was a brilliant student, they allowed him to pass the last exams -- exam, by himself at special ec -- exams. He passed it brilliantly, and he was accepted to the University of San Petra -- Petrabuk -- Saint Peterburg, I'm sorry. And then he finished there -- he -- he didn't finish the Petraburg University, he studied there two year -- for two years, and then I don't know on which family reasons, they - - they left Russia for Poland -- but Poland was also Russia then, Poland was occupied by Russians. And he finished at Technical University in Warsaw. He finished it and I saw the diploma in ghetto, actually. Was a diploma with a gold medal. But he couldn't find a -- a job as an engineer, but it -- the first World War -- World War broke out, and he went. He was a -- a soldier ze -- probably the only one -- Russian soldier with a university degree. I have a picture of him, I don't know where it is [indecipherable] actually, with the university sign, you know. And then after war he came with his family to Wilna, back to Wilna, because they run from the Germans, even on the first World War, to Russia, and they came back after war and Wilna became Poland again. And he couldn't find a job as engineer, he started to teach mathematics and physics. Course this is -- was his -- his field. He finished mathematics and physics in technical school. He was a teacher of high school gymnasium, and then he went to stu -- to teach

at the sch -- technical school, and the techni -- then he was a principal of the technical school. It was -- I think it was only one technical school in Poland which were especially for Jewish students because all the subjects were taught in -- in Yiddish. And my father didn't know Yiddish before, yeah. So he -- he learned, he learned Yiddish and had a very fine Yiddish, very clear, very good pronounce [indecipherable]. And he was the principal, the director of the school until the World War II broke out.

Q: What -- what is your father's name?

A: My father's name is Matthias. Matthias Shreyber. My mother was also very high educated lady. She finished the Russian gymnasium, then she finished a course of -- I think that -- that the women were not allowed to -- to stay in -- at uni -- at the university, so they -- it was a organized in Russia, a course for a -- higher courses for women. So she finished chemistry, something with -- with chemistry now. But she haven't worked. She was running the house and the children. She knew seven languages. Yeah. English and Italian, and German was her mother tongue. My grandmother was from Berlin. She married a Polish Jew, and she came to Wilna with my -- but she spoke only German at home and my mother's first language was German, but because she was educated in Russian schools, so with my father, at home with us, she spoke Russian.

Q: What was your mother's name?

A: My mother's name Valentina.

Q: Her maiden name?

A: Zhouk. Valentina Zhouk.

Q: How did your parents meet?

A: My mother was friendly with a owner of a -- this was a private Jewish school, a gymnasium, a very good ha -- very good [indecipherable] gymnasium, private. My -- my father was a teacher

there, so she once came there and they met. She told me she fell in love with him at once, he was a very handsome man. And that's it.

Q: What do you remember about being a young, young girl i-in the house? What wa -- what was -- what was a day like, or a meal like?

A: My father insisted that me and my brother, we have to attend a Yiddish school, a progressive Yiddish school, and we spoke -- with my brother, I spoke Yiddish, because we -- we -- we -- we thought that my mother doesn't understand it, but because she knew very well German, and Yiddish is -- if you know Yiddish you understand German, if you know German, you can't understand not everything, not -- but the meaning of the sentence you can understand in Yiddish. My brother was five years o-older, a very handsome and very, very good natured boy. And I was not so good natured, and I used to argue with him and fight with him. I think he hated me. I don't know. I was not a good one. I was always --

Q: [indecipherable] tell us his name?

A: His name was Joseph. And ne -- and we used to -- to call him Josek, from wor -- Joseph. Fr-French, Joseph.

Q: S-So you say that your family was not religious.

A: No.

Q: Did religion play any role at all in family life?

A: No, no. Nothing. And at school they were educated also very secular and it's a pity, I think. We lost something, because I -- I don't know any of the Jewish holidays -- I didn't know -- now I know, coming back to Canada so I know when it's Rosh Hashanah and Passover, and Yom Kippur. I didn't know before.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about your neighborhood, what that was like and whether or not there were other Jewish families, or non-Jewish families?

A: Yeah, it was a mixed neighborhood. There were Jewish families over there, but not a lot. And it was a neighbor -- it was not a very good neighborhood because my grandfather had a factory, and he wanted to build his house -- he has a factory, so it was such a -- if you can say industrial neighborhood more or less. It was not a beautiful neighborhood, but our house was beautiful.

Q: The grandfather was on your mother's side, or your father's side?

A: On my mother's side. On my father's side, he was a rabbiner. It's not a rabbi, but a rabbiner of the city of Wilna.

Q: What -- what does that mean?

A: You know, exactly I don't know za -- but I know that he like provided his papers like birth certificates and marriage certificates and he had the -- the books -- the archives of that Jewish community and so on. He was also educated [indecipherable]

Q: Do you know the names of your grandparents on either side?

A: The first name, I think it was Abraham Shreyber. I don't know my grandmother's name. I know that -- oho -- his -- his name was Samuel. That's why I was Shulanis, named after his -- my gran --

Q: Samuel Shreyber.

A: -- yeah, it's Samuel Shreyber, yeah. And I don't know my grandmother's name. And my grandmother from my mother's side was Frederica, her name, and I don't remember her maiden name, it was a German name, something -- something like -- I don't know. And my -- my grandfather from my mother's side was Joseph Zhouk. Yeah, that -- my brother was named that. My grandmother from my mother's side died very young. Not very young, she was 50 years old

and she died of a heart attack. The thing is they came fr -- they run from Russia to Wilna when the revolution started. They came very poor, they didn't -- they lost everything in Russia and she couldn't probably bear it. And after her, in three or four months my grandfather died. That's it.

[indecipherable]

Q: What was your position in the Jewish community, your families position? Your father is a -- a -- a pr -- a principal, I think.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you just sort of describe where they fit into the --

A: Yeah, he was a very prominent actually, in the community a very famous person. Everybody knew him from Wilna, everybody -- oh, [indecipherable] Shreyber [indecipherable]. And he was in several committees, very active in several committees, so very honest and real. He was active in the -- in the -- in Jewish com -- committees, yes. You know, when the first -- when the second World War broke out, so I was only 11 years old, and [indecipherable] I -- then I di -- was not very interested in such things without my parents and I know only that he adored our father.

[indecipherable] it was everything, and he didn't dare not to obey him. But my mother, my mother could tell me thousand times to do something, I wouldn't do it. It's -- it -- yeah. It's a pity [indecipherable]

Q: You say that your -- your father was involved in the community. Do you ever remember him talking about that, and about wh-why he was involved?

A: You know, the parents were -- it's -- it's -- it was an absolute another life before the war, I mean. I heard my parents talking but always in their bedroom with the doors clo -- with the door closed, so we didn't know what -- what's going on there. I mean, their discussions. My mother loved very much my father, that I know. And my father was very polite, never -- you know,

never raised his voice. And but they had discussions but each one political or something else, I don't know. I really don't know. And I don't think that my brother, who was older, he probably didn't know either.

Q: How -- how did you think of yourselves? Did you think that you were Polish, Russian, Jewish? H-How did you think of yourselves as an identity of your family?

A: I was sure that I am Jewish, because I attended a Yiddish school, and I was sure that to be a Jew it doesn't mean to be a religious Jew. I was taught Yiddish literature, Yiddish writers, poets, history of the Jews. That was enough only to -- to be proud of my nation, and to feel that I am Jewish. I never avoided it, never.

Q: Do you remember as a young girl, eight, nine, 10, ex -- every experiencing any anti-Semitism?

A: Oh yeah, very much. I didn't look -- it's -- it's maybe strange to say that here, but the European Jews have a special look, and I was blonde, and you can see not dark eyes. I looked -- I didn't look like a Jewish girl. And my -- my brother -- my brother was black hair, black eyes, and -- and th -- because our school didn't work on Saturday, so we were -- it was open on Sundays. So we usually went on Sundays with our bags, school bags, to school. And that was a reason to fight. So I don't know, nobody f-fought me, but my brother. And it was a time when he had in his pocket, a castet, I don't know how it is in English, it's like an iron thing what you put your fingers there.

Q: Brass knuckles.

A: Yeah. And that what you can fight back. And -- and it was a time when he didn't walk from school to -- to home. Usually we walked it, it was not so far, but we didn't have a car of course, it was very seldom they were having a car, it was a big luxury. So, he went by bus from school

home, and he -- he didn't get off on the right stop, but a stop after that, and went home from another side because a group of guys were waiting for him on the corner of our street, and the other streets. It was -- we were -- our house was located near a corner of two streets, all -- that was it.

Q: Who were the guys?

A: I don't know, [indecipherable] the neighborhood guys. It was a bar on the corner and they were drinking there [indecipherable]. They amused themselves with fighting with Jews.

Q: Were they Polish, or --

A: Yeah, yeah. Yeah it was not a big mixture of nationalities there, it was a very big percentage Jews, and -- and that -- probably 25 percent of the population of Wilna are Jewish. So then it was a little bit of White Russian, and a little bit Lithuanian. And mostly they are Poles.

Q: Did you and Joseph ever talk about that, about how to protect yourselves in these situations?

A: No. I mean, I don't remember. I don't remember. There were other things what I remember. I remember walking through the streets near university and looking at the [indecipherable] house, on -- on the windows, how the students, the Jewish students were standing on the lectures, not sitting. Yeah. It was a protest because some of the Polish students decided that Polish students have to sit separately on the one side, and it was left the other side of the whole auditorium was left for the Jews -- Jewish students. So the Jewish student decided no, they will not sit separately, they will stand. So they stand, all lectures they were standing behind the benches there, that they [indecipherable]. Then they had an -- a church, and it was to go through the church, it was like a -- a gate, yeah? And so Jewish people are walking through, if it's winter they were wearing the hats. So -- and the Catholics had to remove their hats. So, if you don't remove their -- your hats, you are beaten and remove the hat from -- such things. But I had friends, Polish also. I played

with them in the streets and the -- if I heard something like bad, like they are cursing me or something, so I used to stand, I remember, in our -- the gate of our garden with stones and waited for them. And they knew it [indecipherable]. I'll not let them walk through without throwing the stones to them. So they were a little bit afraid of me. But they were little also. I didn't have to do this big guys, of course. Little like me, 10 - 11 -12 years old, you know.

Q: You came down to do this interview with an old friend, with Rachel Lerdis.

A: Yeah.

Q: Who you knew -- whom you knew when you were young. I'm wondering if you could tell us about your first memories of her, how you met her, or just your first memories of being together with her when you were young.

A: I met her when we were in the country. We rented a house in the country, and their family rented a house in the country, the r -- the houses were close. And -- and then her family came from Warsaw, the sisters with their families. And that's how we met with her. And I s --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: I remember her always smiling [indecipherable] nice looking girl. And my brother was more involved in it than I, yeah. Yeah. I think that the love started from there. They were 16 probably or so. And I was 11, so that I -- he was 16, and she --

Q: You're referring to the fact that your -- your brother and Rachel Lerdis when they were young, dated.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Yes. What did you speak with each other?

A: With whom? With Rachel?

Q: Rachel.

A: I don't think we spoke a lot before the war. I don't think so. When I finished my six year school, it was a -- the first -- how it's called in English, oh my God, elementary school. When I finished the elementary school, I went to the same gymnasium where Rachel was, and my brother. So there I saw them more often together. Otherwise I -- I was not very close to her before the war.

Q: Did your parents know each other?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Your parents and her parents?

A: I don't think so.

Q: But they must have met in the country, but just briefly?

A: Maybe, but I don't -- I don't know about that. I don't know.

Q: When do you remember beginning to feel the war closing in, or things changing? Do you have first memories of that, of --

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What happened?

A: It was a bombing before we [indecipherable] telling us that the -- the -- the war started, so they bombed Wilna. The Germans were -- bombed Wilna. That I remember.

Q: But even before that [indecipherable]

A: Oh before that, yeah, it's true --

Q: Can you talk a bit about that, yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The war started with Poland. Yeah, it's true. It was in September '39 when the war started. And we felt it immediately. Immediately it was a shortage of food. In the stores

line -- people were lined up to buy food. I remember that I don't know how, in the kitchen I saw a whole sack of sugar, salt and something else, kasha or something else, I don't know. And --

Q: What did that mean to see that?

A: It -- it meant that it can be a [indecipherable] and they are ready to eat. And then I had a friend, a boyfriend. His parents had a bakery, and we run to the bakery with him. And I saw a big line, people waiting for the bread, and we went to ano -- for -- from another side inside the bakery. And he used to take a big loaf of br -- of bread, yeah, and give me -- ha -- hot bread, and it smelled so good, and used to bring it home. And the lady who lived with us, who helped my mother, her name was Julia. She used to say, "Oh, my God, if Luda wants to eat, she has an appetite, it means it will be a hunger." I was never hungry when I was child. It was not -- my mother was crazy about me. Never hungry. I didn't want to eat, I -- I -- I don't remember feeling something that I want something. It will some --

Q: You di -- you -- your mother thought you didn't eat enough when you were young?

A: Yeah, of course --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- because I didn't eat enough. That's -- that -- that was that, yeah. I was very pale and very thin, and my mother was unhappy with it. But then the war started, and it was a shot at your foot, so I started to eat.

Q: Do you remember your brother or your parents talking about the changes?

A: I remember my mother. My mother was very -- can't say upset, because it's more than upset. She was very unhappy with it. And fer -- we had books at home, books of -- books which described the situation in Germany after Hitler come -- came to power. It was called, I remem -- I remember it, the book was la -- lying on -- on the table in our room in -- in-in my bedroom. So

it was called Brunatnec Shenga in Polish. Brunatnec, it means brown, because fascists had brown, you know, shirts. And it was horrible. There -- there are pictures there about the concentration camps already in Germany. At first, political concentration camp. Communist party in Germany was very popular, and a lot of Germans were communists, so the first victims were the communists of course, you know. And my mother -- my mother knew the Germans very well. I don't know why. I don't think she was born in -- in -- in Germany. I th -- her mother was born in Germany, so -- and they used to go to Germany every -- every summer, probably. And my mother knew the character of the Germans, so she told my father, I remember, we have to leave Wilna. We have to out of it. Go out of Europe. I hate it. He didn't want. He didn't want. She wanted to emigrate, to the States, to Canada, to Australia, but not to stay in Europe. That's it. That was it, yeah. That why I remember it. And -- but we waited the Germans to come to -- to Wilna in 1939 already, because Polish army couldn't stand -- couldn't protect Poland, was too weak. Poles are very good soldiers actually, but they didn't have the tanks, they didn't have the equipment the -- the Germans had, so -- but the Russian came before. They occupied Wilna, they occupied all the -- the best, Belaru -- White Russia, Belarusia, White Russia and Ukraine. So we found ourselves in -- occupied by Russians. What was better than by Germans, of course. It was probably two, three months m -- the Russians were in Wilna, the hosts of Wilna, ba -- but then they gave it to Lithuania. The day the Lithuanians wanted to take over Wilna was a fight between the Poles and -- the Polish -- the remnants of the Polish army and the Lithuanian army. But the fight was very, very short. And suddenly they decided that it has to be a pogrom. They have to -- to kill Jews. We don't know why. Couldn't understand why. What has it to do with -- with pola - - with Poland and Lithuania? They were always tense. There were no diplomatic relationships between pola -- Poland and Lithuania before, even. So the day the Lithuanian occupied -- no,

took over Wilna, so it was a pogrom. I was at home, my mother didn't allow me to go to school, but my son -- my brother was i-in school, and she was so nervous about it. And -- and then it was the whole day, broken glasses, and so on and so on. But then I think that a delegation of Jewish people went to the Russians, who gave the city to Lithuanian. But they had a place where they just -- they were -- that their armia was standing there, together with their tanks and everything. So the Jews went there and asked them for helping us. And they decided -- the Russians decided to go with the tanks through the streets. And that was enough. They didn't do anything, they didn't kill anybody, they didn't -- the Russians I mean. They went through the streets with their tanks, and it was quiet, quiet. It's a -- quiet down everybody. Then my brother came back from school, late in the evening. He -- he told us that they barricaded the windows and the doors with [indecipherable] the tables they had in the classes. And they were waiting. Nothing special. Was no killed people, no, nothing. Only the -- the windows were broken. That is -- that what I remember, the beginning of -- of the war. And then they were almost a year -- yeah, then the Lithuanian were -- they started learning Lithuanian -- the Lithuanian language at school, and -- another language. We had a lot of languages in school. Had Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew, German and then Lithuanian, instead of --

Q: How did the atmosphere changed when the Lithuanians were in charge?

A: You know, that was for change that stores were -- special stores were open, Lithuanian stores, Lithuanian companies came over. Interesting that the Polish president, the portrait of the Polish president was gone from the wall in our classroom, and the Lithuanian sign is -- their official sign is a -- a horse, and -- don't remember [indecipherable] there. A horseman, who has a horse with a sword, I think, something like that.

Q: A man on a horse?

A: Yeah, a man on a horse, yeah. Oh, and that was on the wall. So I remember such a thing, that we decided to open the windows, that was in winter, we decided to open the windows in the classroom, and it was before the language of -- oh, oh -- the lesson of the Lithuanian language, the teacher came in, said, "It's so cold, why didn't you open the li -- why did you open the li -- the windows?" So we said, "The horse is stinking." Suddenly, we became Polish patriots. We -- we played with the Polish children in the street, and we used to -- to throw on the sidewalks a -- a -- the Lithuanian money, with the sign of their horse, and to beat it. And to -- and to say, go to Kovno, go back to Kovno, go back to Kovno. Kovno was their capital. They made Wilna the capital after that. Capital of Lithuania. Well, that was -- we became one block with the Poles against the Lithuanian. Why? I don't know. Don't ask me, I don't know.

Q: What were your parents saying to Joseph about continuing to go to school, or were there any safeguards being made? You know, if this happens, don't come home, or was there any talk like that? Sort of beginning to prepare to -- for -- for trouble?

A: For --

Q: In any way?

A: At what time you're asking it?

Q: A-At this time, when the Lithuanians -- after the day long pogrom with the Lithuanians and when your brother had to be barricaded inside the school.

A: After that was quiet and -- it was quiet until the -- the World War II came to us. It was quiet, yeah. Then, after -- how long was a -- a reign of the Lithuanian was a half a year, or a year? A year, almost a year. Then the Russians decided to occupy the whole Lithuania. They gave them Wilna, but they occupied the whole, you know. And then it was Russia already. In 1940 was Russia, until -- and in ninete -- 1941 when the World War started, yeah.

Q: Was there a time when you noticed the Russians took control back and you had to learn Russian in school again during this period?

A: I didn't care about it because I spoke Russian and it was my language [indecipherable]. So, but the year when the Russians were there, this year, was not a bad year for Jewish people. A lot of Jewish school, Yiddish schools were open, yes, but I -- I -- I have to say that the Hebrew schools were closed, I don't know why. They were against the Hebrew, everything what was Hebrew was not good. And of course, religious people suffered. But Yiddish secular schools were -- a lot of Jewish secular schools were open, and we had a lot -- much more students in our gymnasium than before.

Q: Oh, the students would come from the closed schools and go to yours?

A: Yeah, yeah. Not only that, but there -- there -- it was a part of very poor people, who couldn't afford to pay for school. That's why their children were at home, I don't know, looking for a job, looking for something. I don't know what they were doing, but they couldn't attend schools. And then, when the Russians came, the schools were for free. And not only that, but every child had to be at school. Had to be at school. So they came, and they were -- we have so many students. That was -- for the poor people was much better.

Q: And -- and the stores, were they similar, for instance, your friend's bakery, was that a Jewish bakery?

A: Yeah, it was a Jewish bakery.

Q: Did it remain open, was -- were the -- was the Jewish family still in charge of it?

A: No. No, everything -- in [indecipherable] were not in charge of our house. Everything was gone to the government. The government took over everything. Yeah, that's -- yeah. Yeah.

Q: But you were still in your house?

A: Yes. [indecipherable] we are still in our house, yeah. Some were -- wanted us to go out of the house and to take over the house, it was a problem there. But we stayed in the house, and my father had the same position, but the technical -- Yiddish technical -- Jewish technical school was a part of the pole -- Polish technical school. It means they were like one school, but one was total -- that stu -- Polish students were taught in Polish and the e -- Jews in -- in Yiddish. But my father was this -- had the -- had the same position still, this year.

Q: And do you remember seeing Rachel during this period, was Rachel seeing Joseph, your brother?

A: Yeah, yeah, because we are at school. I was already the first grade of gymnasium. But the school was -- was renamed, it was already not a gymnasium, but a high -- but a high school, and I was not in the first grade of the gymnasium, but I was in the fifth grade of that 10 years school - - high school. It was a 10 years high school. But --

Q: Did your parents -- as things shifted, did your parents ever discuss again, leaving? Did your mother push that issue?

A: I think that yeah. But i -- I don't think that it could be done already, it was too late. It was too late, because I don't think the Russians would allow us to go out. Poland didn't exist already. Part of the -- of Poland was Germany, and part Russia, that's it. So, but she talked about it, yeah. She talked about it. But she didn't know how to do it over there, they said she was -- it's a -- problem of immigration was closed for us, it's [indecipherable]. But a friend of mine, who was the same class, and his mother was a teacher of our school, their -- his father immigrated to the States. He went to Europe for a conference in 1939, but before the war started, before September. He went there with [indecipherable] oldest son. He was in Belgium, I think. And when the war started, he took a ship and he went to ton -- to the States, America. Then he send the papers to

[indecipherable] his w-wife and the other son to come, and they received the visa. And they were the -- the only people who -- who'd leave Russia because they had already the visa, then Lithuanian were there. So they were allowed to go. And he's still in the States, my friend.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: At that point was there ever any thought that the ru -- that the Germans might come into Vilnius?

A: Of course, yes. We were sure that it will -- the war stop, it will not remain like that. It was like everything was -- fe-felt temporary. That today is like that, tomorrow can be changed everything, yeah. It was not stable. Anything was not.

Q: It sounds anything but stable.

A: Yeah, yeah. And then we -- it was -- we finished school, I had -- we planned to go to -- leave for vacation, and the bombs started to fall on Wilna, and my mother told my father immediately, we have to run for Russia. And he didn't want because he had a sister there. A sister who was older than he was and she was like a mother for him. The mother was sick then, he was the youngest boy -- y-youngest child in his family and she was taking care of him. So he didn't -- he didn't want to leave without her. So he used to go to her -- to her apartment, to ask her to leave with them, and she didn't want. Her husband was in the States already. He visited his brother in 1938, and the -- the war started and he couldn't come back. So he was in the States. So she was alone with one daughter, and she told [indecipherable] we are not communists, and we are not men, who will touch us? People were so naïve. Oh, that's all the communist propaganda what you know, that is not true. Hitler is -- we know ge -- we know Germans. Germans were here in the first World War, and they were not so bad, we can survive with it, and so he didn't want to

leave his [indecipherable] until the second day of the war. My mother packed his -- her bag. They gave me a bag, a small bag, he gave -- she gave my brother a small bag and she told my father goodbye. We are running, and you want to stay with your sister, stay. So he went with us. But it was too late. It was too late. We went to the station, we found [indecipherable] train and we went -- the train started to go, but then it were -- it was bombed. It -- it was a horrible story with the train. [indecipherable] with the train was put on hold in the middle of the f -- the forest. Stop it.

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

A: So, talking about a train that it stopped in -- in the middle of the forest, and I didn't mention that the train was full, people who were running from the Germans. A lot of them were soldiers and officers from the Red army, Soviet army, with families. And the others were Jews, and [indecipherable] communists who wanted to run from the fascists. But the civilian were mostly Jews, and a small group of Lithuanian, yeah. So -- and the train was s-stopped before the old border of Soviet Union because we were still on the occupied pass of the -- the Lithuanian territory and the White Russia territory who belonged to Poland and was occupied by the Germans as I told before, after the -- the -- after the war start with Poland. And so the train stopped before the old Soviet border, and they -- the -- it was the -- the army who was -- the Soviet army that -- not that -- it was the encoverdere army. It was not KGB, but it was a part of it, like. They told everybody has to leave the train, but that the women has to leave on the right side of the train, and the military man with the families -- with their families on the left side. Then they closed all the windows and the doors from the right side where we were standing. They opened the doors for the left side, they let in the military men together with their families, and that's it. And they went. The train started to roll -- to go, and we started to cry and to ask and to shout and to -- don't leave us, and the train left. Then I looked around, the forest was full with luggage. Nobody to-took the luggage, they throw out and the people didn't know what to do, they started to walk to the border. And I remember my father coming to the border, showed his passport and told him that he was a -- a member already of a union, and that wa -- there are my documents. No, no, you are spies. Everything na -- we were -- we didn't have the passports of the Soviet Union. We were not citizens of the Soviet Union, we were the citizens of the country Lithuania, who was occupied by the Soviets, but they didn't change the passports yet, the

citizenships yet. They couldn't -- they didn't let us in. Then we -- we made kilometers and kilometers during the day. We walked -- it was such a hot summer like -- like this summer, 1941 summer was very hot. And I remember my mother and -- complained that she cannot walk so long in that. And then at night we came to a place and we found a house open and empty already, no people. So we -- my father decided we have to rest there. We came in together with another family, and in the middle of the night came a peasant, a Polish peasant, or a White Russian peasant, I don't know, and said you have to run, because there are German parachutists already here. So you have to run. So the other family took the -- the bag, they -- one bag of -- of -- the light bags because the big bags were left behind. So, and they run. And my father, like a mathematician, he told, look, if it's true that there are Germans all over here, so it's [indecipherable] to run. If it's not true, so we will start in the morning, we have to rest. And that was too late already. When -- in a war, every minute counts. The other family found a -- a bus and they were safe. And they survived the war. I met them after the war, that was -- yeah. And we were caught by the Germans. And that's it, and we decided to go back.

Q: How -- how were you caught by the Germans?

A: In the morning we went farther and we entered a small village. We found there a Jewish family who let us come in and have a little bit water, a tea, I don't remember even if it was food. No, I don't remember, it was a horrible time. And -- and suddenly the Germans come -- came in with -- on tanks and motorcycles and they occupied the village, and at once started the pogrom. Pogrom. The neighbors came and took over everything from the -- from the people who -- who allowed us to stay, and our things also, our belongings that -- our belongings were three small bags, like. And that's it, and it was finished. Then the Germans took my brother to dig some holes, I don't know, they took him. And they told my mother that they will -- he will come back

in two hours or something. We waited for two hours and he didn't come back so my mother went to them. It's interesting that the roles of my father and my mother changed immediately when the war started. She started to be the head of the family, not my father. She was -- before the war, he was the head of the family, he was the person who brought that money to -- to the family, yeah, supported the family, and she was a quiet lady, who loved books, to read a lot, and during the night even. And that [indecipherable]. The roles changed -- changed. She started to be energetic, started -- concentrated and her German. Her German was her mother tongue, of course. And she went to the Germans and they gave her the -- my -- back the brother -- the hale -- son. She came back together with him, and she told, we have to go back home. Here we are strangers from -- nobody knows us and -- and -- and he -- and it was a long walk home. I don't remember who told us don't go through the forest because you will be -- killed by the people, or the peasants there. You will be robbed, you will be killed and so on. So they decided to go along the highways. So the German army was approaching, going deep to Russia, and we were going back to Lithuania to Wilna. Perhaps it's interesting, it was a false -- first front of the Germans. They were soldiers, it was Wehrmacht. They didn't do any harm to us. First of all, they didn't know who we are. They know that we are people who are -- run from them, but they didn't know we were Jews or non-Jews, or -- and sometimes they threw us cigarettes, what my father was -- he -- he couldn't bear not to smoke, he was a smoker, and he -- it was like better than bread for him. Yeah. And sometimes we went through a village, so they ask for water, so there were people who didn't allow us in to take water. To come over and to take water. No food, no water.

Q: How long were you there for?

A: I think it was there two weeks, probably. I remember only one old lady, a peasant, asked us to come in, and she gave us bread and milk. But it was unusual for us. Very unusual. She told, "My

son is on the front fighting with the Germans, I don't know where he is, so maybe another family will give him some bread." Then we came home. Of course, Wilna was occupied already for 10 days, or -- or -- I don't remember the day we came back, don't remember. And the lady th -- was -- who lived with us --

Q: Julia?

A: Julia was home, and she welcomed us, yeah. She was happy and pride [indecipherable]. Yeah. It's a lot to -- to tell. The first was my brother, what my brother did, he wrote a letter to Rachel. And the only person who walked through the st -- streets was me. So he gave me the letter. Rachel accused me that I probably read the letter, but I don't remember if I read it or not. I don't think so.

Q: Why were you the only one that walked through the street?

A: The men didn't dare to walk the street, because it was very dangerous, they would be caught. My mother didn't want it, so it just left me. I was 13 years old, and I went and pe -- we were in another district, absolutely far from Rachel. I had to go through all the city, and the -- the most dangerous, I thought, dangerous place was a bridge, to cross a bridge because soldiers were already standing there and guarding the bridge, the Germans soldiers of course, and I -- I remember coming over, saying mm-hm, [indecipherable] ask you for documents or not. I decided to jump on one foot, like playing.

Q: Skipping.

A: I was thir -- yeah -- I was 13 years old, why not? I jumped -- I jumped through the bridge. And they looked at me and smiled. Then I run. Run again to her house. Now I have to bring back -- a letter back from her to my brother.

Q: What was their reaction when you got to the house?

A: Don't remember. I was so overwhelmed with the danger to cross city, that I don't re -- I think she was happy and unhappy at the same time. [indecipherable]

Q: How was the city different? You described the bridge, but as you walked through it, what -- h-how could you feel the presence of the Germans?

A: Well, they were all over the streets, the soldiers and their ve-vehicles, their cars and tanks, and -- o-over the street, so it was not difficult to -- to see it. And then I think my mother -- yeah, my mother told me to go to her cousin, to visit her cousin. And -- and I -- I almost [indecipherable] caught in their apartment already mixing something up, maybe it was then the Soviets were in Wilna. I don't remember who was -- the police was there, and searching their apartment. And I was afraid that they will not allow me to go back. And I don't remember it was the germa -- Germans or the Russians. Don't remember exactly, because they were rich people. We were not rich, we were middle class [indecipherable] middle class, and you know, but they were rich people, so I don't remember who searched the apartment, but tha-that was the moment I was scared that I will not be able to go back home.

Q: So your mother let you out?

A: Yeah, all the time. All the time, I don't know, all the time. It was -- we had a Polish lady we were very friendly with. She was a p-poor lady, she was a relative of the German lady who lived with us. It means, this German lady was married to her brother. The brother was a -- a Russian officer in Russia, and was killed in ninet -- in -- in the first World War. So she was alone and she came back to our family. And we loved the lady his Veronica, what I gave the name to the Yad Vashem, her name. And I am talking about it. It's interesting. I am. So she told me after the war why my mother was so sure that I will survive. Nobody di -- what -- happens to me. It was -- she had a dream when she gave birth to me. After she gave -- gave birth, she was tired, of course,

and she fell asleep. And she had a dream that the angel came to her and told her that when your daughter will be 13 years old, it will be a war in which your whole family will be killed, perish, all but not your daughter. She will survive it. So she was sure that -- and you know, she was so -- she was thinking about the -- the dream all the time, but I didn't know it, a-as I told you, I -- I knew it after the war, I learned it from Veronica. That why she insisted she wanted to emigrate so much, and that why she was so nervous. And Veronica told me even that she wanted to commit suicide in 1939, but she persuaded her not to leave the children. And she committed suicide.

Q: Your mother?

A: Yeah, in 1943, when the Germans took her. She told me the Germans will not take me alive. They can take me only a dead body, and that what she did.

Q: So wh-what is day to day life like at this point? I-It sounds like people are staying inside.

A: Yeah.

Q: Have the Germans instituted rules, are you wearing a star at this point?

A: No, no, it was not like tha -- bef -- before we went to ghetto it was no stars, but it was very dangerous to walk the street, especially the men. Even the Poles didn't walk a lot, it was only the military men and Lithuanian.

Q: What did you do all day?

A: I don't know. I don't remember. Probably we read. It's a good question, you know. It was like a -- a prison, but at home. Of course my, the -- the Julia used to go out and to buy some food. It was a shortage o-on food already. I don't remember her -- doing something, you know, what my brother did. And of course we had neighbors. We rented one apartment. It was one house with a lot of rooms, but after my grandparents came home, back to Wilna, after the revolution started in

Russia. So when they -- they died, this -- in -- in Wilna, so my mother rented a part of the house. It was a Polish family there, and my mother was helping them a lot. When the Lithuanian came, they fired all the Poles from the [indecipherable] positions. And he was working for the railroad, so he was fired also because he didn't know Lithuanian, the language, so they fired him. So they couldn't pay for rent, and they couldn't -- and they didn't have money and my mother told them they can stay as long as they want, she will not ask them for rent. Ah, so, but when the war started with the Germans so, and suddenly somebody told that the Germans are going from home to home looking for Jewish men. So she asks them to hide my father and my brother and they refused. Yeah, but -- but we -- we were not sure why they refused, maybe they were afraid of themselves -- themselves being on the side of the Germans also, yeah. But the Germans didn't come to our house, and it was seen, then on September, first of September then, they told all the Jewish people to go to get -- to the ghetto. And they already know the Germans, but the Lithuanian police went from home to home for -- home -- one Jewish house, another Jewish house, to take the Jewish people out of the houses.

Q: Before we get to that, I just want to clarify that -- so then was the bombing of Vilnius by the Germans, was that in August of the same year?

A: It was a -- an -- the -- it was June.

Q: Oh, it was June.

A: June, yeah. The war started the 22nd of June, 1941. June, I think, not July yet, June.

Q: And so then that was -- you tried to run and you came back, that took about two weeks --

A: Yeah.

Q: And then so from about mid June until --

A: No, July, for about --

Q: Okay, July.

A: -- mid July until the first of September, this --

Q: You were just sort of in this prison state.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. Did you have any idea that something might be happening in the last days of August?

Do -- could you tell that maybe you were going to be -- some sort of form of action was going to be taken? Did you seek preparations in the ghetto, or --

A: Well, we didn't know, because it happened, I think, overnight.

Q: Okay.

A: They decided which part of the streets we -- will belong to the ghetto. It was a Jewish district, so not a lot of non-Jews lived there, so they asked the non-Jews to -- to find another -- other apartments and the Jews they took to th -- to the prison, and then to Ponary and they killed them. And so they emptied a whole district, so they could take the -- from the other districts of the city and bring it to -- to the streets who -- which belonged to th -- to the ghetto already. But maybe rumors ki -- were going, of course around that it will be a ghetto organized, because people knew that they organized the ghetto in other cities probably. I don't know, I don't remember. I know only that we knew that some would -- prominent Jews were arrested and killed. Some Jewish men were taken from apartments and from the streets. We knew that the -- the Lithuanian were helping them, and the Lithuanian police, they organized Lithuanian police, and the fascist [indecipherable] of Lithuania of course was [indecipherable]. And th-the Poles were -- behaved very quietly, they were afraid for themselves. And you have to remember that the Germans were enemies of the Polish people, because they conquered their country, they were destroying their country, and they killed a lot of Poles over. So it was like -- a little bit it's your enemies and our

enemies are the same, so it was like that. Had to say, oh, like a moral support from the side of the Poles. Not all of them, was a part of them were very happy to see it, and participated in it, participated in it, but a lot of them were -- hated the Germans and --

Q: Was your mother making any sort of prep -- preparations, perhaps gathering up jewelry, maybe packing a bag that would definitely go if you had to go anywhere? What wa --

A: I think so, yeah, because perba -- probably rumors were already around the city that the ghetto will be organized, and when they started to see how they are throwing out the people, the Jewish people from the houses, so my mother started to pack. But it's interesting we were in the last one, because Germans didn't know that our house is Jewish. We didn't look like -- the look was like -- I don't know, something. And th -- and y -- every house had a -- such a -- a -- how to call it? A sign, which -- the names of all the tenants. So our name, last name, is a German name, Shreyber. A lot of Germans have Shreyber. It -- in German, this is a writer. And my father's name in Polish was not Matthias, but it was Mateush, and my mother names -- my mother's name is Valentina. And my was -- and my brother's is Jusef in Polish, yeah. And my, Sulamita, the only -- the only Hebrew name, but it's such an -- it was not a popular name, so they didn't know what name is it. And then the go -- went to the tenants, the Polish, Latinsky, Latinska and so on. So they -- we saw them coming in to our yard and reading the sign and [indecipherable]. So I'm coming in again, somebody else, reading, and [indecipherable]. So we were very nervous, what -- we didn't know what to do. And -- but somebody told them, yeah, yeah, go, there are Jews there. So I remember they knocked at the door, Lithuanian policemen, and my mother opened the door, and they saw my mother and said, oh, I'm sorry, it's a mistake. So she told no, it's not a mistake, we are Jews. So he came in, and he asked for the pas -- passports, for the documents, and he started to write name. Then he looked out -- around -- my father looked -- I

will show you the picture. It was an -- a -- a look of a Russian intelligent [indecipherable] you know -- you have to know the Russian intelligent, how they -- they looked, like Chekhov, like, you know. He looked my -- my mother was absolute not Jewish look, and me. So he told, look, you can't change the nationality in the documents. You don't have the names, the Jewish names, you don't have the last name Jewish -- a Jewish one. What are you thinking how -- and it was such a shock for us. And I remember my father looking at my mother, and -- and she told no, we will go where -- where -- where our people go, together with them. And we went. Because, you know, even if she allow him, okay, okay, maybe you can help pass -- to change, because it was not so easy to change in passport the name, you change to -- and there's a nationality, to change like you cannot recognize it, it's changed, you know? It's very difficult, we didn't know who can read, and then the neighbors would say, look why didn't you take them, what is it with you? They are Jews. So we decided to go with [indecipherable] we went, we took some -- yeah, we took some belongings with me -- with us.

Q: After that decision was made, did your father and mother discuss it, or disagree about it?

A: No, absolutely not. We took our belongings and the only thing my mother told Julia, Julia, this big bedroom where the children were, and the small room and the bathroom will belong to you. I don't know if they leave you the other rooms, yeah? And she wrote on the door her name, Julia -- her maiden name was German, I don't remember. And she wrote al -- under that, volkesdeutsche. The Germans who were not in Germany, [indecipherable] but they were all in Poland, in Lithuania -- they lived in Poland or Lithuania, they named them not Germans, but volkesdeutsche. It's deutsche is German, but volkes, it's --

Q: People.

A: -- people, people -- German people, yeah. And she brought to the room as much belonging as she could, then she saw that it's too much, somebody can say what -- what is it. So she brought to the neighbors a part of the belongings.

Q: The neighbors that wouldn't help your father?

A: No -- yeah. She di -- y-you know, they couldn't recognize already that they are not friendly to us, because to hide a Jew was very -- very, very dangerous. So how can you accuse a person who di -- doesn't want to risk their own life? You cannot make such a big a -- you know, a-a-accusation immediately. So she didn't. She couldn't understand it, she ment -- she said, oh yeah, she was afraid, but yeah, and that's it, then we went to ghetto -- to the ghetto, and started a new life.

Q: You went with that Lithuanian policeman? Right then?

A: No, no, no, no. We were -- I don't know where he was. The other policemen were guarding the -- the Jewish people, and --

Q: But did you go that night after you had that discussion with the Lithuanian police --

A: It was not the night, it was the daytime.

Q: No -- it was the day?

A: Yeah.

Q: But did it happen --

A: And the same day -- yeah, yeah --

Q: -- very quickly?

A: -- yes, at once.

Q: At once.

A: We went to ou -- we walked out with our belongings and were -- people were gathering already on the road, and we went with them.

Q: How much -- how many things did you actually take? What did you take, do you remember?

A: I don't remember even what -- how could we remember that? I don't know, probably our -- our personal belongings, nothing more. Not furniture, not nothing. I don't know, maybe we took some pillows, or some --

Q: Your father took his diploma?

A: Yeah, the papers we took always, yeah. The papers we took, yeah. And I don't know when was it, but probably a day or two before, Veronica came to our house, and my mother gave her the jewelry. She didn't take the jewelry there.

Q: Does that mean that you were able to get the jewelry back?

A: It means that she was selling the jewelry and bringing us food to -- to the ghetto, otherwise -- she was selling.

Q: What was Veronica's last name?

A: Stenkavich.

Q: She was Polish?

A: Yeah. Catholic, very religious and very human.

Q: When you got to the ghetto, how did you find a place to live?

A: A relative of my father, which relative was it, I don't remember. I think it was my father's sister's husband's relative, that he wa -- he had apartment there. And he escaped when everybody was taken to Ponary, I don't -- I don't remember how. He was living there and he gave us a room. So we were 13 people, 13, one - three in -- in -- probably 13 like the room was like this room, like it was a small room, this [indecipherable] there was 13 people in this room.

Q: How did you actually sleep at night? Just lined up?

A: There were two beds, so I -- I don't know how my father made some -- a -- a -- a wooden benches, yeah? They -- we used to sit on them during the day and during the night we put it together close to the bed. And my mother, my father and my brother slept not how we are sleeping alongs -- in -- in -- along the bed, yeah, but in square, like that, in the -- across the bed, and the -- the legs --

Q: Horizontally.

A: -- yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And the bed wer -- the legs were on the benches already, yeah, like that. The other family, also engineer, Kuniski, he, his wife -- his mother-in-law and his son slept in one bed like that also. My aunt -- my father's sister and her daughter had a -- along the window, such a wooden -- a -- a piece of wood, and she put a -- put something to -- to make it softer, sometime, and she slept there with her daughter. Another small bed, I think, was along another wall, and the engineer, the other engineer's daughter with her husband slept. And I and Rachel, he slept also in one -- it's -- was not a bed, but it just was a -- I -- I have to have a dictionary. I don't know even if I find it in a dictionary such a word there, like a -- like a piece of -- of wood, yeah. Yeah. It was put -- they put it on the side during the day and they -- we put it in bun -- in bunches during the night and he slept up --

Q: Sort of fold up?

A: Yeah, yeah, that's it. I don't know how it's called [indecipherable]

Q: So there were already people in that room when you arrived?

A: No, only one person was in the -- in whole a -- in the whole apartment. It was he, their relative. Then he disappeared, probably were caught and killed, I don't know when, you know.

Q: A-And eventually Rachel came and stayed with you, but do you remember when you first bumped into her, or when she first found you?

A: I remember only when my brother brought her.

Q: So your brother went out and found her?

A: Yeah, in ghetto already.

Q: Yeah.

A: She was in ghetto already also, yeah. It wa --

Q: Had you brought food with you?

A: Probably a little bit.

Q: What -- what were the conditions like in terms of bathing and going to the bathroom?

A: It was one bathroom. We had one, two, three, four rooms, full with -- with people, and one bathroom in the corridor, and -- and -- and the washroom was separately, yeah, not hot water, but cold water. My mother had a shower every day, cold water, in summer and in winter. She was used to it. I was afraid to do it.

Q: Did you have a family meeting, or di -- do you remember talking to your parents late at night ab-about what was going on?

A: I didn't talk to my parents. I don't know, I -- I don't remember. I-I probably more listened than I talked. And nobody would listen to me. I was a child, a teenager, yeah. It was sad, and then people started to disappear, to disappear. And rumors went around that people are taking to the -- to prison and then from the prison to Ponary and killed. And then became the big action in Yom Kippur, the Jewish holiday, [indecipherable] everybody. They took from the apartment, that's what I remember. Rachel remembers something a little bit different, but I remember it that our family was taken from our room, and everybody had to go to the gate, to main -- to the main

ga -- gate of ghetto, because other gates were -- other streets were closed, yeah. They build like walls, and that it was a main gate and another gate was for the head of the -- of the ghetto, special gate, a small gate, but he had the keys, and he could open and walk out, but he couldn't. So everybody was gathered in front of the main gate. So the Lithuanian police went through the apartments and together with the Jewish police, and asked everybody to go out to the ghetto, to people in the front of the -- of the gate, and then they went to search every apartment if somebody was left there. And then I started to scream. What are we waiting? Are we waiting so quietly to be shot? And I screamed and talked to my parents and talked, and a man was standing behind and told my father, "Quiet down your daughter, otherwise I will quiet her down. What she's talking about? Nobody will kill us, they are checking our documents." That was the -- they always lied to -- to quiet the people down so the -- we are checking your papers, so you have to line up and we will check your papers. I didn't believe it. So my father told me I will give you a - - my watch as a good [indecipherable] watch -- I'll give you the watch, and give it to the Lithuanian, and -- because they -- they was taking some money, and -- give it to the Lithuanian, he will let you go. Professor, what are you talking about? I will give to one Lithuanian, he will let me go, the other one will cu -- catch me, there is four. And I ha [indecipherable] was how could you stand her quietly and your -- go to -- to the grave? What are you -- so my mother couldn't listen to it any more, and she went to the German who was the leader of the whole entertainment, yeah? Yeah. We will call like that, the death dance. And she started to talk to him in German, of course. He was shocked. He told her -- he asked her, "What? Where are you from? Your German is so perfect." I'm from Berlin. I am also from ber -- from Berlin. Where is your family. [indecipherable] here. So, get out of here. And he came over with my mother and he told -- told [indecipherable] this is my daughter, my [indecipherable] and he -- he told us to stand on

the side, yeah. So we stand here, and he was standing, father, and then a Lithuanian came over and started to slap us back to there. So he told no, don't touch them. So people saw that we are standing there, so people started to run behind us, so our family was growing and we were standing in the front and behind us some other people, some other people. And then they opened the gate and all the people went -- left. We was -- we were already in the ghetto, standing in the ghetto and waiting for the -- for [indecipherable] yeah. And then he told, the action is finished, goodbye, and he left, and he went back. And then the -- so the Jewish police knew it, where other people are -- are going. They told, oh, you save your life, you save your life. And then we heard that everybody was taken to the prison, to Lukeeshki, and from the pris -- prison to Ponary and everybody was killed. It was thousands and thousands of people. I don't know -- I don't remember the number, but it was a lot. Maybe eight thousand, maybe 10 thousand. And then some run away, people wounded from the, you know, graves, came to ghetto, smelling with dead people already. Well, we knew already. And I told my mother, that's it, I am not more going together with you and waiting until they will shot me. [indecipherable] shoot me, they will kill me. [indecipherable] to run. Every time it was a rumor, every time that we heard that it will be an action, it will be something in ghetto. So every time I heard it in the morning, I was putting my star of -- the David star, yeah in -- on the front only, I didn't have it on -- on my back, and it was not, you know, I -- it was with a needle --

Q: A pin.

A: -- with a pin, yeah. And I went together with these people who went to work, who left the ghetto to work, people were working for the Germans, doing some job.

Q: You -- you told your mother that --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- from now on you were going to run away --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- when you heard rumors.

A: Yeah.

Q: What did your mother say?

A: Okay. She was happy that -- so -- and then it was a problem. Her -- we were working -- the Jewish people who worked the brig -- with the brigades, yeah, they were walking through the streets, but not on the sidewalks, but in -- on the road. So it was one risk to take out the -- my star, yellow star, to go to the sidewalk and to disappear. Not to take it. And I run though the -- through the town, to the city, to Veronica. And I stayed with her a couple of months.

Q: What did she say when you came to the door?

A: She was happy. But she was very poor, and she had only one room. And they -- her neighbors liked to -- to talk to her, to come in and to have a chat, you know, they saw me. I couldn't hide myself, was one room. So she told everybody, oh my relative from -- from a village came to live. Okay. They knew, but they pretend that they don't know. And we used to walk with her. I used to go with her to a priest. Once we went and she -- she gave him an -- a golden ruble what my -- my mother had when that hor -- the times of [indecipherable] there were golden rubles [indecipherable] like that. So she gave it to him and he gave us some bread, and a piece of margarine, I think. And as everybo --

Q: A priest, this was a priest?

A: Yeah. And he took the money and he gave us bread, and some margarine, and he came back, and tomorrow, for tomorrow she went -- I -- I don't know, maybe I went together with her, and I

-- and we gave it to my brother who worked also outside the ghetto, and he used to bring it in the ghetto.

Q: So you and Veronica went and found your brother, and gave him some food?

A: Oh, she knew where he worked --

Q: Okay.

A: -- yeah, it's not the first time she went to him to give him food.

Q: So your brother was able to also tell your parents that you were with her?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, that I am alive and I am with her, yeah.

Q: What did you look like? You had long braids?

A: Yeah.

Q: Long blonde braids?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Okay.

A: I'll show you. I have here a picture.

Q: Okay.

A: She saved us -- she and Julia saved us their old pictures.

Q: So -- so you could look -- you didn't -- as you've said many times actually in this interview, you didn't necessarily -- you couldn't look like what people assumed Jews looked like.

A: Yeah.

Q: You could pass for a little German girl, or a Polish girl?

A: Yeah, yeah, a Polish girl, yeah.

Q: A Polish girl.

A: Because I -- my Polish was fluently, and --

Q: So when you were staying with Veronica, what were the fears? Were they mostly of the neighbors, or at that point would you be afraid that Germans might come searching house to house?

A: The Lithuanian.

Q: The Lithuanians?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was -- and the -- the neighbors were friendly, except one, and this one started to talk that Veronica is hiding a Jew. And then another neighbor came to us and told her, Veronica, you have to do something, because she told, that the rumors are going like that, that you are hiding a Jewish girl. So her mother, she had a -- she has a mo -- had a mother, a old mother, yeah, she was also not very young, but so sh -- her mother started to cry, let me die in my bed, I don't want to be hanged by Germans -- by Lithuanian. If they would find me, they would kill both of them. Was no question about it. She cried [indecipherable] because didn't know what to do. So I decided to go back. And I remember our way back, she took me, and we went back. Was in the evening. She cried the whole w-way back. She told me if I can -- if I risk with my own life, it's okay, but I don't want to risk with my mother's life. And I -- I understood it. That's it, it's too dan -- dangerous. When I came back my mother was very unhappy that it was all the actions with the [indecipherable] the yellow, with the pink and [indecipherable] were over [indecipherable]. And it was a small period of time that it was qu -- almost quiet, yeah. Some people were killed because they took some bread to get, or some people were killed because they

were caught stealing something and so on, but not such a action how thousands of people were killed.

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

Q: Can you talk a little bit about how you began to work when you were in the ghetto? You were, after all -- at that point how old were you?

A: Ah, 15 -- or 15 I was already in fo -- 1943, so -- and I started to work in 1942 probably, when I was 14. But you know, because I was in and out of the ghetto, I didn't have like a -- a real serious wor -- job. But I don't know who took me to Polish bricks. I -- they have to be polished, I don't know. So it was such a machine. It was red, not -- they were not very st -- very straight so I had to polish them. My mother was very upset about it because it were a dust which goes -- went to my lungs, and she was always afraid -- afraid of my lungs, because my aunt, her sister -- my mother's sister, died of tuberculosis.

Q: You were working with bricks?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Making the bricks?

A: No, polishing them.

Q: Polishing the bricks?

A: Yeah.

Q: For what?

A: I have no idea for what.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: There were a lot of jobs what I didn't ha -- I -- I didn't know why I -- where I have to do it, but I don't remember who took me, who asked me to do it, but I went to work for one time. And then the evening I belonged to -- to a -- a youth club. You know, we tried to make the life more or less normal, you know? As normal as could be. As close to normal as it could be. So we had a

club, and we had poets and writers, who taught us literature, Jewish literature, and we were performing there, and I won even a -- a prize for a poem what I was reciting, yeah. Yeah -- re --

Q: A poem?

A: Yeah, a poem.

Q: What was the poem about?

A: It was a poem of -- an -- an old Yiddish p-poet, Ihoyash, that was his name. He is a famous Yiddish poet -- Jewish poet, actually, not Yiddish. But he wrote in Yiddish. That -- and we were -- it was like a close family, and the -- in the club, so I was so involved in performing something, and -- so it was -- but it was a very short time, a short time what I told you, I don't know, three, four months that we were -- we had the life without the big, big action, without the killing thousands of people. People were dying of starvation, of course, and -- and illnesses. People were taken for that, or for another so-called crime. If you see as -- you are very hungry and you steal a piece of bread, you were shot, you know. But like the actions, which were before, like the actions with the yellow shines, with the pink shines, what -- thousands of people were killed. So it was a short period, I think the end of '42, or the beginning of the '43, that it was -- I don't remember the date exactly, but it was more or less quiet. And we had even a school for students - - everything was illegal, of course. The school was like we used to come and the teachers taught us history, and literature, and mathematics. And I remember my father as a mathematic. He used to -- he wanted to teach me mathematics, so he explained to me something, and I didn't listen even to him. He asked me to repeat and I told him, I don't know. So he thought, you are not listening to me. So I told him, do you want me to -- to die a educated person? I don't care. Well, he stopped. Then the teacher of French language, yeah, I had a private less -- private lessons of French before the war. So she was a neighbor of ours in the ghetto, so my mother used to ask me,

go to Eda Danielovna, go to her, she is so lonely, she already lost her husband and her daughter, she is alone, go and talk to her French. Well, I thought, what ha -- why -- what do you want from me? I can be killed without French. And I remember that only once I came to her and we talked, and now I don't know French. Now I kne -- I have to know French, but I don't know now. That - - my mother was clever that she wanted me to -- to, you know, not to forget the language, the French language, and --

Q: How did your parents react when you spoke like that?

A: Nothing. They kept quiet. What could they tell? They never told me, you will survive, because they didn't know. Maybe my mother had, but I told you the dream, so she was hopeful -- she hopes that I will survive, but the life was -- it was so difficult to survive that -- I know that my father closed the book and never came to me again. So, and the lessons at school were very -- you know, it was very upsetting because every day we used to see, oh another teacher is gone, yeah. Oh, he died. Oh, this one was caught carrying a piece of bread and was taken to the prison. Oh, this -- you know, every day, so it was so -- you know, upsetting that then we closed the school at all. Let's see, they forgot to tell you about a m -- the last days of the -- the last days of the peace before the 90 -- the ra -- the war started in 1941 -- in 1941. So it was days very -- very -- not quiet days, because the KGB were already -- start already to work very energetic in Lithuania. Before they were -- they kept a little bit quiet, they let us leave normally, yeah. Then, probably they felt already that it will be a war between Russia and Germany, so they started to take people out to Siberia, that -- the people who they thought were enemies of Soviet Union. Who were the enemies of the sov -- of Soviet Union? Of course, some parties, alexa -- Zionist parties, Zionist parties and BUND, and -- and rich people. So but Wilna was a poor city at all, and they didn't -- in Wilna didn't -- they didn't have rich people, very rich people, I mean. So,

but in -- the Bolsheviks thought that everybody who has a small store was selling some newspapers and some pencils and some salt and sugar, everything in one room, is rich. So they used to take the people out of their homes and to take them to the railway station and to take them to Siberia. Also peasants, Lithuanian peasants who had more than one cow, or one -- was already like a kulak in -- in Russia. A rich peasant who is exploiting others, you know, so -- and my mother was dreaming to run away from Wilna. So she was standing on the street in front of our house, and asking them when they -- you know, they are -- the kb -- KGB was -- had the list of names and was taking one -- from one house a family, from another one. Come to us, please, we will -- we are rich, we are ri -- do you see, we have a house -- the house didn't belong already to us, but she told like that -- and a house, and na na na, and then come right in. We had normal furniture, fi -- nice furniture. We -- we are rich, take us, take us to Siberia. And people thought that she is crazy, what is it? I remember somebody asked me, is your mother crazy? And I, no. So why she is asking them to take you to Siberia? Because it's better than to take over the ger -- the Germans will take over us, yeah. And she was right. Mostly. Of course, not everybody survived in Siberia also, of course not. I s -- it was a very hard time, it was a very hard time to Russia at all, and it was a hard time to people in Siberia. But mostly they survived, and they came back.

Q: Your mother tried awfully hard to -- to get out.

A: She tried very hard to -- to get out of the country, yeah, of Lithuania and the city of -- couldn't. That's it. Yeah, that's what I missed these days. Then the war started, so you know already that we are on our way too late, and we were caught, and we came back, and we came to the ghetto, yeah.

Q: In -- in the ghetto, can you describe the -- the interactions that you did have with the Germans? Where would you interact with them once you were in the ghetto? Was it just coming in and going out, or --

A: No, it's a -- it's -- as I told you, when it was Yom Kippur, the Jewish holiday, when they took all the people, that what I survived, this action. The others actions I was not there in ghetto.

Q: Right.

A: I knew only that then it was a yel -- the action of the yellow -- yellow -- documents of the yellow shine [indecipherable]. So I was with Veronica, and we knew that something is going on in ghetto. And now of course I was very upset, and I didn't know what happened with my family. So she told me, come, we will go th -- to this -- to the -- in the direction of the ghetto, maybe we will learn something. And we went and we met a Jewish family, walking like that in the streets. So we stopped them and started to talk to them, what's going on? So they told me -- they told us that it was the action of yellow documents, of yellow shines, and we have the -- the yellow shines, so we were allowed to go and to go to our job where he was working. He was working for Germans, I don't know which organization, so he took his family and he went there. So I didn't know if my father had it, and I was so upset and we went farther, and we stayed -- I don't know which street we -- we were stopped by a crowd with -- the crowd was looking how they -- the Jews were going through the road to Ponary. And I was looking together, and I thought, my God, why is there -- why is they are walking so quietly? Why is they not doing something, you know? And I looked if my father or my mother -- my family is there. Couldn't see it. But suddenly I saw a woman carried a small child, and shud -- suddenly the Lithuanian were not so close, the soldiers who took them, she throw the child to the crowd, and somebody took the child and disappeared immediately. Understand? She throw to the crowd, to the Aryan crowd who

were standing, and probably a -- a -- a woman took the child and run away. But of course she was afraid that somebody will stop her for taking, but nobody stopped her. She run away, she -- immediately she was gone. So the woman saved her child. It was horrible. I don't remem -- then, we went with her to that place where my son was working because my father was working in the ghetto. And my --

Q: Or your brother?

A: My father, and my brother worked out of the ghetto, so we -- we went to he -- to see him.

Q: To see who?

A: My -- my brother.

Q: Okay, uh-huh.

A: And he -- I -- we -- we met him and he told that yeah, the family is okay.

Q: Really?

A: The family is okay. So, the family -- my father took Rachel as a daughter inste -- you know, instead of me, because I was not there. And my brother took my cousin, my -- my father's sister's daughter, as a wife.

Q: Dina?

A: D-Dina, yes. Dina Abramovich, yeah, who wer -- who is 90 now and works for the [indecipherable] yeah. You know, because it was who had the yellow document, could take with -- with them, a wife, and two children less than 16 years. So Rachel was already approaching 20, but she looked so young. Everybody looked so thin, that you couldn't understand she is 20 or 16 or fi -- 16 or 15, you know? So it was okay, and he took her, my cousin, she was much older than he, but it went smooth, that's it.

Q: But when you came back --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- then were y -- wh-whose paper were you on? If Rachel was on your father's paper?

A: Nobody checked the paper then. They checked the papers when the actions were, you know, but nobody checked the papers. Look, people are dying and running away and kill -- people were killed every minute. So who knows -- who knew? Where is my daughter and where is my brother? Where is my father? Nobody checked it. And my father organized in the ghetto a small school for -- like a technical school. And some use -- some young boys were attending the school, and making some, you know -- I don't -- I don't know even what they produced. But I know one thing, that the -- the underground was working already in ghetto and my -- my brother was among them, who was stealing weapons from the Germans and was bringing to the ghetto. And I know that the young people who are working in the school, the technical school were repairing guns, making something like grenades, like to -- to -- you know --

Q: Grenades?

A: Grenades, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. Handmade grenades?

A: Yeah, yeah. We used to, you know, the bulb -- to take a bulb --

Q: A light bulb?

A: -- from -- yeah, a lamp, yeah. To take everything from inside, to put a liquid, which is -- which can be inflamed immediately when you throw it, the glass will, of course, break, and it will, like a bomb, you know, it will burst. So that was our grenades in ghetto, yeah.

Q: Your -- so they were making these in your father's technical school?

A: Yeah, yeah, they were [indecipherable]

Q: So your father's technical school wasn't just a school?

A: He -- I -- I don't know, he pretended it was a school, you know, it was very -- everything was very [indecipherable]. There they made keys -- like they made keys to -- to the gate. Like, the gate was closed, locked always, yeah. Only when people were going out to work or coming in from work. So they made keys to -- to be able to walk out at night, to the partisan, to the woods, you know? And it was not from the gate, from the main gate, but it was another gate, a small one, what I told you for the -- the leader of the ghetto, who would walk out. He had a personal gate, a personal key, and he could walk out with a key -- through the small gate. His name was Genz.

Q: Jacob Genz?

A: Jacob Genz.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He had a -- a Lithuanian wife, and a daughter who was -- out of ghetto, of course. And he was allowed to come to them to visit them sometimes, you know. So he had his key, and so then the partisans used it, and probably Genz knew about it, I think. So it was very, very difficult to hide, and he knew about the -- that the party -- the underground party existed, yeah, and the [indecipherable] was named.

Q: Were you part of that underground?

A: Yeah, you know, I was a part of it, but I was small -- no, y -- I was too young, and we were only like some, you know, listen to some news from Russia, what's going on in the front, how the Germans are already retreating, and to encourage people that soon, soon, soon, that will be the end of the war, and then -- you know, so we were listening to the news, writing down and then giving it to read for people, and so this was not exactly a big job, and --

Q: But you did that?

A: Yeah, yeah, we did. And -- and we, of course, I hope that they will take me to the partisans, cause I -- I -- I didn't look like a Jewish girl and I could go to the fr -- from the forest to the city and back. I had such -- we had to have a connection, so somebody had to come to the city and go back to -- to the forest, so -- but they decided that I am too young, and they left me behind, me and Rachel, also.

Q: Who -- who left you behind?

A: The organizers of the -- of the -- of the underground organization.

Q: Was your brother involved?

A: My brother was involved in the -- of course, yes, he used to steal and bring weapons. But he was caught before -- before the liquidation of the ghetto. He was caught in the action of men, and it was -- they were -- before they liquidated the ghetto, they were catching only men, so he was caught and transferred to the -- the concentration camp in Estonia, in Klooga.

Q: Can you tell us about that, that day that he was caught?

A: It was a day when the organization mobilized all the members, and decided to -- to fight the Germans, decided to resist, it's enough, you have to resist. And we were mobilized on one street in a -- in a big, big yard of the -- of the house where the partisans probably had the weapons, I don't know. I don't know exactly because we -- we were not -- I was not told where and what they have. One group of the underground fighters were sent to another house, and they had to start to fight the Germans, who were entering -- the Germans and the Lithuanians who were entering the -- the ghetto. And another group of only boys and my -- they include my brother were sent to another street, and -- but they went without weapons and they were told that the weapons were being delivered. And they were not delivered and the Germans surrounded them and they took them, all of them, the whole group. And the -- the people who were in fron -- in

the front house, saw it was foolish, they were told that it will be a parole when they start to shout -- to shoot the Germans, so it was a parole fire. But fire is in German also. You know what fire? Fire is a fire, you know? It -- so it's -- and the Germans walked through the streets and somebody asked for a cigarette probably, give me the fire or something. They had fire, they started to [indecipherable]. And they did -- and the Germans, they -- around to the -- the base, to the f -- to the house, that the people from the house couldn't see them, yeah. And they put a bomb there and they run away and the whole house was exploded and all the people were -- were -- died, of course. Were killed.

Q: So ri -- the people in the resistance in the ghetto were waiting for an order to shoot, and they got -- they got a mixed up order and they shot accidentally?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And then the Germans bombed the building?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where were you during all of this?

A: And I was in another -- well, in the sam -- the same street, but oh, maybe three or four houses from there, yeah.

Q: So -- so you saw this?

A: I didn't see it, but I heard it, of course. And then -- then the organization, the head of the organization decided there is no reason to fight. We have to leave ge -- the ghetto to go -- you have to rent to -- to go to the partisans and to fight the -- the Germans from the woods. But was it a right decision? But the decision has to be done much earlier. And to take much more people to the partisans because we were so afraid that the Germans can learn about the organization, that it was very, very -- it was a conspiracy, very, very underground, and nobody knew it except the

members of the organization. But we could involve more -- more young people. And the other thing is, they took only -- to the woods they took only people who had a pistol, or a -- a gun, or something like that. Who had no weapons they didn't want it. So we didn't -- I had -- didn't have it, and -- and Rachel didn't have it, so we were left behind, and that what is it.

Q: So how did you find out where Joseph was taken to?

A: Joseph was so capable that he sent us a -- a small letter that the man who -- the machinist of the train, the man who was -- how you say? You know, somebody has to sit there, and to --

Q: The conductor?

A: Conductor, yeah, but it's not like a conductor -- okay, the conductor was a young Polish guy, and my brother wrote a note that I am taking to a concentration camp to Estonia, and please save Rachel. He was so thinking about her, that that was his -- yeah. And the guy, I don't know how, I don't remember how, he brought a letter to the ghetto -- oh he, or somebody else brought it, but we -- we had it, and we knew that they were there. And my father told me that you cannot run away without Rachel, because my son asked me to save Rachel. Okay. So, when it was the liquidation of the ghetto, on the 23rd of September, 1943, so we were -- the ghetto was surrounded already by Lithuanian police, and -- and I think even with police -- no, the -- I think mostly Ukrainian police, because the Lithuanian police, the Lithuanian SS actually knew already that the Russians are coming, and they run to the forest with another group of partisans, what they claim now that they were the patriots. Okay, maybe, but I don't know which patriot they were, but -- so they run to the forest to fight the Russians, of course, because they wanted to help the Germans, but the Germans wanted to mobilize them to go to the army and to fight the Russian [indiscipherable]. They didn't want it, so they didn't obey the Germans, but they wanted to fight Russians, so they run to the forests. And of course they were afraid that if some Jews

were alive, so they were going to tell that -- what -- what was going on there. So I think that the -
- the liquidation of the g-ghetto in Wilna was by a Ukrainian SS division, made by Ukrainians, because I remember standing with Rachel in line already, hearing them talking Russian. Russian, or Ukrainian, it's very similar, you know, you can recognize, you can understand. And we -- when we understood that we cannot go out together with the organization, underground organization, cannot leave the ghetto, we started to look for a exit, how to run. We met some other girls. We were sitting a couple of hours in a -- you know, the places where the -- the water is running from the toilets.

Q: The sewer?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tunnel, or sewer?

A: In such a -- yeah. So we s-sat there until it was dark, then we went out, and --

Q: You were hiding?

A: Yeah, hiding, but for several hours, we didn't want to hide it for -- forever, we couldn't. It was like sitting like that, and it was not -- not only comfortable, but was impossible to sit long there. And -- and it was in ghetto, at -- you know, and we wanted to go out. So we walked out, the ghetto was -- looked terrible. There are no people already in the ghetto. It was dark already, with the -- the windows were open, the doors were open, the belongings were in the streets, you know. The pillows were torn apart, all the feathers. Like, I see the -- the picture like today, you know, like it was yesterday. And n-near us was a library, a big library, a [indecipherable] library. So the books were out in the streets, torn and -- you know. And we looked for people, you know, so we met three o-other girls, so we were five of us. And we decided to go to climb the stairs upstairs in a building. And I know -- I don't know how we knew that the building has a hole in

the roof, and we can go out to -- onto the roof, and from the roof we can jump to another building which doesn't belong already to the ghetto. So it was dark, and we couldn't see well, but we saw the hole in the roof, and one of the girls climbed the ladder, and she was the first who looked out, and she was caught. So, a soldier was [indecipherable] there and watching. She was caught, and she shouted so loudly that we ran back. I remember not finding the way out of there. You know, the building, it was dark, where are the stairs, where are -- where is [indecipherable] run back. And then -- then we s -- we saw no way out. And we went to the building of the Judenrat, I mean like the government of the ghetto [indecipherable]. And we found this Jewish police and the government [indecipherable] and some people were there. And we -- we came to them. So the next day, we were taken together with the poli -- Jewish police and everybody. Taken to the same place where the old people were taken already [indecipherable] and old, old cemetery, what Rachel told you, called Rosa, and -- and then I wa -- I met my mother. She -- when she saw me she was surprised, and so upset, and I couldn't describe you the -- you know, I can't describe you the -- her face. She was so sure that I'll run away. She was so sure that I will survive, you know? And that was her only hope. And then they started to let out the people one by one, and to select them, one to the right, one to the left, one to the right, one to the left. And we saw that to the left, they are pushing the old people and children, and handicaps. It -- it means they are sending them to death, that we know already. To the right, only young people. And I remember that when I -- I think Rachel wer -- we walked out the first and she was sent to the right. I was the next and my mother was behind me. And he ask me -- like I was 15 years old, maybe I w-was tall, and he thought maybe I am older, but he ask me, "Are you alone?" I told no, no. So he -- he want to push me to the left, and I told, "Yes, I am alone." And he pushed me to the right. And my mother, he didn't push her, she went immediately to the left. And I stopped

her, cried, "Ma, Ma." She -- she didn't look at me. That was the last time I saw her. She told us that she went together with -- with my father. They walked out of the ghetto together, but they separated the men from the women, so she didn't know where my father is. And Rachel's sister decided go together as a child and with the family, both sisters. They were young, they went together. And I didn't go with my mother. It was hard fo -- to me, but you know. It was a time when I ask myself why I didn't go with my mother, and then I was protecting myself and saying, oh but my mother was -- would be even more unhappy if she saw me together with her, dying. And it was only good for the Germans. More Jews are dying, it's better for them, so why I shouldn't do it? Okay, maybe I'm right, maybe not, but I did it. Th-The moment I didn't think about it, I protected my life. So they gathered all the people from the left side, and they send to Majdanek immediately to the gas chambers. They were not even in the concentration camp, not one day. From the train they took them to the gas chambers immediately. And one person from the whole -- I don't know how many thousand people were there, because so many thousands were already killed, but I don't know how many. But one person was run away. And she -- she was a -- a wi -- a wife of a engineer who worked with my father. When I came back, she came back to Wilna after the work -- after the war, and she learned that I am in hospital right after the war. So she came to me to hospital -- to the hospital, and she told me that your mother was not killed, your mother committed suicide. So I told her I know, because my mother told me, I have the pills, they will not kill me. So she committed suicide in the car already -- in the train, on the train. She committed suicide and my husband, who was not a husband yet, but the hu -- the husband's mother -- my husband's -- in the future he was my --

Q: Your future husband.

A: Yeah, my future husband's mother and his aunt. The aunt was -- worked for a pharmacy and she gave them the pills. Three of them together committed suicide. So that was -- that how I learned how my m -- mother died. And we were taken to a train, and when we went to the train, I asked Rachel to run. Come, come. I told her, as soon as we are out of the country, and I'll not know another language, I'll not run away. I know the language here, I can communicate with the people, I can run. She was not used to run. It was a -- it was a -- really not so easy to decide it. She told me, we will maybe meet my -- my brother in the concentration camp, she couldn't. And one --

Q: Joseph?

A: Yeah, Joseph. And one of our girls told wi -- and wa -- that one woman Hiah Shapiro [indecipherable] she is now in Israel, she told us, girls, I'm running. And she immediately took from -- from our row to the sidewalk, to a house. I didn't know that it was the house where she lived, and she disappeared, and she survived. She found a way to the woods. It was not so easy everything, it was not, but she was in the partisans, and then she -- she run to the [indecipherable] Europe. In 1945 she went to -- through Poland, through Hungary, through Italy, on -- il -- illegal to Palestine.

Q: So you wanted to run?

A: But I didn't, because I couldn't run by myself. I had to run with Rachel. That was my father's last words to me. Don't run without Rachel. Then many years passed and I thought, how could he tell a child of 15 years such a thing, such a warning? It was a matter of life and death, and that's it. And we were taken -- we were taken to the train station, to the train and when -- and went to Latvia, to Kaiserwald, then from Kaiserwald to Stutthof. Not to Stutthof, to Strassenhof. There we stayed for the -- more or less a year, and we were working for the [indecipherable]

manufacturer. A factory, produced materials for -- for the soldiers, such -- like stuff, I don't know what they -- what -- they were sewing them, I don't know from the stuff here -- it's a web - web machine, yes, web machine, yes? That's -- it's in English, no? A machine who is --

Q: Weaving?

A: We -- how?

Q: Weaving?

A: Weedy?

Q: Weave?

A: Weave, yeah.

Q: Yeah. [indecipherable]

A: That is, yeah.

Q: C-Can you descri --

A: Web is in German.

Q: Can you describe the train ride from Vilnius, I guess you went to Kaiserwald first?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: That was your deportation?

A: Yep.

Q: Can you describe that train ride?

A: First of all, we were, of course, in the wagons, the cars were like for cattles, yeah. We were sitting on the floor, close to each other, how many people in one, I don't know even. Hundred, 200, I don't know. Locked the doors, no windows, a small like window, like under the roof. And they were -- you know, we didn't know the direction. We didn't know where they take -- where they took us. And in a half an hour or an hour was a ride, yeah, suddenly the train stopped. We

were sure that it's Ponary. So they brought us to the place where they shoot the Jews, yeah? So we were waiting and waiting when the door will be opened. I don't know if they stopped there, or in another place. If they stopped it deliberately to make us, you know, so -- it's like to -- morally to -- to f -- to destroy us morally.

Q: To weaken you, really.

A: Yeah. Oh, we were weak -- already weakened. Already. But -- and then the train went on and we suddenly stop -- stopped -- I don't know how long we went. The whole day, I think, until the next night. I think we went -- we were on the train the whole day, and until in the middle of the night, opened the doors, and we -- we saw big lamps like a -- like that, how it's called --

Q: Lights?

A: -- reflector more.

Q: Lights?

A: Lights, yeah, but has a name. Forgot now. You know, it -- big, big lamp pointing the light in one direction and you see everything.

Q: Spotlight.

A: Oh, it has another -- like -- like you -- somebody is performing on a stage. There are lights who are lighting them -- the stage, yeah? What is it called, the lights? Okay, you understand what I mean, yeah?

Q: Absolutely.

A: And the lights were centered onto the door -- on the doors of the cars, so we were blind absolutely. We were in the dark the whole time, and suddenly so much light, yeah. And the dogs barking, and we couldn't see even where we are, and who are around us. There were SS men, these big dogs, you know, how they used to do it. And they were shouting at us, raus, raus,

faster, faster, faster. Go, go. And then we were putting in a -- in a row everybody and letting into a concentration camp. We saw there the gates and we understood that it's a concentration camp. That's how we came to the concentration camp. And then for tomorrow, we went out in the morning, we went out to a appelle. I mean --

Q: Roll call.

A: Yeah, we had to -- to show up, everybody has to show up in a -- in -- to stand in a row straight like soldiers, you know? And we were told to -- to give every jewelry we have, or money, or watches, everything what's valuable to give them immediately. If they find it, is, you know, there is one sentence, death, death, death, yeah? So people gave what they had. And they were taking such a -- like a -- like a ba -- big bag, and everybody was putting something in there, gold rings, or something what was left. I think Rachel had something from my mother. My mother took with her what was left from the jewelry Veronica didn't sell, something, a brooch, I think, she took with her, and she gave to Rachel something, and Rachel threw it in the toilet. So they were not so, you know, excited [indecipherable] the Germans, they took the toilet out, you know, it was not a toilet where you wash the -- with the -- with the water, yeah, the toilet, you flush it. No, it was a toilet like a -- a [indecipherable] where you are --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah. And so they took it and they checked it. They fished from there some what do you send, rings or something, and we were laughing at that. It's a good job for a German soldier. That was it. Then --

Q: Rachel threw it on purpose into the toilet?

A: Yes, of course, of course, yes, yeah. She didn't tell it, about it? It's interesting. Well, maybe she doesn't remember it, I don't know, it's [indecipherable]

Q: W-Wasn't that a dangerous thing to do?

A: No. Who can -- who can know, who can point her out that she did it?

Q: Okay.

A: And there were like mountains of sand, so people put it in the sand.

Q: Their jewelry?

A: Their jewelry. So they took it from the sand. They knew everything. But there are -- there were brave people who took it from other people to save it, and saved it, and nobody searched us. They were so sure that we are so afraid that we will not hide it. So -- but I remember that a acquaintance of mine, when we came already to another concentration camp she had it. She thought I took it. That's [indecipherable]

Q: What did she have?

A: She had some jewelry.

Q: Oh, some jewelry.

A: Some jewelry, she took it in from other people.

Q: Right.

A: She asked. The people gave it to her.

Q: At that point, how did you feel? Did you feel brave?

A: No. I don't know. I -- I didn't think to do it, I -- I didn't -- it was not in my mind to do something -- some -- such brave things. I son -- I think my bravery I left in Wilna. I was not brave any more. I think so, but maybe. And then we were taken to -- to Strassenhof. It was a concentration camp, but it was more a labor camp, I think, because everybody was working. So it was not so bad. Comparing with ghetto, it was bad. Comparing to the other concentration camp, it was not so bad, you know? Bad things are like th -- bad things have stages. Can be bad, be bad,

it can be more bad, and even more bad. So there was the stages, so we were there, and at once we worked for a -- we -- they were building some -- something, a building, a factory, so we worked there. I don't remember even what we did. Did we dig something, we -- we -- did we take -- use - - used to take breaks and bra -- bricks, and --

Q: Bricks.

A: -- and bring it to them? Or we -- I don't remember exactly what job we did. We helped the Latvian people to build it. We were -- we were doing the dirty job for -- you know, the heavy job, the dirty job for the builders. And one man who was working there, started to talk to me in Russian -- because we didn't know Latvian, it was a strange country for us. It was in not -- it was similar to Lithuanian, but we didn't know Lithuanian even very well. We didn't know. So he started to talk Russian and we talked to him also, you know. He asked for -- where we are coming from and so on. And he -- one day he brought even food, I think. And one day he told me, I'll -- I'll bring you clothes, and you will run away. We were already in the cl -- given the clothes of the concentration camp, like stripes, you know? St-Striped clothes, yeah.

Q: Uniforms.

A: Uniforms. You can say uniforms, can -- maybe it is uniforms. I -- I think a uniform is a uniform, it isn't -- something isn't, but here -- okay. But prisoner uniforms, okay, we'll say like that. And he told me I'll bring you one and I'll show you how to run away, and I will bring you to the partisans. And I came and I don't know if I told Rachel or I told her later, and I thought what to do, what to do? Can I trust him, or he will take me immediately to Gestapo, because there were such things. But I -- I -- I think now that I could trust him, because there were things that -- in Lithuania some people were asking for money, and then they were -- you -- o-or they will hide you or take you to a good place.

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

A: Yeah, so -- so we were in Strassenhof, we were for a year, more or less.

Q: Can I get you to finish that story, what made you dis -- what did you decide about the offer from the man?

A: Uh-huh, yeah.

Q: The -- the Latvian man.

A: Yeah, so I -- I was afraid to believe him, and then I was afraid another thing. The thing is that if you run away, they will find it out very easily because they counted us every day in the morning, and every day in the evening. They knew exactly the number of the prisoners. So they will shot their closest. It means Rachel would be shor -- shot, that for sure. And sh -- not she -- not only she. So I thought no, I cannot do it. That's it. I don't remember telling her. I-I think in -- in -- I didn't tell her in concentration camp for -- about it. It was out of my mind. And then we were taken to a f -- to the [indecipherable] manufacturer -- to a factory, and we worked there together with the Latvian people. The Latvian woman taught us how to manage the machines, and she almost left it for us. We were already doing it. We're happy that we can do such a job, but it was of course, difficult for us, because everybody would -- had to take care of 10 machines or something like that. But then we learned from her, we looked how she was stealing the material, yeah, and we learned from her. She was not afraid of us.

Q: The Latvian woman?

A: The Latvian woman, so she was stealing, so Rachel told, we can do the same and we can sell it, and we can -- I mean sell to get bread for it. And that we were r-risking the life for sure. So one of us, me, and other times she, was cutting the roll. You have to be very careful how you cut the roll, not to leave the sign. But I think that the people who ah -- were checking --

Q: Mm-hm.

A: -- checked the -- the [indecipherable] material, you know, the rolls. You are bringing to a place where it was checked, measured probably, knew about that, that the Latvian are doing it. And they were afraid to tell it, because they probably didn't want to -- to threaten the Latvian people who were working with us. They didn't think that the Jewish women can dare to do it. I believe it.

Q: If you cut it, where would you put it?

A: I put it like that, behind, and then Rachel run to the toilet, and she was look --

Q: Wrapped in a towel?

A: -- wrapping it around her waist. We were very thin, that you cannot find it [indecipherable] you didn't look fat after [indecipherable]. Of course it was not a lot, maybe a couple of meters.

Q: But then who would you sell it to?

A: We work -- you know, because we were in touch with Latvian, some of the prisoners were from Riga, and they spoke Latvian. So they had a connection with the inner -- ou-out -- the world outside the concentration camp. See, they used to take it -- in the concentration camp, they used to take it to bring it to the Latvian, and the Latvian gave them a bread, and they used to take some bread for themselves, some bread to us. So that makes us more happier. I mean, we were hungry, very hungry, because the food was very -- this was very little food there. Rations were very small. A small piece of bread and a little bit margarine and some soup, like waterish -- watery soup, like water with some beans in it or something like. So we were very hungry, so this was a support, a big support.

Q: Rachel talked about you wanting to eat your bread all up in the morning.

A: Ah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Every time we received the bread, I told give it my -- give my bread to me. She told no, I'll not give it to you. Give it to me, I'm hungry, give it to me, I want to eat it. No, you will not eat it. I'll give you a piece and that's it, that's your breakfast. I am hungry. You will get the other one in the evening. And that save us the life. I don't know how she knew it, or maybe she learned it from somebody, maybe the instinct, you know, told her to -- to -- not to eat it immediately the whole bread and then to be out of food the whole day, what was very bad, of course.

Q: In the concentration camp, or when you worked, were there ever -- did you ever have an experience where a German seemed sympathetic or helpful?

A: No, it was a -- you know, we were punished for si -- for some things, you -- we used to come to the concentration camps so they used to -- we used to stand in lines, they used to count us and then we were punished for something. Somebody did something wrong and we were standing for hours, very exhausted, and very tired. And so another time, they thought, oh we had to jump on one foot around the building, around there. But we were young, and I remember jumping and laughing, you know? We were pushing each other on, and I jumped over to a SS, he was like in a -- in a -- a SS coat, having a gun. He was like guarding us, yeah. And he was crying. When I saw him crying, I don't know how I dared, I asked him, what are you crying? So he told, I am not a German. I am a Romanian. And they -- the Germans lied to me. They told me, would you wa -- would you like to go to the front? He was mobilized, yeah, he -- would you -- take into the army, I mean. It's -- how it's c-called, not mobilized, draft, yeah, it was a draft. So he told, won't you -- won't you -- won't -- would you like to go to the fr-front line, to the eastern front? No. So you will be an SS. He didn't know what is SS. Okay, I'll be an SS. He was not ver-very young in my eyes, probably he was 35, so then I was 15, so it was old already for me, you know. So he told

me -- and I have a daughter like you at home. And I looked at you and I -- and I cannot bear it. He cried. And then I -- in a short time I didn't see him at all. I don't know, maybe he left the SS and went to the front, I don't know. I never saw him again. That was one, you know, one person who -- who couldn't bear the -- who -- looking how we were punished and how we were beaten or -- then a group of girls run away, and from the same place where the Russian Latvian guy was working. So they shot every 10th. They were counting when the -- when girls are standing on the appelle, they were counting one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, out and th -- every 10 -- 10th people -- person was shot. So we knew we -- we are risking very much. And I remember that one lady told, we have to watch each other not to let run away some other -- somebody. So I told her, are you crazy? Let run away everybody who can. We will be shot at, not -- not earlier, so it's later. But let everybody run. If I could, I would ru -- run, but -- but I -- that was I refused this time, and I didn't have another time.

Q: So you -- you -- what did you think was going to happen to you?

A: You know, we heard already that the army, the Soviet army is coming. We -- we didn't believe that they will let us alive.

Q: The Germans.

A: The Germans. We thought they will kill everybody and that's it. It will be the final solution. We didn't hear about the final solution there, but we he -- knew exactly what they want to do with us, yeah. That's it. Maybe I -- I remember that s -- the Soviet army started to bomb Riga. And the Germans came running to the concentration camp, they're hiding themself. Oh, we were so happy to -- to look at them, how afraid they were of their lives, yeah. I remember opening the window, telling them come, come to us. We are not -- we are not afraid to die of your bomb, but together with the Germans. Here we all were making signs to them for -- through the window

and praying, come, come the bomb to -- to throughout yeah -- to throughout the concentration camp [indecipherable] building. Didn't happen. I don't know where they bombed, but they didn't bomb the concentration camp. Yeah.

Q: So when -- can you describe when you leave the work camp? I want to keep going chronologically --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you worked for a year --

A: For a year, then --

Q: -- then what happened?

A: Then what happened. They shaved our heads, gave something else to wear, I think, other uniform, and --

Q: Your heads weren't shaved the first year?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: Rachel cut me the hair in the first -- in -- in Kaiserwald, but then I had my hair until I was -- our concentration camp was evacuated already. So it means they were evacuated, we knew that the Soviet army is coming. So they took us to the -- to a -- to the s-sea, and they -- we were going away -- be -- they took us to a -- a ship, and went to -- by the sea, we went to -- to Stutthof.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: This is another concentration camp, which was not a labor camp any more, it was only concentration camp. And the death rate was very big, of course, very high. And crazy things, crazy things there. Even in -- being in Strassenhof, they made a list of everybody who is younger than 16 and older than 30. And they took all the people older than 30 years and younger than 16.

So because of Rachel, I was in -- not in the list, because she asked me to write myself older, not to be a child. So I write myself not, so then I was probably 16, so I was two years older, so I was 18, so they didn't take me. So then I went to Stutthof, it was -- it was horrible, it was -- we went - - we were placed in a block, meaning a -- such a shtuba, a house, a wooden house where criminals were in -- the bosses of the -- of -- of the houses, like a Russian criminal was a -- a woman was -- she was the boss of our house, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. H-How did you know she was a criminal?

A: You can see by her language. The curses, by the way of her behavior, I don't know, or maybe she was a prostitute maybe, not a criminal, and like that. And one time they told us to load big stones on wagons to push them down -- down the hill, then to push them up the hill, to unload them, then to load them again, push down the hill. It's not so easy to push them hen -- down on the hill there, have to go very slowly, so you have to hold. They were loaded by -- with this -- with brick stones, and to push it up the hill also, like that, the -- a whole day, yeah. All that to make you happy. Then, of course, the beatings, and the st -- the illnesses, the starving was, you know, it was over -- we were overwhelmed with dirt, with lice, with -- it was awful. Then one day somebody told that they are taking some young people to work for the farmers. So we went with Rachel. There was -- we stayed there probably two or three months. We worked very hard, but at least we were more or less free. We could wash ourself, we washed our clothes, we were more or less clean, you know, and the food was like, you know, the maid of the ba -- of the f-farmer gave us a key of the basement where the potatoes were, and so we had it. But in three months they took us back -- they took us back, so they took us to a shower. And you never knew, if you are taken to a shower, it will be water from there, from the ceiling, or it will be death, who

-- they'll kill you. Because they used to do it from the same things, you know, the -- where the showers are, they used to -- to send the gas to the area you are closed, yeah.

Q: How did you know that though?

A: I don't know, but we knew.

Q: Just knew.

A: Yeah. We knew -- we saw the crematorium. The crematorium had smoke 24 hours a day, it never stopped smoking, the smoke was black and smell it [indecipherable] the smell was horrible. So we knew that they are burning people there. We knew it.

Q: Wh-Where was this?

A: In Stutthof.

Q: Stutthof.

A: Yeah, it was not in Strassenhof, it was in Stutthof, yeah. And every time, every appelle is selecting people to the crematorium.

Q: Could you tell how they were selecting?

A: Oh, they were going like -- you are standing five people in a row, and you -- the SS men used to go and look at you. And I don't know, I -- I learned one thing, don't show in your eyes that you are afraid, because if you are afraid, oh, they look at you. Don't show that you hate the -- hate them so much that you will kill them, otherwise, he will take you. Look at -- look -- don't look at them at all. Look through them, you know?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Like he would be a glass, and you look through them to -- to some point, I don't know, and look very indifferently. It's not very [indecipherable]. Oh, you won't -- you don't take me, you'll

take me, maybe it's even better than -- such a life is better death [indecipherable] no. We are never selected, with Rachel.

Q: How did you manage to always stay -- it sounds like you were always physically with her, that you didn't get separated too much.

A: No, not too much at all. I don't know how we managed. I don't know how.

Q: What -- what was it like when you were separated for some reason?

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't remember being separated?

A: No. Not in the concentration camps, never. We were afraid of it.

Q: So if one of you was asked to do something, would the other one say, I'll go with you?

A: No. Ju -- were not asked individual -- individually to do something. It's a group.

[indecipherable] 10 people [indecipherable] we went together.

Q: What would you talk about at night together?

A: At night we used to talk how good it was at home. How tasty was the food what I hated and didn't eat. And I always thought, where is the kasha Mama gave me, and where is the milk I didn't want to drink? And that's all, and some such things, and then where are our parents, our sisters, and brothers? Are they in a concentration camp like we? Can they survive? And so on.

Yeah, and then we are -- we were [indecipherable] to a -- to a house after being in -- working for the farmers, we are [indecipherable] a house, which was -- there were only sick people. Were no beds, it was -- it were no beds before also, but it were be -- wooden beds, you know, in like --

Q: Bunks?

A: How?

Q: Bunks?

A: Bunks, yeah?

Q: Wooden beds --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- on top of each other, mm-hm.

A: So -- and here no bed -- no, no beds at all. Everybody was sitting on the floor, and because we were so crowded, so many people were, so we were sitting in a row, like my legs were a little bit spread in me, another person in me, like five. And we were sleeping like that, everybody was leaning towards the other. And that was the worst. People were dying like -- like, you know, flies. I remember I woke up, I was lying -- I was leaning -- leaning a li -- leaning up a -- a -- a woman who was dead already. So, I mean, my head was on the dead corpse already, corpse. And every morning used to come several men who were taking the corpses out of us, of our room, yeah. And once I heard that the kapo who was coming and directing the people what to do, from which line to take the corpses, spoke Polish. So I ask him, look, how is this Red army? Is she coming? How far are they? Because we listen -- we heard already the bombs, the -- you know, the -- the bullets falling, you know. So he told me, what are you doing here? A language is a such powerful -- powerful thing, you know? It's such a connection between people who are not connected and maybe not even like each other. But he her -- he didn't hear Polish very much, and suddenly he heard Polish. So he ask me if [indecipherable] I mean miss. Oh, what I didn't hear wa -- for -- you know, for years. What are you doing here? I told him, you don't know what I'm doing here? [indecipherable] do you know that you will die here? Nobody will be alive here. Go out of here. How -- how can we go out of here? So he told me, and he said, today will come a German and take some people to work with the kitchen, with potatoes, to wash it, to prepare food, I don't know. Don't be afraid, he underline me, it's not to the crematorium. Go for -- and --

and stand up -- stand there in a line and wait until they will take you. And then it was -- one German or two came, and we went with Rachel and they took us. Took us together again. Went to another house where we are having to do these potatoes, you know. Bad, frozen potatoes, preparing it for a dinner for the -- for the prisoners. And sleeping already in a room which had the wooden beds, yeah. And then we heard that they are evacuate -- ready to evacuate the whole concentration camp. Who can go, who can work? The others? They will -- they will take -- they will make a fire and everything will be burned, and that what they did. And we were evacuated. We went on that -- we went o-on the Death March, with this --

Q: Did -- did you choose to go?

A: Oh, I don't remember if we choose --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- see, I -- I think they didn't ask us. They didn't ask us anything, they told us to go, so we went. It was a horrible, of course, we were -- first of all, it was cold, it was the end of February, the beginning of March, it was cold. It was snowing, it was freezing. We were -- we were in such uniforms, as they gave us such, you know, things to cover us, is a -- like sheets, you know, some to cover us. And the lice were all over us, I remember th -- th -- I [indecipherable] everything was -- is -- is moving. They gave us a -- a piece of bread and go. And on the way we saw the horses, together with German families, they were running from the Russians already, so they load on the horses everybo -- everything -- on the carts actually, and th-they were running, and sometimes Polish people were -- which were taken from Poland to work for the Germans were shouting to us, ma -- to encourage us. So --

Q: Like what would they say?

A: Let -- s-stay alive, stay alive, the Russians are coming. Stay alive, stay alive, the Russians are coming. It's not far, it's not far, but you -- you can hear. You can see the red sky from the fire of the front, you know, and the Germans were running. And then they took us to a -- one small camp. We were -- I don't know, we were there for a week or so. And then they took us from the small camp to -- again, was a march, yeah, and then they marched in -- we -- we came to a barn, yeah. They opened the door and they told us to go. We didn't know that people are there, and we started to walk over the people. The screaming was so [indecipherable] we couldn't -- we -- we couldn't understand what's -- and the other rows are pushing us, yeah, and we cannot walk because we are walking on the bodies of other people, heads, there were legs. But that was the last place. They close the door and we didn't hear from the Germans any more. The -- they -- we were -- it was night, in the morning we wanted to go out, and we looked, you know, through the door, and we looked for a -- for a s -- piece of light where -- where -- where we can see what's going on there. And we started to knock on the door. And some women were shouting, don't knock, they will shoot us. And we knocked. We knocked, we knocked, nobody was there, so we started to push the door. And we pushed it open, no Germans. And we saw the road, and over there, the army, the -- the Soviet army is standing. So a group of young girls, and including me and Rachel, we run to the soldiers, yeah? We wanted to embrace them. They saw us, they started to run away. Because we -- then they told us that we looked so horrible, that they were afraid. What -- what are they, shadas of pe -- of some corpses, or some dead people, or -- who is running? And we are -- were dirty, of course. And th-then they told us that we -- they were not allowed to come over to us because we carried typhus and other illnesses. So it would be an epidemic, you know, they were afraid of the army. They wanted to protect them. So they run, and we run after them. And we came to a village, a German village. And I was sick, I was alr --

already absolutely sick. I felt that I -- I -- I was coughing, and I had the high fever. I felt it, I didn't have a -- a thermometer to -- to measure the fever. And we came over to a German village, we open the one house we wanted to enter. So a family was sitting around the table and telling us, raus. So we wacked out -- we walked out. We walked out and I saw a Russian officer going through, and -- and I knew Russian, so I told him, look, you liberated us, but we don't have where to stay. What -- what do you mean where you don't have where to stay? I told, they are not alone. Oh yeah? He took this, his pistol, opened the door, opened the pistol and told, if you don't go away from this house, you will be killed. So they left and we occupied the house. I lied down near a stove, which was [indecipherable] was hot. I was so cold, shivering. And Rachel was very active. She took all my clothes off, and put in the stove, yet it was bong, bong, like the lice and everything what -- and everybody did it, yes, some other girls came in. Then they took water, they boiled the water and we washed ourself. Then we took some clothes there that was in the house because we couldn't stay naked, of course, and we couldn't use the old uniforms [indecipherable]. Then came -- we were already cleaner, a little bit, it came to feeding myself. I remember Rachel brought a -- a piece of bread. Fresh bread, smelled a -- a -- she gave it to me. So I gave one bite and I told, look at, I am full already, I cannot eat any more. And she told, you know, I don't know why, but I am full also. So we stopped eating, and other people started to eat a lot. Then they were dying, you know, why it was something in the stomach and the emergency had no time, the military emergency, to take them to the hospital, they were dying. And we survived only because we couldn't eat. We two -- we -- we didn't know, we were so young that we didn't know that you -- when you were starved al-almost to death so many -- for so many years, you can't eat a lot. You have to start from the beginning, a little bit, a little bit. Then, to make the story short, because it's so -- so very shor -- big story, we are -- stayed there for a

month, and we are allowed by the Soviet government [indecipherable] the military government to -- to go home. So we went to a train, and we went to ho -- Poland. Trains were not passenger trains, trains -- also the soldiers were there, and it was a mixture, a mixture. And seems that the whole population is moving. One is going to Germany, the other is going from Germany, and everybody is moving. We met Polish people from Wilna who told me that my house is already bombed, that I don't have a house, and it was true. That I learned in Poland on the train. The mid -- in the middle of the -- the woods, the train would stop, and the -- the train -- and -- and the people -- some people came from the woods and robbed. Everybody took the b-belongings from everybody, because what the other people did, even from Lithuania, from Poland, went together with the Soviet army to Germany, took belongings of -- the German belongings, you know, jewelry -- what -- what they left behind. And li -- and they brought it back to their country and sold it all for theirselves, I don't know. There were already such people, businessmen, yeah, or businesswomen. So the others knew it, and they -- they were taking the belongings of these people. And we laughed with Rachel because we didn't have anything, so nobody took from us anything. That's it, and then we came closer to our border already, Lithuanian border, and we changed the trains, of course, and some Soviet officers told us, come girls to us, sit down there to their [indecipherable] yeah. And the train went to Lithuania, yeah. So she started to ask us from wa -- from where we are coming now, and what -- and they saw how they look. So we told them the truth, what it was and -- so one told us, look, you know that on the border of Lithuania and Poland, you will be stopped. And because you don't have papers, no identification papers, no nothing, no passports, no in -- identification papers. So we will be taken in a -- in a camp. I told, what? I am not going in any camp any more, any camp, if it was German, or Russians, I don't care. So he -- so I -- I'm -- I'm going to die in Wilna. I was sure that I am dying. I was -- felt like

dying, yeah. So, but I will die in Wilna where I was born. I don't want to die in Germany of course, I don't want to die in Poland. So they told, you know what? We will hide you. And there were some machines inside, what probably the Soviets were taking from the Germans already, like -- like to make x-rays. I saw the [indecipherable] like from some medicine machines or something like that, I don't know. I saw it for x-rays. And they hide us over there. And then the - the train stopped, and the people came over, also military people with lamps, lights everything looked around, asked them for papers, the officers gave them the papers. They ask, is there anybody else here? No, nobody is here. Oh, okay. So the door was closed, and the train came to Kovno to Kaunas, not to Wilna. Oh, so that we are free. Good, we are almost home. Kovno from Wilna is hundred kilometer only. So we walked out, and we were arrested immediately because we -- oh, to look at us, you can see what we -- where we came from. And they asked us for documents and we don't have it. So give us a passport, give us something, we don't have. So we started to tell them that we were taken fro -- b-by the Germans. Uh-huh, come to KGB. And then they started, we will arrest you, you're spies, you're -- everybody was spies, and you're prostitutes, you -- you run to the -- together with the -- with the ger -- German army. Look at us, I thought [indecipherable] you will look at us, saw how we look, the hair shaved, and -- but what was -- I don't know what they would do this as, if not a Jewish guy who was in Kovno already saw how the soldiers took us like that, you know, took us to the -- to the KGB. So they run there, we didn't know it, and they -- with money. So they gave her money for -- to the officer who took us, yeah, to [indecipherable] us, yeah. And he let us go.

Q: But he didn't know who you were?

A: No.

Q: Just that you were Jewish?

A: Of course. And then the man was waiting outside, to-took us to the -- the -- his house, and started to ask about his family, he didn't know where his family is, and [indecipherable]. And -- and he gave us, of course, a shower, and -- and we stayed there two days probably. He was looking for a way how to come from Kovno, how to go from Kovno to Wilna. But it was -- it was hundred kilometers. Now, you can make in a -- in an hour or less, but it was no way to go there, only by train. But train you have to have a ticket, and to buy a ticket you have to have a passport. So he found a man, the con --

Q: Conductor?

A: Conductor, yeah. Okay [indecipherable]

Q: Engineer --

A: Yeah, a con -- a conductor who was responsible for the train, who was -- and he took us on the train, but not in the wagons, but on the locomotive, how it's -- yeah, on the machine who is pushing that train, who is giving that power. And -- and he brought us over to Wilna. And then -- okay, I was brought to the hospital immediately because I was with tuberculosis, staying at the hospital almost two years, in and out. But you see, I'm still alive. That's it. Enough. It's fi --

Q: Okay, tell us about this picture?

A: This is a picture of my father's family. You can see my father, the youngest is standing there to the right, on the right side. Then it was sitting his brother and behind him is standing his sister, and on the left side was sitting the other sister. So you can see they are in uniforms of the Russian gymnasium. And it probably was in the early years of the 20's and 30's, like 1905 and of -- like something like that. That's it.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: This my grandfather. He was a rabbiner in Wilna who was responsible for the Jewish community in Wilna.

Q: And what was his name?

A: Samuel Shreyber.

Q: Who is this?

A: This is my mother's mother. She was born in Berlin, but she married a Polish Jew, and came to live with him in Wilna. And this was probably the late 19th century, in the later 19th century. I don't know e-exactly the date. That's it.

Q: Who is this good looking guy?

A: My father. This is my father in a uniform of a Russian -- of Russian students. He was a -- a student of university. I don't know exactly, was it in -- at sa -- St. Petersburg University, or it was already in the Warsaw Polytechnical University school. So this was a usual uniform of the students. You see on his -- on the top of his shoulders there, on the shoulders is written -- is a crown and written N2, Nikolai the second. That to me, I gave it to my younger daughter when she was a wending -- the wedding. This is my mother. The photograph is made in Wilna, probably in 1915, something like that, before her wedding. And she has a medallion who -- it -- the medallion, she received it from her mother, and now I gave it to my daughter as a wedding pre -- present to my younger daughter, Mira. And that's it.

Q: Okay.

A: This is my family. My mother, my father, my brother is standing and I am sitting on the lap of my mother, holding a ball, probably with a very serious look, like I was very serious. Not giving the ball to anybody, probably.

Q: And this is dated when? 1929 on the back.

A: It's a -- no, no, I was here probably three years old, so it was '31. 1931 probably. Maybe I'm two years old so it's '30, 1930.

Q: And who is this?

A: This is Veronica Stenkavich, the lady who helped us with food during the o -- German occupation and kept me, or wanted to save my life, kept me for a half a year, more or less in her home, but she couldn't keep me any longer. We met after the war, and she was like a part of my family after the war. She died when she was 75 in 1963.

Q: Okay, go ahead please.

A: This is a picture of my father standing in the middle surrounded with a group of his students, of the students of the e -- Jewish technical school in Wilna, made in Wilna in 1934. The building behind them is the technical school, the building of the technical school. It's written the fifth -- now I have lost it -- the fifth year already houses -- on the fi -- no, I don't know [indecipherable] in English. You finish the school there, the fifth graduation, oh -- the fifth graduation of the students of the technical school. And there's always a director, my father.

Q: Who do we have here?

A: This is my brother and me in 1936. It's a photograph of two of us. Yeah, my brother and myself, yeah.

Q: And the book?

A: This is a book written by my uncle, my father's brother-in-law, Hirsch Abramovich. You can see him on the picture together with my aunt, my father's sister and two cousins. One of the cousins is still alive, and she's a reference librarian in Evo in New York. And her name is Dina Abramovich. The title of the book it -- the proph -- prophets of a lost world, the memoirs of a east European, of east European Jewish life before the World War II. And the -- the book was

written in 1956, and translated -- was written in -- in engli -- in Yiddish and translated into English in 1999. Publish -- is it? No date.

Q: And this would be what?

A: This is a -- a textbook for the students o-o-of the Yiddish technical school. The textbook is written in Yiddish by my father, and the title is in Yiddish, is [speaks Yiddish], parts of the engines. So he was translated, think, German technical books into Yiddish and writing the textbooks and drawing the -- the pictures. The drawings are by him. They were prepared specially for the students of the Yiddish technical school, yes.

Q: How did you come by it? How did it survive?

A: Yeah, they survived in a -- in such way that I have three of them, one -- one book was -- two books were -- were given me by the students of his -- o-of his school after the war. One book was given me in Montreal, by hi -- also his former student, who brought it -- who immigrated in 1938, I think, to Canada and he brought the book with him and he gave it to me as a present.

End of Tape Four

Conclusion of Interview