

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Irena Veisaite
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PREFACE

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IRENA VEISAITE

September 7, 2004

Beginning Tape One

Question: Good morning.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: I would like to start with asking you to tell your name, place and date of birth, please.

A: I am Irena Veisaite. I was born in Kaunas a long time ago, in 1928, on the ninth of January.

Q: So, when the war began, you were --

A: 13 years old.

Q: 13 years old.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you please tell me something about this 13 years old girl before the war, please.

A: Well, I was very lucky to be born in a wonderful family, in a wealthy family. I had really a wonderful childhood, except maybe that my parents get divorced in '38, which was, of course, a very big shock to me. My father left Lithuania, remarried later on, and I stayed with my mother in Kaunas. I -- I was probably a quite good pupil. My father sent me to a Yiddish school Shalom Aleichem gymnasium, which was famous. They had very good teachers, and it was a left wing school, I would say, which was shaped by Yiddishes -- by the Yiddishists and not by sci -- Zionists. And the people --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Sorry?

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Mis -- yeah, but my -- my parents were already out of the shtetl, they were European educated people. My mother finished [indecipherable] schule in Berlin. My father got his education in Hamburg, and th -- and so they were not religious, but were very tolerant. My grandparents -- I had -- had only my grandparent -- parents from my mother's side, so they were quite m -- they came out of Bapte my father was a milkman, like Tevya from Shalom Aleichem. Was really a wonderful, wonderful man. I think he influenced the whole family a lot, with his very open-minded and -- views and with his goodness.

Q: Excuse me, I must ask you for --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Can you take off this -- because it makes sounds on the tape will you, and -- thank you. Sorry for interrupting you.

A: Yeah, okay. And -- and I was educated respecting them very much and very much respecting their belief, and I would go every Friday for kiddush, to -- to meet Saturday and I was attending there all day, of course holidays and Rosh Hashanah and -- and especially Easter, where I played a big role under the table, looking for [indecipherable]

Q: You say their holidays.

A: Not -- not holidays, but how is it in English, [indecipherable]. It is like -- no --

Q: Yes, I understand.

A: Yeah.

Q: But you say their.

A: I was with my par -- when I -- with my grandparents always there.

Q: Their holidays, their --

A: Their Jewish holidays.

Q: Their Jewish holidays. Back then you felt it's theirs and not yours?

A: Because in our house we didn't celebrate it, we especially. So I felt it more than -- as the -- a-as the tradition of my grandparents, which was very nice and respected. But I had also in my childhood a Christmas tree.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Because -- not because it was for religious purposes, that my parents were -- were saying that you can take from other people the best they have, and they wouldn't like me to be envious of other children who have this tree and get their different presents. So I had also a Christmas tree and our home was very international. We had very many guests, Lithuanians and Russians and -- from all over the world, friends who would come and visit us. So my parents spoke already -- except English probably, all European languages, French, German, Polish, Russian. So -- no, my -- my parents told me that you have always to speak the language that everybody understands, if you can. So I was multilingual from childhood. I was speaking from my -- my native languages were two, Lithuanian, and Russian, I spoke from childhood. And then when I was five years old I had something with my lungs and I was sent to S-Switzerland, to Arosa in a sanatorium, where I stayed for almost a year, and then I forgot all languages. I came back not speaking Lithuanian and not speaking Russian, but speaking only German. And I remember that I went with my parents to Moscow, my father had his family there and my uncle made me a present, such a sewing machine, a children's sewing machine. And it is in Russian shvaina mashina. So I was told that -- that -- then the joke was that I answered the [speaks Russian here], I don't want a big machine, yeah. So this only proves that I really didn't speak any more Russian, but of course the languages came back very fast. And when I was sent to the Shalom Aleichem gymnasium, to the yeshiva school, I didn't speak Yiddish, but I

learned it quite fast. And I -- but the -- the beginning was not so good because I didn't speak so well Yiddish, so my classmates would call me the intelligentka. So --

Q: This is also a question I wanted to ask you about.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: On one hand you described a very cosmopolitan house.

A: Yeah.

Q: And on the other hand you are sent to a Yiddish --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- school.

A: Yeah.

Q: Didn't you feel any contradiction?

A: No, I didn't feel because I mentioned already that it was a left wing school, really a very good school. I remember my -- my -- my teachers, most of the teachers with great respect. And my -- I must say that, for instance, my Lithuanian, I am really literate in Lithuanian. I write in Lithuanian well, and I learned -- I spoke from childhood, but I learned really the language and the writing in this Jewish school. Bu -- and my -- my teacher was [indecipherable]. She perished in the Holocaust, and she came from a Lithuanian province and she was -- she finished the university, Lithuanian language and literature, and she was really a wonderful teacher.

Q: Now --

A: So this -- a-and they saved my life also, you know, beca --

Q: You will tell about this later, but --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you said -- you use an expression that I would like --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- if you allow me, to check with you. You said about your teacher that she perished in the Holocaust. You -- you mean she was murdered in the Holocaust?

A: Murdered, yeah, murdered. Sorry, my English is maybe not so [indecipherable]

Q: No, no, no, because -- because -- it's not your English, because many people don't use the term murder, and they, like --

A: No, she was killed. She was killed in the Holocaust, yeah.

Q: She was wo -- yes.

A: And but she was -- in the school she was an exception, because she was a Zionist. But because she was a very good teacher, she was kept in the school. And my father had also illusions, left winged illusions. He was a rich man in Kaunas and he had his own house, he has his own business. But he was -- he was dreaming about social justice, and as you know, in the 30's, many European, not only Lithuanian intellectuals, had this illusion that the Soviet Union is maybe the solution. And maybe they are giving equal rights to everybody. So he insisted that a -- I go to this school. All my cousins went to Lithuanian school.

Q: So your father was a leftist bourgeois?

A: He was a salon communist, I would say. Not a communist, but a left wing salon. He was helping people who were in trouble. He was paying, I think, money for Mopar -- for the -- this was an organization who has collected money for the political prisoners in -- in those times. And in the main time he was -- he was quite a rich man, and he never came to the -- to live in the Soviet Union. So -- and th --

Q: What -- what -- what were he doing --

A: -- and his -- his -- his family -- you know, my father was sent to be educated in Hamburg, because my grandfather, who was a merchant of the second gildia -- I know that's a quite high level, he was quite [indecipherable] man. He was -- he had his business in Garganas, it's was -- it's not far, now it's Byelorussia. And all his chil -- sons became revolutionaries, so he got sick of it, fed up with it and he decided, the youngest son, to send to -- to study in Germany, that he shouldn't become a revolutionary. But my -- they were really -- you -- you should very much distinguish the revolutionaries of those times with the Stalin times, because they were -- they really thought it was an utopias, you know, and an utopia, that's socialism, and communism will bring social justice, equality and so on. And it ended that one brother of my father was arrested in '37 and killed by Stalin. A-And -- because he was a too honest man, he was a quite known person. He was the director of [speaks Lithuanian here] this is fiction literature, it's a big, big publishing house. And he was also then later on the director of the medicine -- is that me-medical publishing house. Well, he was accused so, and he was killed. He was arrested in '37. And my other uncle who was a professor, he never joined the party again after the Bolsheviks came to power because he saw what happened in the Crimea. He spend the time of the civil war in Crimea and he saw what the -- really the Bolsheviks are like, and he never joined the party. He had his own story, which I don't know if we have time to tell you now, but very interesting, that he never told me, really, the truth he knew.

Q: About the Bolsheviks?

A: When I came -- yeah, when I came, because everybody was afraid then. And only when he was already quite -- qui -- after -- after Khrushchev's letter, this -- in -- on the -- in '56, when Stalin was really -- it was opened up what he did, he told me that he knew it all, because he also knew -- he was a friend of Krupska, Lenin's wife, who was also persecuted by Stalin and the

whole -- all -- all -- this whole regime on -- and the -- the -- what -- what happened in '37, he had no illusions. But of course he -- but then he told me really true story.

Q: After. Many years later.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So your father was sent to Germany --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- to study, and he came back to Lithuania.

A: And then th-the -- the first World War started, because he was born in 1900. So when the first World War started, and you know that Lithuania was under the Tsarist regime, so he was a rush - a r -- a citizen of Russia. So he went back with lot -- with lot of adventures, and he was even arrested by the Bolsheviks as a German spy. And just by miracle he -- his life was saved and he came back to Kaunas and his father was already in Kaunas. He was the owner of [speaks Lithuanian here], it was a lottery. And because he was the only one not in Russian, not in the Soviet Union, so he inherited his business, and it was the stu -- h-he was the owner of [speaks Lithuanian here]. This is the -- the main agency of the government lottery.

Q: Would you like to make a break and to have some water for your throat?

A: Maybe it would b-be good because I -- my --

Q: Okay. Let's stop for a moment.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: [indecipherable] can you please bring a glass of water? [interruption] Thank you. Okay, so your father came back to Kaunas.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: At the age of?

A: Then he was 20 something, or maybe a little bit less, I can't tell you exactly --

Q: When di --

A: -- but he is born in 1900.

Q: And when did he start his business? He became a wealthy man l-later on.

A: In '26, I think, my grandfather -- my grandfather was wealthy, and --

Q: Mm-hm. Ou-out of --

A: -- and he -- an-and my father inherited his business, the lottery business.

Q: The lottery business.

A: And th-then he never [indecipherable]

Q: I see, I see.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Okay, so you were studying in a Yiddish school --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- with leftist tendency --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in a cosmopolitan family.

A: Yeah.

Q: You didn't f -- did you feel a Jew, or did you feel a citizen of the world?

A: No, I felt that I am -- I am a Lithuanian Jew. This I felt, of course. I -- this -- I was -- I was, you know, educated in our school, very patriotic, because we were studying history. I don't know if you heard, there was such a -- a textbook shap -written by a Lithuanian historian, Shapulka, who really mythologized the Lithuanian history. And his book had the -- probably the task to unite a nation, because I don't know if you know Lithuanian history, but Lithuania was --

the history is quite painful, because you know that the Polish influence, the Russian influence, and -- and the Lithuanian speaker were mainly peasants. So it was very important to unite a nation and to give them a mythology that -- to be proud. And then it came to idealize the past, our -- our great --

Q: You identified with this?

A: Yeah, I identified with that --

Q: You did, you did.

A: -- I was singing [indecipherable] Vilnius [indecipherable] was very anti-Polish. In -- in -- in -- not against the individual, but that Vilnius was occupied and we were very strong, yeah. And you know, I remember even such a joke, which shows you also where we had a -- it was obligatory to have a exa-examination religion.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And a little --

Q: A religion in the Yiddish school.

A: In -- in the Yiddish school, Jewish religion.

Q: Jewish religion.

A: And I had also to -- to pass this exam. And I was really always the first pupil, which is not very good for developing a good character, but it happened that I was. So -- and you know, and the -- th -- the person, the teacher who was asking questions was a Lithuanian inspector. And he asked me --

Q: A Jew?

A: Wha -- no, not a Jew --

Q: So how --

A: -- a Lithuanian inspector.

Q: -- how could he --

A: He came to -- to find out what is -- how -- how religion is teaching in our school -- is -- is taught in our school.

Q: I -- he did make the examination, but only checked --

A: No -- yeah, he came -- additional questions.

Q: Okay.

A: So he asked me -- I think so, maybe you know, you can sometimes remember, but I remember that this Lithuanian inspector asked me, what is Yom Kippur? So I said, Yom Kippur is a very famous artist. It was -- y-you probably know Jan Kiepura. He was a -- playing -- he was of Polish, I think, origin and he was playing, if I am not mistaken, with Martha Eggerth, and -- and she was also very famous actress, and --

Q: So how did he react in respect to --

A: He -- I -- everybody was laughing.

Q: He was laughing as well?

A: And he was laughing as well.

Q: Yeah. So an --

A: No, and I -- I still -- I very much liked all the, you know, all the -- the -- Easter especially, and I was always asking the que -- the -- the kashas [speaks foreign language here] and -- and so on, so I -- I didn't reject it, and --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- no way. And we were very much, you know, indoctrinated against the Sinai schools, the Hebrew schools. So, in -- in the end, in the Soviet times the Hebrew schools were closed, and

some of the -- of the pupils from the Hebrew schools came to our school, but -- was united, the school.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And oh we had quite big fights with the Zionists there, I remember.

Q: And you a-as a 13 or 12 years old girl --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you had your opinions.

A: I had my opinion, yeah. I had my opinion and -- and I had a very big conflict with a -- with a boy who was the best pupil, the first pupil in his school, in the Hebrew school, Schwabe. And I was the first in AMI school. And when we came together in the first term -- seme -- semester finished, so he -- I was the first and he was the second. So he started the fight against me. So it was a whole story, but it -- it's fine [indecipherable] Bloomberg, a very nice boy. He survived.

Q: And sometime in the period before the war started, during your youth in Kaunas, do you feel any antisi -- anti-Semitism? Did you omit and phenomena of anti-Semitism?

Q: To be honest, I didn't feel, no. I didn't feel. I-I had -- my school friends were Jewish, but I had also -- we had a lot around. I hadn't -- I -- probably I didn't have very close friends of my age of Lithuanian ethnic origin. But I really didn't -- didn't feel -- but what I really felt is a terrible fear because of war, because the adults were speaking all the time about war, about Hitler, about what is happening. And I had even such a terrible dream, you know, I don't remember so many dreams, but this is one of the dreams I remember very well. I was a little girl and somehow I found myself in a camp where Hitler was. And I was taken to his -- to his tent and he was ca -- somehow very kind, he -- he told me that I should sit on his knees and say him Poppy. This is father. And I couldn't say it. And this was terrible for me and then I woke up.

Q: You --

A: But I was terribly, terribly -- this was really the -- the nightmare. And then of course I remember how the -- the German -- the Nazis took over Klaipėda [indecipherable] and how our friends came from there, and what they told me -- and the very close friends, families from Klaipėda, they had to escape. Then I remember very well, when the war with Poland started, how Polish refugees came to Vilnius -- to Kaunas and I know that my parents helped them. My father wasn't there any more, but my mother helped them and tried to support them.

Q: The people who came from Klaipėda, what did they tell about the Germans?

A: They -- they thank God, left before it was closed.

Q: Yes.

A: So they didn't tell anything specially about their own experience, but they told about Kristallnacht, about you know, things which are happening in Germany, and about the whole ideology of Hitler. And this -- really, this is the nightmare of my childhood, Hitler.

Q: This dream, you -- you said that you dreamt that you were in a camp.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: The [indecipherable] camp.

A: The -- the -- the camp is that it was a place where many tents were staying. And it was not in a house, but in a tent.

Q: Anybody was talking about camps in this period before the war?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Q: No.

A: A camp maybe like a camp, or scouts, or I don't know, something. No, no, it was a tent in a -- in a wood, in a forest, and tents were staying and in one tent, in -- the central tent was Hitler's and I was taken to him and what I remember I -- I already told you, that --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- he told me to sit on his knees and to say him very nicely, Poppy. And I couldn't pronounce it.

Q: And this was more or less in the period that people f -- refugees started coming to Kaunas?

A: This I can't tell you exactly, but it was somewhere in '38 - '39. And then, you see, when my parents divorced --

Q: In 30 --

A: In '38.

Q: -- eight.

A: In the beginning of '38, the agreement was that I will spend my summer with my father --

Q: Where --

A: -- and I will live with my mother.

Q: Where did your father went to?

A: My father went to -- to west Europe. His second wife was of German origin, and he lived in Belgium. He survived the war -- war in Belgium. But in '38 he took me, and I spent two months with him and we were in Switzerland, in Belgium, in France and in Berlin. Mm -- and I got my wonderful bicycle, which was very famous in -- in Kaunas. Probably one of the first bicycles with gears, you know.

Q: '38 in Berlin.

A: '38 I was in Berlin, yeah.

Q: How was it?

A: Sorry?

Q: How was it?

A: This is what I wanted to tell you, that it was wonderful because I -- we were Lithuanian citizens and we were not -- we w -- were not under the Hitler's law, and we got even -- but my father told me when we -- we lived on Kurfürstendamm and we got for breakfast, for instance, a -- a little britchen, a -- a -- no, a piece of white bread with butter, with -- or margarine and marmalade and my father told me that the Germans don't receive it, and the Jews definitely not, because it is very hard now and they are preparing a war. And then my pa -- father took me to the street Unter den Linden which was the main street on the Brandenburger Tor, and -- and th-there were -- there were normal benches. I think they were white, but I don't remember, but I remember the yellow benches. And my father told me that you are not obliged to sit on the yellow bench because you are not a German citizen. But you are Jewish and this is benches where Jews are sitting. They are excluded, they are discriminated, and I want you to get the feeling how it is like to sit on such a bench. So we were sitting, I remember it very well. And can you imagine that in 2004, when we joined European Union, I was speaking at the Brandenburger Tor, to the crowds because when the enlargement of the European Union happened, I was speaking in the name of representing my country, Lithuania, and -- and I -- I -- I finished my speech with a personal remark, that you see how time changed? I'm speaking from the place, behind is the Reichstag, where I was doomed to die, to be killed, and now I am representing and talking to you, representing the country. It also proves -- it's a si -- symbolic, for me very important proofs how times have changed. It was a -- a -- I must say it was a big moment in my

life, it was successful, my speech, so I was very happy. But, of course you feel -- the first time when I was in Berlin after the war I feel very stel -- felt very strange, staying at the Reichstag.

Q: So you wa -- went for two months vacation to Europe --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- to western Europe with your father and you came back --

A: To Lithuania.

Q: -- to Kaunas.

A: Yeah, Kaunas.

Q: And -- and ni -- in '39, Jewish refugees from Poland --

A: They're coming, yeah.

Q: -- start to come to Kaunas.

A: Start to come, yeah.

Q: How did you meet with them, and --

A: They came to our house, to my mother's house. I know even -- I can even show you now, I have a little silver such plate which my mother bought from -- from a refugee, to help them also. And I know that my mother -- my mother was involved in -- in helping them. But I don't know details, but I know that they were around.

Q: And did you hear what they were telling?

A: Yes, yes of course. I was very curious. I was called in the family alticope, and -- and th-the -- it means that I am a old cop -- a old head, because I was always interested and I was such like responsible person. And so I was interested and I heard it, yes.

Q: And what do you remember ma -- made impression on you of what they were telling?

A: It made a terrible impression. It -- it raised my fear.

Q: What were they telling?

A: The people had to leave their homes, everything and -- and just became refugees and got stuck. And I didn't know, but later on I learned that they -- many -- very many of them got stuck in Lithuania and of course they were killed made -- mainly. And -- in the Holocaust, but some of them were saved by Sugihara, and the hol -- the Dutch also, cons -- council -- c-con -- consul. Ambassador.

Q: So, at the certain moment you feel that -- y-you are afraid be -- the adults are talking about the war.

A: Yeah. I was very afraid. It was really a nightmare, this -- it was like, you know, like hanging over -- over the heads.

Q: You were talking with this -- ab-about it with your mother?

A: Yes, of course.

Q: What did she say about it?

A: Well, she's -- she tried to -- to comfort me, but I don't remember exactly, you know. I remember many conversations with my mother, but I don't remember exactly what we were speaking. But I know the only one thing, that my mother wanted to leave Kaunas. And she asked my father to pay her the alimentay -- I don't know, the money he has to pay her after the divorce, in currency that she could leave the country. But it was maybe not only of -- out of fear, but also those times very few people were divorced. And my mother was a quite -- my father was q -- my family was a quite known family. So I think she didn't feel very well, in this little town, you know, where everybody was talking about the divorce and -- and she was somehow -- maybe she felt humiliated. And she was in Sweden and a German refugee who got a affidavit to go to America wanted to marry my mother and take her -- take her out. And because it was already

very tense, I can imagine what the adults were -- were already talking about this -- those times, my mother decided that she is not coming back, but I should go to Stockholm. And a ticket, air ticket was bought, and we had a very good friend, Monsieur Dumaniel who was a -- a -- mm -- a cons -- con -- consul -- a ambassador of France and Lithuania and then he was transferred to Helsinki, but he stayed friends with my mother. My mother was beloved by everybody, really. She had lots -- many, many friends, was -- and I sh -- I had to go to Helsinki and then he would take me to Stockholm and then we would go to America. And I was -- that was the first of September, and my uncle brought me to the -- to the airport [indecipherable] in Kaunas and I was waiting for the airplane to come. And I went through customs. I remember like today I had talc powder, how the customer took a knife and -- and cut this little box to see if I have in gold there or something else. And -- and I was waiting, but the airplane never came, because it's the first day of war, and the airplane was supposed to come from Warsaw. So -- so I got back and when -- and then my mother came also back. And this was fatal.

Q: And then the war started in Poland.

A: No, the war -- the -- the -- yeah, it was the first of September '39.

Q: Yes.

A: So, my mother wanted to leave, and probably she had also reason to leave because we all felt that we are trapped. We -- my mother didn't -- my mother was much less left winged than my father.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But -- but -- but didn't work out.

Q: And you stayed in Kaunas.

A: I stayed in Kaunas and my mother came back.

Q: And then the Russians came?

A: Then the Russians came. The Soviets.

Q: Soviets.

A: You know, I don't -- I try not to use the word Germans or Russians. I think that any nation is a nation [indecipherable] to be respected, but I say Nazis and Soviets, because not all the Russians were Soviets and not all the Germans were Nazis.

Q: So the Soviets came?

A: Yeah, the Soviets came. The Soviet Russians came. I know it is [indecipherable] -- it is stupid because nobody is following me, but -- but still I feel better when I do [indecipherable]

Q: Personally I agree with you about the Soviets --

A: Mm, yeah.

Q: -- not about the Germans, but this is another --

A: I agree with Germans. I have seen wonderful Germans, and if we have time, I can tell you as -
- wonderful stories about wonderful Germans.

Q: Yes, th-the problem is that when you say Nazis, you detach it from the origin, and th-this is the problem, were they -- they were from Indonesia, the Nazis?

A: No, they're German Nazis, you can say German Nazis --

Q: Yes.

A: -- if you -- if you want to be very precise, yes.

Q: Okay, yes. So, how did life change when the Soviets came?

A: Oh, life changed a lot. First of all we were thrown out from our flat, and we had to share a flat with another family. We had two rooms and the other family had one room. And we had to share the kitchen, which was very unusual for us, of course. My mother didn't work and this was good,

maybe. She went to work. She was educated, she -- she was quite capable woman and she worked in the narcomat of trade. So she started to work. And -- and immediately rumors went on, and th-th-this person is arrested, th-that person is arrested. Life changed. But still I was at school. I believe that maybe this is for justice. That -- that still maybe I'd -- I was not so mature in my political views as I-I was later, but -- but still I m -- I was not -- I personally -- it affected very much the life of the adults, but not so much maybe my own life, because I went to school, I fought with the Zionists there, I don't know. And so, it [indecipherable] stupid, but it was. I was never religious so I never experienced luck of -- of the possibility to -- to practice religion. I also -- can you imagine that about the religious schools, the famous Lithuania, I got to know only probably in the -- after our independence, when I was sent -- I wa -- I got a fellowship in Oxford, and I was in [indecipherable] and I learned really what Lithuania means for Jewish culture and religious culture and so on. Because we were very far aw-away from this yeshiva -- yeshi botnikas and the [indecipherable] and all that. And the school was also not closed to religion. So --

Q: During the Soviet time, did you have any contacts with your father?

A: No.

Q: [indecipherable] And still there was the fear of the war, or the war was already here?

A: No, I can't say that it -- the war was already here. The war started on the 22nd of June, '41. But there was already a lot of things happening. Don't forget that in those times parents were even afraid to talk to children openly, because the children could say something at school and then you will be arrested. So there was no such open communication with the parents on all topics. And I wouldn't say that I heard a lot, but I know for instance, when deportations started, my mother was very, very upset and she -- she was -- she was helping people, her -- Lithuanian

people who were also Jewish people, but also Lithuanians. She worked with, and -- as much as she could -- as she knew. And she was very, very, very unhappy about what happened. And I remember also my mother, on the 15th of June '40, when the tanks came in. And this -- I remember my mother sitting so, at the table. And she was very upset that some Jewish people went out in the streets to greet the Soviet army, the Soviet tanks. And i-it was even, I must say for -- for historical truth, that my mother called them interveldnikas, who went out in the street, because it was not loyal, it was --

Q: Interveld is a si --

A: No, they're -- you know.

Q: -- low.

A: Yeah. The -- the people who are the lowest.

Q: Low grade.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes, okay. Did you see them? Those Jews who went out and th -- you didn't --

A: No, no, no.

Q: -- you didn't go there.

A: No, I didn't go there, no. But you see, this is a very complicated question, this Jewish and Lithuanian reaction to those times, because it was quite clear after, that we are trapped between two super powers. And it is also absolutely obvious, and it couldn't be different, that for Lithuanians, maybe still the ger -- e-e-especially after the deportation, that for the Lithuanians still, the Germans are better, and for the Jews are still the Soviets better. And I learned now recently, I was calling our institute of resistance on genocide, and I ask them how many people were deported, and how many people came back from Siberia. So I was told that in '41, the last

information is 17,000. After the war it was hundred -- about 130,000. So -- including the Jews, who were also deported. So, as a whole, about 150,000. Now, from the people who were deported in 1941, only about 20 percent came back, but from the people -- but these are so not very precise figures. And fa -- from the people who were deported in -- after the war, until '51 or '50 -- I don't know how long, think un-until '51, or maybe '53, I don't remember now exactly, the deportation -- 70 percent came back. From the Holocaust very few people came back, so it was still even better in -- in the -- for -- for Jews it's a paradox, but in some way they were saved. And for instance our -- such a Jewish writer, Josade, he saved his parents from deportation and he could -- he suffered his whole life. Actually, you made a film about him, he suffered his whole life, that he really killed his parents because he saved them from the Soviet deportation. They got killed in -- in the Holocaust. So it is -- yeah. But, also among the Lithuanian, I would say, intellige -- intelligentsia, among the loudeninke, this was the m-m -- the Volkspartei, the -- no, they were not socialists, but close to socialists. So they were thinking, what's better, the Germans or the Soviets? And they decided better the Soviets. Why? Because under Germany, under the German governance, for instance, Prussia disappeared. No -- no -- no traces of Prussia any more. And under the Tsarist time, which was 200 years, we not only didn't disappear, but we developed our, in Lithuania, the resistance movement. The -- the -- re-revival of the nation. So, that e -- we will -- we will be able to resist the Russian -- the Russian -- the -- the Soviet, and better not to deal with the -- with the Germans. Then also, some people, they're fascinated, like for instance, Paletskis, or -- or Vanslovar, or Kemontite or Gregorouskas, or other people, they were fascinated by the official [indecipherable], and they thought that even if we join the Soviet Union, we will still stay a Lithuanian republic, and we will have our national culture and rights. So it was, you know -- but after the deportations, then of course, the -- the Wehrmacht, the

German army was met by Lithuanians with flowers. So -- but that's also understandable, because it was like saving from the deportation to Siberia. Was a very complicated situation, and is very interesting that in Poland -- you know the story with the [indecipherable] where Poles killed, not -- not -- not Nazis, but Poles killed. So it is also in the region where the Soviets were before, where the deportations took place, and so on, you see? Then there is also another such moment, which can't be forgotten. Of course in -- in -- in Lithuania, the Jews had cultural autonomy and -- autonomy and so on, but it was not such an absolutely equal situation for everybody. Jews couldn't take government positions, high up positions in the army. They served in the army, but not on high -- or very few of them became officers and so on. And they didn't feel like equal citizens of Lithuania, but the in -- the independence times was only 20 years, that's a very short time. And when the Soviets came, so they declared that everybody's equal, and quite a few Jews got into the administration, got into, you know, official positions. I -- I -- sorry -- and -- and it was like an illusion that now we are equal. But this was absolutely illusion. And i -- and I must say ma -- but I came now -- come now a little bit back, my uncle, the brother of my mother, Jorge Stromas is -- was a very, very educated person, he got his education in France and he came back and he had an official position in the -- in -- in the Ministry of Finance, and was very, of course, helpful, but then he had to leave it, because he was Jewish. So, you see, he was still a -- a very much -- he was a [indecipherable] because he lacked very much the language and so on. But -- but still, he was not completely equal, even such a person as he, who was a -- so, it was very complicated. I don't know if I expressed myself clearly now.

Q: You did.

A: Yeah.

Q: You did. Certainly you did. So, did you feel that the war is almost s-starting at a certa -- certain point?

A: The -- th-the danger, the feeling of danger was present all the time, and of course everybody was shocked with the Soviet German pact, with the Nazi pa -- you know -- not --

Q: Ribbentrop-Molotov --

A: -- oh, Ribbentrop-Molotov pact.

Q: Yeah.

A: And in -- in the Soviet Union people who would say something against Hitler were arrested, you know. So it was a quite -- quite confusing situation. But of course, you know, people are optimistic and -- and still the war came unexpected, the bombing.

Q: It came unexpected for you?

A: F-For me, of course.

Q: For you of -- how did it start?

A: I was at home. My mother was operated in -- in the hospital Raudonas Kryžius, the Red Cross, by Professor Kanauka. She had the very, very serious operation which -- which ended very well, and she will be okay, but -- on the 16th of June. So she was in hospital and I was at home. It was not very far, we lived not very far away from the hospital. And suddenly I woke up and I hear some, you know, like thunder. I didn't understand what's happening. And then I don't remember who told me that it's the -- the war. I was -- I -- I don't remember who told me, but I know that quite a long time we didn't -- no, hours, it's not days, but hours, and then I think Molotov made the speech that the war is started. And then I was -- I was go -- going to my mother --

Q: You had the radio at home?

A: Sorry?

Q: You had radio at home? You had a radio at home?

A: Yes, yes, we had the radio. And I -- I went to my mother and I stayed in the hospital, because I was afraid to be alone. And I tried to make myself useful and to help, because there were immediately wounded injured people coming in. And -- and I stayed with my mother there, I helped a little bit the nurses there, too. And then on Monday it was already clear that -- that the Soviets are withdrawing, are leaving. And on Tuesday the bicyclists -- no, the mo-motociklistai, how you say it, the --

Q: Yes, motorcycles.

A: Mo -- yeah, moto -- came the -- the -- the Wehrmacht, they ca --

Q: Ge-German Nazis.

A: Yeah, yeah, they came already in, they were already in. And my mother was immediately transferred to a different room. A much worse room than she had. And there were such -- on Monday, a young Lithuanian boy opposite the hospital was raising the Lithuanian flag, and the tanks were still going out at this next --

Q: The Soviet?

A: The Soviet tanks. And when they saw that he's raising the flag, they wanted -- they shot at him, but he was not killed, he was wounded. And then he was taken in as a hero into the hospital and everybody was taking care of him. And -- and then the -- the Soviet tanks wanted to shot into this hospital. This is -- you know, this is [speaks foreign language here] what -- what -- where -- where it is -- and -- and m -- and they -- they turned, they -- the tank turned the --

Q: The gun.

A: -- the gun against the windows, and I remember how the -- the Russian -- the Soviet soldiers, they ra -- they [indecipherable] to hand up and they were crying brazi, brazi [indecipherable] brothers, brother, don't shoot here, we -- we are here.

Q: The wounded soldier --

A: The wound -- th-the -- the --

Q: -- Soviet soldiers in the hospital.

A: Yeah, yeah. And then they -- they left, they didn't shot, so we stayed alive. But on Thursday, my mother was arrested. A Baltaraištininkas, a partisan, so called -- we called them Baltaraištininkai came to arrest my mother.

Q: From the hospital?

A: From the hospital. But Professor Kanauka was so n-nice and he said that now she is a patient, so she belongs to me and you can't take her, because she can't even walk. But -- and she was kept in the hospital until Sunday. But, under the supervision of a Baltaraištininkas. And of course I had to leave. And he told me only that I should bring clothes for my mother.

Q: Who told you, the partisan?

A: This -- the Baltaraištininkas, yeah.

Q: There was a partisan who was left in the hospital?

A: Yeah, with a gun. Yeah, was left at the hospital to watch my mother.

Q: To watch your mother.

A: Yeah. And then m -- I left, and I -- on Friday I came back and I brought her clothes and she was already sitting at the window, and the Baltaraištininkas was probably flirting with the nurses, I don't know, maybe, but he wasn't there, so I could get in. And this was my last time I saw my mother, and she was 35 years old. And we had the last talk, and I remember that my mother gave

me some, like, three commandments. And I can -- until now I can't believe what kind of personality she was that she could speak about such things in such circumstances. Of course, she had the hope that it is a mistake and --- and that everything will be okay. But she told me that -- try always to live according to your possibilities. Don't ask for more. Be s -- be independent and self-sufficient. And she also meant that if I need now money I can sell something of her jewelry or something of our belongings that I shouldn't go and ask grandparents, or aunts or uncles or somebody else for help. Then the second commandment was I should always live with truth, because a lie doesn't help. And the third, which is maybe the dearest to me and probably saved me in some way, I should never take revenge. So -- and she of course told me where to go and maybe to look for help, that she should be released. So I left her, and of course I started to -- to try to -- to liberate her.

Q: Ho-How did you interpret the situation that your mother is giving you this kind of advice, these commands, this --

A: I am until now interpreting it. I think she was just a wonderful person and she believed in some very important common values she wanted me to follow.

Q: But at this moment --

A: At this moment why she -- because this was very important for her.

Q: But for you, you weren't surprised that suddenly she is giving you --

A: No, I was not surprised, I was -- I had -- I was surprised later on, and then I was just listening and remembering, and I was 13 years old. It was such a situation, you can't imagine. I was -- I was not reflecting then, I was only thinking what to do, how to save my mother. So -- and -- and I went to -- to such a person, Skuropskas is his name, he was working, he was a tow toninkas, he belonged to the national party and my mother helped him to escape the -- to save him from

deportation, because in some way she -- she told him that he's in danger. And -- and when I came, he was already the -- the minister and the -- he was sitting in the -- ond -- in the place where the [indecipherable] was sitting. And -- and he told me -- I s -- told him that my mother is arrested, could he help? He knows her, he knows that she was not NKVD and she was nothing. She was even not a party member, nothing. So he said there were hidden and there were open communists and NKVDist. So he didn't help at all. He had already high position, but it didn't last for long. And then I went to Pulkininkas Bobelis who was a neighbor of ours. We lived together before we -- we -- m-my father built his own house of Laisves Aleja, at the beginning of Laisves Aleja. It was I think first, or number one, and -- house, and the house is still there. And he was a very, very polite and very charming Colonel Bobelis, and he came to s -- play cards with my mother and I was friendly with his daughter Laimuta, who was my age. The -- she had two brothers, Kazys Bobelis and they are -- ah, no, sh-she had two brothers, Jurgis [indecipherable] is why, the sons of Bobelis. But they were older and they were already very active in this movement of liberation, and Bobelis became the commandant of Kaunas. And I must say I had a very bad experience with him. I went to his house and he promised to help and asked me that -- he said -- told me that I have to bribe -- he has to bribe people so I should bring some -- some -- some --

Q: [indecipherable]

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

Q: Okay, so you were running --

A: I was running away and of course my grandparents didn't allowed me any more to go to him. But I must also say that I learned from Sara Ganita that he helped her family, Bobelis, and I also -- he released my aunt, the wife of stro -- o-of Jorge Stromas, who got arrested. And when he got to know that she is there, he told to let her out. So -- but my experience with him was really not very good. And -- and it's painful for me, of course. So I couldn't help my mother, and I was -- she was taken on Sunday to the pri -- to prison on Mizkavajoes, to the main prison.

Q: How -- when did you know this? When did you learn about it?

A: I can't tell you exactly when I learned it. I was looking for her, but I got to know that she is there and that she is there with -- sitting with such communist -- Lithuanian communist Bud-Budinskinada, I think her -- her name was. And -- and I gave her -- I brought her something to eat and I got her signature.

Q: How did you bring her --

A: And -- I was queuing in line, in -- and they were taking packages for -- for prisoners, so I -- I once brought, and the second time when they came, it was I think, middle of July, I was told -- or maybe even earlier, it was told -- I was told that she is not any more there. And then I couldn't find her anywhere, and I think she was killed at the seventh [indecipherable] I think, or on the fourth -- I think on the seventh, but I don't know where. I can't go there even, this is too hard for me. But this I can't take, be -- my mother is -- she was such a -- a wonderful person. But you see, she -- she was already divorced and the narcom -- the minister were -- were called -- he was called narcom in -- in the Soviet times, Gregorouskas Marionas, he fall in love with here and probably therefore she was -- she was somehow suspicious, or they wanted -- I don't know why.

I think this -- this Skuopskas denounced her, so I think. Because not everybody was arrested. People -- they would take women from the street and man especially -- not so many women, more man. But -- but she ca -- she was arrested and I am absolutely sure that it was denounced. And I -- and she was, after such a hard operation and I was told by women prisoners who came out, and I met them in the ghetto, that my mother was very proud, and she would -- she was singing. Sometimes they thought that maybe she lost her mind, but I don't know. But in the -- she was interrogated by the Gestapo or by the Lithuanian police, I don't know. I think by Gestapo. And she spoke, of course, German very well. And th-they -- they told her that, oh we can't believe you are Jewish. She -- but she answered that she is Jewish, and she was not asking, she was proud and full of dignity, so that's -- that's all I know about my mother.

Q: And you heard it from other prisoners, they --

A: Yeah, from women prisoners, that she was very nice and behaved very proudly and -- and very -- and full of -- with dignity. She didn't ask for mercy, or she was not, you know --

Q: But this you learned later, in the ghetto?

A: Yeah.

Q: This point --

A: She just disappeared, and my uncle, her brother, Jorge Stromas was also arrested on Monday evening. He -- just because he was too honest. He didn't leave -- he didn't escape. My mother couldn't escape because she was ill, and my uncle couldn't escape because his son, Alexander Stromas was in Palanga. And my mother was in hospital. We were a very close family, old grandparents, my grandparents. So he stayed here. But he understood that -- he was the director of Parama. This is a bakery of bread. And he went on Monday evening to -- because the factory has to work, to give the keys away, because he understood that he will not any more be the

director, so -- and then they arrested him, and I saw him working in -- in the Russian embassy. This was in the beginning of Laisves Aleja, guarded by a Baltaraištininkas with some other people. I -- I was very -- I was very energetic. My father, I must say, somehow prepared me for such a life because he educated me and -- to be very independent. So I went immediately to my aunt, his wife, and my cousin Margaret, and I brought her down to -- to -- to this place, and I was trying to convince my uncle to leave. It was on -- on Wednesday, to -- to escape, because the Baltaraištininkas was -- it was they were not so hardly guarded, yeah. The har -- it was -- he could escape. And I told him come, you -- you should escape. And my uncles said no, I can't do it, because these Baltaraištininkas, we were all count and if he comes back without one person, he will be punished. And I don't believe that something will happen, you know. Everything will be okay. And he didn't go, because -- because he didn't want, you know, to put in a bad position this Baltaraištininkas. And then he was killed in Lietukis in the garage. But this I got to know only after the war. After -- after -- after the war was finished, yeah.

Q: The Lietukis garage happened on the second day of the --

A: No, it was on the 27th, on Friday. You know, there are now controversies, who can now remember exactly, but in my opinion, I saw him definitely on Wednesday, and I didn't see the Lietukis massacre, but as I learned from -- from literature and so on and from memories, it was on the 27th, on Friday.

Q: And Wednesday was the 25th.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, you lost your uncle.

A: Yeah, I lost my uncle --

Q: You didn't --

A: -- and I lost my mother.

Q: -- you didn't know how, but --

A: No.

Q: -- he disappeared.

A: They -- they disappeared.

Q: They disappeared.

A: We -- I -- I -- we were all waiting a long time for them to come back, but never happened.

Couldn't believe.

Q: Then you see --

A: Was also a person -- you know, they were extremely -- my -- I wouldn't say that about my father, he was a -- such a strong person, but my mother and her brother were extremely soft, liberal, good hearted people who wouldn't really -- they -- it is so -- it is terrible. Sorry.

Q: And a-a-a -- you're left on your own, or what --

A: No, I was then staying with my aunt, my mother's sister. The only who -- from the whole family who survived, and my grandparents lost all their children except this aunt, and with my grandparents, I went with them to the ghetto.

Q: But before you went to the ghetto there were still --

A: I was alone, I was in my house.

Q: -- two -- two weeks?

A: Yeah, there were not, there was more than two weeks.

Q: More than two weeks?

A: Yeah. The war started on the 22nd, the order to go to the ghetto was on the 15th of July, and the ghetto was closed on the 15th of August. And I had another aunt of a uncle of my mother's

brother who perished before, well died before. Died. No, died from operation. And I was -- you know, I was by myself 13 years old, but she had a little son, Lavinka, my -- my cousin, and I took care of them, you know. I was -- I was -- I was going to -- to -- to get some food, because the -- in the Jewish shops you couldn't buy anything, so I would take off my -- my star, yellow star and I would try to go in this Lithuanian shops to buy something. So mostly I succeeded, but twice I was thrown out from the -- and [indecipherable] you -- why are you staying here?

Q: They knew you, or the --

A: No, no.

Q: -- no.

A: But I -- I looked like a Jewish girl --

Q: You looked Jewish.

A: -- yeah. But what saved me sometimes is my language, because it was ma -- be-because it was, you know, like a stereotype that the Jews don't speak Lithuanian well. They can't speak Lithuanian well, they have an accent, they are, you know, and so on. I had no accent at all. So, they couldn't believe I could sometimes you know, like it -- it -- it made people doubtful. Maybe I am not Jewish because I speak so well Lithuanian.

Q: And was it dangerous for you to walk in the streets in this period?

A: Oh yes, very dangerous. Very dangerous. And it was maybe you know, the -- the most humiliating thing because -- I don't remember now exactly which day it was, but we were not allowed to go on the sidewalks. So we had to walk like animals on -- on the -- on the street, not on the pavement.

Q: Yeah.

A: So -- and you couldn't go two together, you have to go one by one. So this was really -- it was so humiliating, it was so -- and terrible. And then you meet people you knew -- you knew them, yeah? And when they see you, they turn away their eyes from you. And I was -- it was -- it -- it was so shocked, I couldn't understand what happened. And -- and only later already, much later, I understood that they were turning away their eyes and heads because they couldn't help, and maybe they were very confused, I am -- I am -- I understand that --

Q: And ashamed.

A: -- there was no -- I -- I tried to understand this, but this was very painful. And I remember how a partisan, a -- a Baltaraištininkas on Laisves Aleja, I went there, I was with my star and he took my hand and -- and said, do you know -- don't you know that the Jews have no rights to wear watches? And I had a Paul Bourret, which my father bought me in Switzerland when we were in '38, it was a very dear present to me. And he took it off. And good he didn't beat me up or didn't kill me, or -- but it was also very humiliating. I was very sensitive to such things. I couldn't understand.

Q: You knew him?

A: No, no. But it was such -- you know, the atmosphere was really somehow terrible. My cousin Margaret, my -- the -- the daughter of Jorge Stomas, of my uncle, she later got to know that her classmates were -- were discussing -- they knew that she has a radio, and then the radio was not so -- so, they were discussing maybe let us go and take away from her the radio. And then they still decided no, it wouldn't be nice, so they didn't go. But once one of the group stopped them. So, you see, it was -- i-it was a atmosphere of you had no rights at all. You were nothing, nothing. Everybody was an enemy. And when our former -- former servant, she was a cook in our house, she brought me something to eat -- so she was hiding, nobody should know, nobody

should see it, she was afraid. And so it was -- it was really -- it was a -- there were some people who tried to help, too, but really very few, and everybody was very afraid to help Jews.

Q: You understand such a phenomena suddenly -- not talking about the partisans and about the German Nazis, but the Lithuanian friends of --

A: Can you -- did you live some -- sometimes -- did you have the experience of living in totalitarian society? Probably not.

Q: No.

A: So -- so, when you are living in a totalitarian society, you are afraid of your shadow.

Q: No, I'm not talking --

A: This is what -- how they -- they --

Q: No, no, this was --

A: -- keep, and they know that for instance, Lithuanians who tried to help Jews were killed, also.

Q: This was not my question.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: I'm asking you about another thing, about those Lithuanians who suddenly found out that it's okay to loot, it's permitted, and then they can do it, to take the radio, for instance.

A: No, not everybody did it, you know, I would say the whole atmosphere was bad, but not everybody did it, no. Many people were ashamed to do it, it -- it is like, you know, when you say that the Jews were meeting with joi -- the Red army. So, there were some Jews who did it, some were terrified. But -- so the same is to say that Lithuanians, some yes, but not all. And then you see the propaganda, the -- the Nazi propaganda, which was taken also over by the LAF-ists, the Lithuanian LAF-ist Skirpa, who had a good intention to -- to have again an independent Lithuania, he thought that maybe Hitler will give him back the independence, but it didn't

happen. It was a big disappointment, of course. But I know that you can't use any -- you have, you know, this M-Machiavelli, that i-if you have a task you can pay any price, this is not valuable in life, it is terrible. So -- and it was, the propaganda was, you see, you are of -- all Jews are communists. It stays very deep in your -- in your con -- in the Lithuanian conscience that -- that they sold you to the Soviet Union, they are your real enemies and therefore you have to kill them like parasites. So you -- and I am absolutely sure that many Lithuanians really took revenge for their deported -- and it could happen that for instance, when their family or somebody was deported, some -- some of the people who came to deport was -- could be also a Jew. There were not many of them, but still, it could happen. This is why th -- you should never generalize. So it was like absolute belief that the Jews are your enemies, that the Jews are communists, the Jews sold your cu -- sold your country and there were maybe people who believed that they are killing the enemies. And only later it came -- of course there were people among the killers who wanted to become richer, who wanted the -- there were different people. It's complicated, but i-in the beginning it was really that. And it's very interesting, one lawyer from Solvakia, he told me how, after the beginning of the war, the Jews, I think it was in Vilkaviškis, they were collected and brought into the kazaram, you know, where the -- the -- the -- the soldiers live. And everybody was asked who he is and -- and they wanted to get from them, I don't know, the men -- men, maybe men. And then one Jew was somehow -- wasn't obedient, and they shot him. And they were so afraid that they did it. And they have hidden him in -- in somewhere, buried him in a secret place, because they were afraid that tomorrow will come a [indecipherable] and will accuse them that they killed a person. But nothing happened, nobody came. So it was absolute free. You could kill a Jew, you could kill him like a fly. Nothing would happen to you. So -- and then it is e -- it -- it -- it -- it comes like a -- I don't know, it was a terrible atmosphere of hatred.

You can't -- it's described in literature, it is -- it doesn't last for very long, but it is there and they have to pay a very high price for that.

Q: And then there was the decree about moving to the ghetto.

A: Yeah. We had to exchange flats to find a place. The Lithuanians who lived in Vilijampolė became our flats and we went there. Of course we all were very squeezed in, but not --

Q: Was it -- was it a relief to go --

A: To go to the ghetto?

Q: -- to the ghetto?

A: In some way, yes. Because -- because we felt really very insecure and unprotected in the town. But this was also, as you understand, it was a -- not a secure place.

Q: And what did you take with you to the ghetto? What could you take with you?

A: I remember that we got a -- a coach with a horse and I put some clothes in, and food, mainly. And some -- what you had what could be maybe sold later on, or something, but --

Q: You were together with your aunts?

A: No, I live -- I lived separately, but -- but we went to the ghetto. I went with the aunt, first of all, of my -- of my -- of my -- that uncle, past -- Tanta Ada with Lavinka. And I stayed with them, because they were very helpless and I was already stronger. And then they were taken to the ninth fort on the aktion --

Q: This is --

A: -- big aktion on the 28th of October '41. But already before I went already to live with my grandparents and with my Aunt Paula.

Q: In the ghetto?

A: Yeah, because it was a more secure family who had some men, and Auntie Ada, he was a lonely woman with a child, so she wasn't very secure. Nobody was secure, but still.

Q: Now, can you describe the first weeks in the ghetto before the big aktion?

A: The aktion started very soon, very fast. There were --

Q: But see, there were a few weeks there.

A: Y-Y-Yeah. No, you see, we were somehow trying to cope with new situation. It was immediately a question of food, because there were -- the Germans came, the -- the Nazis came too, and took away our, you know, food we had. Also, it was an order to give away everything gold, silver and so on. So th -- I remember how the Germans were even searching, you know, gynecologically, the -- the Nazis who came to the -- to the ghetto. And they took away -- I had such a bracelet here, was also a very pre -- a very dear present from my father, this chains, for lu7ck. Took it away also. Everything. Very brutally.

Q: This was the Germans, or the ger --

A: Nazis, yeah, those were the Germans.

Q: The Germans.

A: Yeah.

Q: Not the Lithuanian, the partisans?

A: No, the partisans were maybe also, but this were the Germans. They took away. And the lithu -- the Lithuanian partisans were looking after the ghetto, they were guarding the ghetto, and they were really -- during the aktions they would take the people, they would guard the people who were selected by the Nazis. And at the big aktion, I was staying with my grandfather and my grandmother on the 28th of October, and with the -- and th-there was al-also the whole family was standing, and my aunt with her son and her husband and his brother, and they went already

through, and I was behind them with two old people. I remember I was dressed in my mother's suits and I put here to make a bigger breast, I put some socks into the bra. And also I -- I took some shoes on higher heels to look a little bit more a -- as an adult. And then -- and my -- my aunt and my cousin went through bet -- but the parents and a sister of my aunt's husband, they were taken to the bad side, and the-they were killed at the ni -- in the ninth fort. And I was, of course, it was already -- we were staying the whole day on [indecipherable] in Vilijampolè, we were already of course, tired and -- and I know that about four o'clock, it was already a little bit getting dark, it was -- and not dark, but that was not the nicest day there was, it was not so nice. And when I was staying, I can feel now like I was holding my parents behind -- my grandparents behind me and I was looking him in the eyes. And Rowka, who was making the selection, said [speaks foreign language] this girl has nice eyes, and -- beautiful eyes and told me to go to the right side, to the bad --

Q: Together --

A: -- to the good side.

Q: Together with your --

A: To-Together. He didn't see them maybe, because I think I hypnotized him. And then I was taking away my grandparents. I don't know where I had so much, you know, I was so strong. And m -- I remember my grandmother saying [speaks foreign language], where are you carrying me? I can't -- I can't run, and my grandfather was also not so fit. And -- and I -- I told her, Bobinka, laif. I was shle -- I was carrying them until we got to the -- to the right side, so [indecipherable]

Q: From what you describe, I learn -- I understand that already then you knew what was the good side and what was the bad side.

A: Yes. We knew because we saw that on the one side are the elderly people, the ill people, the children, the weak people. And here are the -- the -- we didn't know, but we guessed. And then sometimes policemen would come and take out somebody, you know, and send to the other side, so we guessed that sa --

Q: Policemen? You mean --

A: Jewish police.

Q: -- Jewish police.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: At that time the -- the Jewish police in the ghetto already had a stand, and --

A: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: What did you think about them at that time? About the Jewish police?

A: I thought of them -- I -- I knew personally Kopelman, who was the head of the police, and he was a very decent person. Not very strong, but very decent. And many policemen were wonderful people. And some of them were like -- like animals. So Armstam was terrible, you know, and everybody hated him. But there were -- this was onl -- th-those were only individuals. But as -- the police as a whole were somehow respected, in my view.

Q: You know, w-w-we -- you -- you thou -- you were talking about the big aktion, but before the big sh -- aktion, there was the a-aktion of the intelligentsia.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And did you see though, can you tell about it?

A: Yes, I can tell. Everybody wanted to go, because they thought that there will be a better solution.

Q: What -- what was the announcement?

A: The -- the announcement was that -- that he will work in archives, he will -- we need intellectual people, and we are asking for 500 men. So, of course I would now be suspicious why they are asking only for men, but -- but th-then -- and they went and my cousin, who was then -- how old was he, he was 20 years old. So he wanted also to go, but they had already 500, he was too late. So it was a -- it was very tragic, because really very good people went.

Q: And they disappeared.

A: They disappeared.

Q: Di-Did you hear any rumors about what happened to them?

A: Mm, you see, it is a very strange thing. You hear rumors and you'd want -- don't want to believe in it. You know, and you don't know. So when people say, how could they go to be killed like -- like sheeps, so I would like to see how others would -- would behave in such position. First of all you don't know that they are taking you, they say you -- they're taking for work. And then you know that if you protest at this very moment, they will kill you immediately. And there you have still some hope that maybe, maybe you will be taken for work. And -- and then, you know, you -- you probably know, I learned it also, for any moment you need a leader. You can't expect that the crowd will do spontaneously something, you know. So -- it can spontaneously, but it's [indecipherable] and people were afraid. My aunt, for instance, she had a hiding place, the widow of my uncle, Jorge Stromas. And she was afraid to step out from the -- from the cot -- from the group of people who was taking out of the ghetto.

Q: At what point did she had the hi-hiding place? You mean Malina later?

A: No, no, my -- my -- everybody understood that there is no future in the ghetto and that they are going to kill us all. And my aunt did everything and she pushed out her son, Alexander Stromas, and he was taken by a Lithuanian family and was -- lived with them unt-until their

liberation, wonderful people, absolutely, Metsunaviches family. And my -- his sister Margaret, she got married. And her husband was a very active and very energetic man, and he organized a place, a hiding place in a factory, and a Lithuanian friend, a worker of this factory [indecipherable], he brought them there, under an attic. And even the German leader of the factory knew that they are there, but di-di-di -- didn't denounce them. And he -- nine months he was feeding them, and risking his life and the life of his family, but they were saved. And M-Margaret's mother, Auntie Jaina had also to come to this place. She knew, but she hadn't the courage to step out, and I know what it is. I stepped out, so I know what it is.

Q: So this is later. We're talking about later --

A: This is already in '43, yeah.

Q: Yes. We are now at the end of '41.

A: Yeah.

Q: And we -- you described the selection at the big aktion in [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, that was terrible. You can't imagine how it was. It was the -- the -- the day after the selection when everybody came home, was such a crying, such a -- such a -- a f -- a terrible -- everybody lost somebody. It was really terrible, terrible.

Q: And did you know what happened to them?

A: Sorry?

Q: Did you know what happened to them?

A: We didn't know anything, but for instance, the next day and the day after, we heard shootings. So, I told you we believed and we didn't believe, but we know -- never saw them back. We saw them from -- they were taken on the 28th to the little ghetto, and then the next day they were taken to the Ninth Fort from the little ghetto.

Q: And you saw them walking?

A: Yeah, we s -- we saw them going, yeah.

Q: And then you heard shots?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: For how long these shots were going on?

A: I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. I don't know. It went on probably for some time, but I don't remember.

Q: Did you hear anything about people who were taken to the Ninth Fort and managed to survive there and come back to the ghetto?

A: Yeah, this was Judel Baylis.

Q: You know him?

A: Yeah, I know him. I helped to publish his book. I --

Q: But -- but then, I -- if you --

A: Ah, then?

Q: Then. Not later.

A: No, I -- then I really didn't know, no. No. I he-heard only rumors --

Q: Mm.

A: -- about somebody coming back, telling terrible stories, and some people thought they are mad, you know. But I was still a young child and then I -- I went to -- to -- to -- I worked, because I need to have some food, so I went to the aerodrome, to the -- to work. It was very hard work there.

Q: You -- when you say you went there, could you initiate this --

A: No, no, I just joined the -- the brigada of the ar -- aerodromestikas.

Q: Yes, but how did you join them? You came in the morning and said, I'm coming with you to work?

A: No, no, I registered probably, in the [indecipherable]. I don't remember now exactly how I did it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But I went there and then I could expect a little bit bigger piece of bread, you know.

Q: That was given by whom?

A: It was given by -- by the -- we had some stores in the -- in the ghetto, so we would get there some bread.

Q: So you got some coupons to --

A: I -- I don't remember we had coupons or not coupons, I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember.

A: But I know that my aunt, a cousin of my mother worked in such a shop and she couldn't give me more, but still she tried. You know, the burt -- bread was cut so give me a little bit bigger piece of bread. And then she worked in the -- in the kitchen of the werkstatten, where I worked later on, so she gave me a little bit thicker soup, you know. But however, I went to -- with the aerodromestikas, and this was the hardest brigade. We had to work nightshifts there. And it finished with that I collapsed.

Q: What were you doing there?

A: We were -- no -- pits --

Q: Digging pits?

A: Digging pits, yeah. Digging pits and with a kierka, with such a --

Q: For what? Pits for what?

A: Yeah, I don't know how to call it in English.

Q: But for -- what was the purpose of these pits?

A: Like trenches to make, I don't know.

Q: For soldiers --

A: I think it was -- it is -- it had no purpose at all. It was just to sc -- to ca -- to -- to torture us. I don't know if that's some -- but opposite were -- also, this was terrible. We were already better off than the -- than the Soviet prisoners of war. They were so hungry. Was terrible. So we would share with them, but if somebody sees it, ger -- a Nazi guard, that you throw some piece of bread or a cigarette, they would kill you immediately.

Q: Did you see people being shot for throwing a piece of bread or a cigarette?

A: I don't remember seeing it, but I know that it -- it would happen.

Q: You knew that it was dangerous.

A: Yeah, yeah, it was very dangerous.

Q: But you didn't see it.

A: No, but I was told.

Q: How did you communicate with the Soviet prisoners?

A: No, I didn't communicate, but some people, they were -- we were -- they were a little bit far behind the fence, so we couldn't direct communicate with them, but somehow people managed. And of course we tried not to work too hard, but the guards would come and beat us up, and I got also on my back some hits. But then it finished that I --

Q: Who were the guards?

A: The guards were -- as far as I remember these were -- were soldiers, is -- German soldiers, mainly. I don't remember it being Lithuanians. Maybe the Lithuanians were taking us to the airport there, but really, you see, the memory is not so -- is not so clear, and --

Q: Well, this -- maybe it will help you to try and remember in what language they were talking.

A: I think in German, but because I understood German --

Q: You

A: So if I wouldn't understand German, then I would maybe remember better. But because I -- Lithuanian and German I understood equally, so I maybe don't remember. I only remember how a woman was picking up a piece of cigarette which this guard was throwing out -- throwing away, and she got terribly beaten up for that. This I saw. And some people managed even to leave the brigade, to get out to some Lithuanian houses and to bring some food, in exchange of some things, but it was also, of course, very dangerous. So then I'd -- I'd worked there at li -- I think about six weeks and then I collapsed, I was dystrophia, you know, I couldn't move any more, I was absolutely -- and I got ill and I was lying in bed for six weeks.

Q: You -- you collapsed during work?

A: No, no, at home --

Q: At home.

A: -- I couldn't any more go, I was absolutely dystrophia. I was still 13 years old, so I needed some food. I know how much teenagers are eating.

Q: So you stayed at home for a few weeks.

A: For six weeks I was -- I was ill and --

Q: Anybody took care of you?

A: Yeah, my -- of course, my family and then doctors would come.

Q: Your family is whom you gra --

A: My aunt and my grandparents. And my grandparents would -- I would find under my pillow a little piece of bread. So my grandmother or grandfather would take their portion and give it secretly to me, because the husband of my aunt was very -- he wa -- he wanted everybody to have equally and so -- but they -- they gave me some bit more, my grandparents. And he would cut everything in equal pieces. So it was -- and then I -- then I recovered, bit by bit and then I got another job. I -- the werkstatten were organized, and I was working there in the [indecipherable] this is [indecipherable] this is fo -- where we made toys. And then already we saw -- we made out toys from -- from different, you know, m -- no -- no -- for instance, suitcases, clothes which were -- that was taken away from the killed people.

Q: And you recognized this?

A: Yeah, we could ice -- I remember some inscriptions. And of course I couldn't recognize the -- the -- the clothes, but it is clear that the clothes was not very good clothes, the good clothes was probably taken by other people. And then we made -- I made dolls. We made dolls out of that. We were cutting from the suitcases such round things to put like joints that we can move their hands, and -- and from the material we would -- we would sew clothes, nice for these dolls. And the dolls were sent as presents to the families of the German soldiers, to Germany.

Q: How did you know this?

A: I -- we are told.

Q: You were told so.

A: Yeah.

Q: How many people was -- were working together with you in this werkstatz?

A: [indecipherable] in the werkstatten were a lot of people.

Q: In this -- in this werkstatten.

A: In the -- in the [indecipherable] alone, there may be 15 - 20.

Q: Which was a small one.

A: Small, small, yeah.

Q: And how did you learn to manufacture this --

A: Ah, you learn everything immediately. Somebody knows better, and -- we had -- we had, you know, I don't know how it is in -- in Russia, when you cut wood, then you have like -- like flour, how it's called.

Q: I n -- I know what you mean, I --

A: You know what I -- so we would put it inside these legs and -- and bodies so it -- it should have a shape, and then we would put the clothes on, and make --

Q: And you got this from another werkstatt, this flour?

A: Yeah, from another werkstatt, because there was another werkstatt who made something out of -- of wood.

Q: Of wood.

A: Yeah, yeah. So they had --

Q: And this period, working in this werkstatt was a relief for you?

A: In some way, yes. There were no reliefs in the ghetto, but still there were some -- the for -- the year '42 was a little bit better than '41, and there were not so many aktions, not so great aktions, and we managed even to organize an orchestra, and --

Q: What do you mean we managed? You took part?

A: Well, th-the -- the ghetto.

Q: And you took -- you took part?

A: That [indecipherable] me, no, but I identify myself with the ghetto

Q: Yeah, I-I see. And you went to listen to this orchestra?

A: Yeah, yeah, these were moments of relief. We were singing, people were performing and -- and then -- and this was really -- and I had a friend, Bobby Rosenberg -- brum who was playing piano and on [indecipherable] there were -- this was this concert hall, the piano was there and we went sometimes and listened -- were listening how he plays. And he had also a hidden patophone and concerts. Huberman was playing Tchaikovsky's concert and Mendelssohn's they had, so we were -- we went sometimes to listen to it. This was just, you know, really moments of relief. And then I went to school also there. It was a illegal school, and -- because we were not allowed to have schools, but still, it was organized and I went there and I learned there, for instance, Schiller's Ballade, which also, I must say, gave me a lot of moral strength, because as you know, Schiller in his Ballades is giving examples of people's high morality of -- of -- of behavior in very critical circumstances, according to their principles, to their understanding of honor and so on and -- like the [speaks foreign language here] and so on, so --

Q: And this was for you something to identify with at this point?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. With -- I always identified with -- I wanted to be like -- you can't always be, but I wanted really, it gave me some. It was also in -- coinciding with what I learned from home, from my mother.

Q: May I ask you, you are, at this time a gi -- a girl of 14, and this is the time that girls start to think about romantic [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, I had a romance in the ghetto as well. And we are still friends until now. It's Dr. Jack Browns. Now he is Dr. Jack Browns, then he was Yasha. And when we were meeting each other and we were very happy to share many things, and I remember how after the Estonian aktion,

when people were taken to Estonia and I was in the werkstatten and he worked also in the [indecipherable] but in -- in the biz -- he worked with -- with wood. He told me that I shouldn't go alone home, that he is going to see if his parents are there. We went together and then he will see me off. And I remember that we went together, it was a very good feeling and his parents were at home, thank God, and then I was living in the other part of the ghetto and we had to pass the Krikschu kaichu Street where the ghetto was very narrow and that was a little bit dangerous to walk there, so his parents were absolutely terrified that he is going to see me off, but still he did it, and -- and I came back and I also found my family, but many people disappeared and after the Estonian aktion, I left the ghetto pretty soon.

Q: Why was it dangerous to go in this narrow part of the ghetto?

A: Because there were the guards, and the guards can shoot you any time.

Q: Were they shooting from [indecipherable]

A: They -- oh, it can -- yeah, for instance, there was a very tragic story in the ghetto, which happened to a half Jew, Argie Saviskas. He was a very beautiful man. He is a son of a very famous Lithuanian writer and diplomat who happened to marry a Jewish woman, and he has two sons. One of her sons is still alive -- of their sons is still alive, Augustinas Saviskas, he is a very famous painter. And his brother Argie Saviskas fall in love with a Jewish woman, terribly ugly woman. She didn't look li -- she had the child, but he fall in love with her and he joined her in the ghetto. And he was guarding the gardens in the ghetto, where we were growing some potatoes or something like that. And once he started to talk to a Lithuanian guard who was walking around, and they got in some controversy. And when this guard learned that he is Lithuanian -- because he probably accused them that he is a guard or something, he shot him, this Argie Saviskas, he just shot him. So it's a very tragic story.

Q: So it was frightening to --

A: Yeah, it was frightening, yeah.

Q: -- get closer to the guards?

A: Yeah, and after an aktion, you know, you are so frightened, you don't know where the danger comes from.

Q: You said that 1942 was a bit better than 1941.

A: This was a little bit more stable, less aktions.

Q: But still, do you remember any aktions in 1942?

A: There were different events. People were punished for smuggling in food, and people -- I -- I can't tell you now this, I should check really the dates, I don't remember exactly when it was, but there were -- for instance there was a Jewish fa -- a -- a Jewish man who had a Christian wife, she was Belgian. And they wanted to -- they -- they applied to go to the -- to Belgium, because she was Christian, and -- and they were not allowed and finally they were told that okay, and they were taken out from the ghetto and they were shot.

Q: Did you see them taken out of the ghetto?

A: No, I didn't see, but I know -- I knew them.

Q: You knew --

A: I knew them personally, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. And how did you know they were shot?

A: Because they never came back and then -- then it was the rumors were spreading around, so --

Q: And have you seen any people who were punished for smuggling food? Any cases of punishments?

A: You see -- that I saw th -- for instance how they go through the -- the -- through the fence, below the fence. I knew -- I knew even the places where they went, but -- and they were bribing the guards often, but I didn't see it by myself, no.

Q: You only heard about?

A: Yeah, yeah, but -- you know, I was not running around in the evening or at night.

Q: So I -- I'm trying to understand how it is to be a 14 years old girl in the ghetto. You have to work?

A: Yes.

Q: You have a love affair?

A: Yeah. No, a love affair, you know, it was all very platonic and very innocent. It was -- it was another time, so it was not like today.

Q: In the sense that he gave you some strength, I think.

A: Yeah, we had very nice feelings, but we had no -- no sexual relations or something. This was not the case in those times.

Q: And what did you eat?

A: What I eat -- I ate?

Q: Yes.

A: I ate the piece of bread.

Q: That you were -- that was distributed.

A: Yeah, yeah. I got the soup in the werkstatten for instance, which was very thin, but still my aunt was giving me sometimes a little bit more so I -- I could find there some lentils or a little piece of -- of horsemeat.

Q: How did you know it was horsemeat?

A: Because my -- I know what was cooked, my -- my aunt told me.

Q: She told you?

A: Yeah. And I know already the -- the -- the taste of it. And it is very good to get a -- a piece of horse -- horsemear, not so bad. Yeah, so this was the main food, and yeah, we made sometimes for -- when we had kipsventai -- what is Easter? Easter is -- what is it? It's not a holiday, but what is it?

Q: It's a -- festive. No, I don't know what it's --

A: It's [indecipherable]. I don't know how it's in English now, I -- I -- it -- it is out of my head.

Q: I can tell you in Hebrew. It's [indecipherable]

A: In Hebrew it doesn't help me. Unfortunately [indecipherable] I'm very upset that I don't know Hebrew. The -- so in '42 we were -- we -- for -- for some celebrations, okay, we made for ma -- for instance, out of cabbage, we made gehakt herring, this is you know, such he-herring like -- like when -- chopped herring. Or out of potatoes, even sometimes we ate the -- the skin of the potatoes. Not always potatoes, so we made out of the skin -- we -- we l-let it through a machine mixing -- mixer, and then we made -- we made kikolach, such -- such -- such --

Q: Yes.

A: -- th -- like -- and then it -- it was li --

Q: Cakes. Some cakes.

A: Yeah, like [indecipherable] cake, yeah. And then we made in -- out of -- we had rye flour.

This was already -- we brought sometimes in from the city. We --

Q: What do you mean, we brought from the city?

A: No, when we -- for instance, my cousin went to work, so he was smuggling in, he was changing it for some -- he was br-bringing out some clothes or something and then getting for the --

Q: Buying.

A: Yeah, buying. So then we made such a porridge out of this -- with this rye flour and if we had some spirgai, some -- some -- you know, pork fat.

Q: Okay.

A: Which was -- was -- was made, you know, with -- because we had not any more guze or -- or chicken fat, this was absolutely -- so -- and if you put a little bit in, so this was already a wonderful -- won-wonderful dish.

Q: Usually, were you hungry?

A: Yeah, this was one of the main feelings in the ghetto. This is fear, hunger. All the time hunger, you can't imagine, it's a terrible feeling, hungry all the time. And -- and then also I was personally -- I really was suffering that I couldn't learn. I wanted to learn. So this was also that time is passing. But fear and -- and hunger was terrible.

Q: So you were --

A: You didn't feel any more so humiliated because you were among the same people.

Q: Everybody was hungry.

A: Y-Yeah, but everybody -- no, there were people who were not so hungry. It was a difference in the ghetto. We were calling them the yallis, you know, the -- the -- the people who were in the altestenrat, the police. There were people who worked in the Gestapo brigada. So they were better off than we because they could smuggle in more, or -- or they had the better place to make

exchange, or speculators who would smuggle in food. They were all so much better off than we.

We were a very ordinary family.

Q: What was the Gestapo brigade?

A: Gestapo brigada was a -- the brigade which worked in the Gestapo. Liptzer was a Gestapo, a Jewish Gestapo man who was working for the Gestapo.

Q: Y-You mean working in the ghetto for the Gestapo --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- collaborating.

A: Yeah, he was collaborating and he was also, I think, the head of the brigade, of the Gestapo brigade, if I am not mistaken.

Q: What were -- was their task?

A: I don't know what they were building there, or they were -- they were doing some work there, I don't know.

Q: Inside the ghetto?

A: No, in the -- inside Gestapo.

Q: In the Gestapo.

A: Yeah.

Q: Ah.

A: And of course the -- the Ge-Gestapo was always interested if there was -- it shouldn't be resistance in the ghetto, it -- the partisans guns shouldn't be smuggled in and so on there.

Q: So they were using these people who were working at the Gestapo?

A: No, Liptzer was not. Not all ga -- people who worked in the Gestapo were collaborating with the Gestapo.

Q: But some of them.

A: No, no, but Liptzer was a yalla, you know, he was rich, and he -- he was working for -- he was a Jew who worked for the Gestapo, yeah. And then there was another one Serabrovich who even lived in town. He was a Jew, and he was also killed, and Liptzer, everybody was killed, but the -- he also worked for -- somehow for the Gestapo. But you know, I was still a 14 years old, 15 years old girl, 13 years old girl. So I saw it all, but not so -- maybe not -- I remember more talking then. But I have seen a lot, I remember this terrible case when -- when the -- when the hospital in the little ghetto was burned down with people who were alive, with doctors, with nurses, with the patients.

Q: What do you mean remember? Did you see it?

A: No, I didn't see, I was in the big ghetto.

Q: Yes, so what --

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

A: So -- but my friend Jack Browns -- my boyfriend, so-called, so he -- his father and he went to work, because they worked in the hospital. And this day they were a little bit late, and the little ghetto was closed and they were -- didn't -- they were -- they were not let in there, so they saved their life, otherwise they were -- would be burned there as well.

Q: So you heard about this --

A: Yeah, I heard about it.

Q: -- you heard about. Do you remember any case of executing someone --

A: Of what?

Q: Execution.

A: I know that there was execution, but my aunt didn't let me go to see it.

Q: Okay, so we have change another tape.

A: Okay. [tape break]

Q: So you have an emotional memory.

A: Yeah, my -- my -- this is -- I don't know if this is important to say now, but that I don't remember the faces of people who were [tape break]

Q: Okay. Yes, please.

A: I wondered, you asked me what were the dominant feeling. So one I forgot to tell you. Never, never -- I wanted so much to live as I -- as -- and to survive as it was in the ghetto. The -- the -- the -- the desire to survive was very, very strong. And maybe the purpose for that, rationally, was to tell the world what happened to us, because it was absolutely unimaginable. Out of my childhood, my peaceful childhood, with belief and enlightenment in goodness and humanity, and

suddenly I see all those terrible, violent, absolutely rational hatred and so on, and I thought that we have to witness it to tell the world about that, that it should never happen again.

Q: You thought about this in this wa --

A: In the ghetto.

Q: In the ghetto?

A: Yeah. Very much. Very much.

Q: That it should never happen again, in the ghetto?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I -- I thought that we have to witness it. We have to witness it, to tell the world what happened to us, because it should never happen again, to anybody. And I somehow believed, after the -- after the end that it will c -- everything will come up and it will really -- we will learn something, but now I have no illusions any more. I know that if not Jews, somebody else. Yugoslavia killed me. Killed all my hopes, absolutely. And also I -- of course, the Soviets --

Q: And Cambodia, Rwanda --

A: Cambodia, Rwanda, yeah, but this was already later, after Yugoslavia. But I must say that it is terrible that -- it is human nature, and you can't change it, and -- and you will never change it.

Q: Let's go back to --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- the optimistic --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- period th-that you still thought it could be changed.

A: Yeah.

Q: In the ghetto.

A: Yeah, yeah. So, what would be your question now?

Q: At the certain point you started thinking about getting out of there.

A: I really didn't think so much by myself about that, but very close friends of my parent's, the Strimychie family, Bogdonavichai Strimychie, they came to Kaunas in '42, because he was in Belgium, he was a -- studying there engineering. He was [indecipherable] with his wife Onutay. And -- and th-they knew that I am in the ghetto in Kaunas. They were looking for me, and they found out that I am there. And then they have sent me a little note that there is no future for me in the ghetto and I should sing that -- to get out, and that they will arrange documents for me, and then we will -- I will -- I will -- I should escape the ghetto. I even didn't want to do it, I don't -- didn't want to leave my family and my friends and th -- I never thought about that. But still, it was clear that everybody can't be saved, and we have to try to save ourselves one by one. And my boyfriend talked me in that I have to go, and -- and my family. And so I got documents that I -- I became the daughter of -- I got the documents of the daughter of the director of the Marijampole gymnasium, Tregeis -- I was Tregita Irena Feliskors, the same name, his daughter had the same name -- name as my name, I was Irena, given -- the name was given by my parents to me. And -- and h-he just gave this documents of his daughter to me, and it was such a green page of paper with -- with -- they forged in there a -- a photography picture. And we decided that I, after the Estonian aktion, that I will leave the ghetto.

Q: The Estonian --

A: The Estonian aktion was, I think the third or fourth of November '43. But I have to check [indecipherable] at the date if -- if -- to be very precise. Or it was maybe on the seventh, I don't remember, but in the beginning of November. And then I had to leave the ghetto in the evening at six o'clock with the brigade, which went to town to work. I should not put my -- not sew my sign, but put it just as a little needle so that I can easily take it off, and Onuta will wait for me on

the bridge, which uni -- connects Kaunas with Vilijampolė. But I couldn't leave at six o'clock, it was something. And of course the policeman there, they knew --

Q: Did you -- did you say goodbye to your family?

A: Yes, of course, everybody was sitting with me at the gate. Yasha, my friend was sitting with me, and my aunt was sitting with me, and -- and everybody, of course was very nervous. And then, finally I was told that I should join the brigade and the policeman, who was counting the people, didn't count me. A Jewish policeman who was --

Q: He knew about it.

A: Yeah, yeah, he knew. And then we went -- this is -- here is the gate, yeah, and here is Krikščiukaičio Street, and here is Jurbarko gatvė and here is the bridge, yeah?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And here is already Kaunas. So -- so I went out with the brigade. Then I know definitely that Lithuanians was guarding us. And s -- a friend -- somebody took off my sign from my back, I took off it from here and then I had to step from the group of people in the colon -- colonna, to the pavement, yeah, they were walk -- walking pavement, because we were walking on the street, the -- the whole brigade. And this step, to do this was the most terrible thing, I can tell you. I can understand how hard it is, because they can shot -- shot -- shot you. But it was already -- I was lucky. And the main I had only one idea in my head, not to run. To go very slowly, not to show that I am nervous, and so I went out, I get -- got a -- gained the feeling that somebody is -- will shoot my back immediately. But still I managed to go slowly, then I turned. And I don't remember the brigade was walking faster or slower, probably slower. And then, on the bridge, nobody was meeting me, because it was already two hours later than it was expected. And then I went to their house, I knew the address, but not so very precisely. So I didn't know the flats, so I

rang the bell, and it was the bell of the house caretaker, yeah, you call it. And they were the most dangerous people because they were really all serving in the ge -- not all, but many of them in -- for Gestapo, and they would denounce. And I asked where are the Strimychie? He told me and I went in, but I told them that -- that I was asking the -- this man. So they were absolutely terrified. They had two children, little. But in the morning they had already prepared a ticket. They took me immediately to Vilnius, where -- which is a more multicultural city and nobody knew here my parents or me. And then started my life in Vilnius. So --

Q: Where in Vilnius?

A: The -- th-the first place [indecipherable] took me was his sister's, she was a dentist and she lived in Shwerinas on Mitskabajo Street. She was a wonderful woman, but she was so afraid when I came, for three days she couldn't eat, she couldn't sleep, she was so afraid. So I can't kill -- can't kill a person, so I had -- they took care [indecipherable] took care all the time what happened to me. So I went to live in the house of her brother, Onuta's brother, on the [speaks Lithuanian here]. It was a house which belonged then to the university before and I lived in his flat with him like -- like a relative from -- from the -- from the countryside. And he was very kind, very good, but he was actually a little bit Bohemian, he was a surgeon and all the elite, artistic elite came, so I learned there Schema and Kuchinskas and Vukoshas and Yukonaviches, all the famous Lithuanian artists and -- and so on. And well, there was a girl from -- from the -- from the countryside. But Pranas, he was very goodhearted and he thought I must look like everybody. So he gave me money and t-told me to curl my hair, you know, permanent [indecipherable] permanent, this is [indecipherable]. And I went, and then I became much more like a Jew, looking, because -- so it was not a very good idea, but nothing thing to do. And once it happened, I lived there for more than two months and once I -- yeah, and I was a -- a friend,

also very famous Lithuanian woman, Marcella Kubilutai. She arranged for me a working place in the orphan home on Subacho 16, it was then. And she told the director of this place that I am a half Jew, it should be a little bit easier for him, and -- and that I -- and he gave me work, I was working like a -- like -- no, like a sanitarka, you know, I -- w-washing and -- and feeding the children and so on. And -- and once -- I will tell you later on about this orphan home, but Pranas, there came his friends one evening and brought a book, Van Gogh reproductions. And I was -- I liked very much Van Gogh, and my mother liked very much Van Gogh, I knew him. And when I saw this book, I forgot who I am, and I said oh, this is Van Gogh, so wonderful. And then they all looked what kind of girl from the countryside is it who knows who is Van Gogh, because then you haven't had so many, you know, books of reproductions as we have now. So -- and it became a little bit dangerous to stay there because they were all very good people, but you know, sometimes when they got drunk, they got -- they were talking too much. And also, he was engaged to a woman from Siauliai, Janni, who of course didn't know that I lived there, and some rumors came that a young girl lives with him, so she got a little bit like jealous and wanted to find out who is this girl, so I had to disappear from this house. And then I got to -- to a family of a Lithuanian Colonel Meskauskas, who was arrested by the Soviets already, in '41, to his widow and daughter, who lived on Gedimino Street. And Marcella Kubilutai also in this house, which arranged my -- me to work there. But registered I was, in Pranas's house. So once, it was maybe a week or two after I started to work there, the gabrininia, the nurse, the -- the main nurse, she came, asked me, who are you, where are you from, who are your parents? She asked -- she started so very suspicious to interrogate me. And I answered all the questions as needed, and -- but I -- when I came home, I was very nervous.

Q: You -- you had the -- you had a cover story prepared?

A: No, I didn't tell her the truth. I said all the time from Marijampole, that I am the daughter of the director of the school

Q: This cover story --

A: Yeah, no, not the truth, of course not. And -- but when I came home I told Marcella immediately that -- that -- that I was asked by this nurse, and probably somebody denounced, or has some suspicion. And she of ca -- course started to find out. And then it really was that some of the -- my colleagues there was su -- was suspicious that I am Jewish. I was still with my curled hair. And -- and she went to director to ask who I am. And the director told her that everth -- everything is okay, everything is alright. And so it calmed down, the whole story. And after a week of this event, suddenly some of my -- the sinit -- the nurses came in, saying that Gestapo surrounded the -- the -- the orphan hou -- o -- home. And I wa-was absolutely sure that it's -- they come to take me. No -- a-and I really didn't know what to do, so I wa -- worked -- there were two rooms, like that, and here in the middle was a little corridor, and here a toilet. So I went in the toilet, into the toilet. I put -- pulled down the water, and I was thinking what to do. To run away, it is little hope to escape. To -- to -- th -- and then I will -- if I escape, I prove that I am Jewish, that I have to be afraid of something. And if I stay, maybe I will at least be able to defend Pranas, because I was registered in his house that -- that -- and say that he didn't know who I am really. So, because it was terrible for me to think that somebody will, because of me, you know, be punished, or suffer. So I decided not to run away. And I went out from the toilet, I was calm and I f -- was feeding the children. And I hear already like, you know, the -- the shoes, the boots coming in and the director, dor -- Dr. [indecipherable] with the -- with, I think, three Gestapo people are coming in. And I saw only their boots, black, shining boots. And the -- but I thought that Dr. Rudokas is a little bit, you know, like making me a little -- like with his eye, such. So

they were looking around the children, they were -- it was a denunciation that rudo -- that Ruditis, Dr. Ruditis is hiding Jewish children, and this was true, actually. But he proved them that they are Karaims, the -- the Karaims are also circumsi-sized and he didn't give the children away. They wanted to take the children for blood for the soldiers, so I was told. And --

Q: Who told you this?

A: Dr. Ruditis. And -- but he didn't give it -- later on he told me. And -- and then they left. I stayed. And this saved me, because it was proved that nobody came to take me, that I didn't run away, I am here. But I can tell you, it was quite an experience to -- to this day I will never forget. So I worked there to the very end of the Nazi occupation. Then I lived in this house of --

Q: Before -- before we finish the Nazi occupation, I would like to ask you one more question about the ghetto.

A: Yeah, but I didn't finish you my story in Vilnius.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, fo -- and then don't forget --

Q: Okay.

A: -- to ask me about the ghetto.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah. This is, you know, and then I was staying in this house of this Meskauskanya colon -- wer -- the -- the widow of the Colonel Meskauskas, Maria Meskauskanya. I wouldn't say that it was the best time I had, but okay. And one day Gestapo came in and was searching the flat. And I was -- my bed was in a sandylukas, how -- in a storage room, and was behind different stuff, was a bed. But when you open the door you can't see, you see only different stuff. And the Gestapo came in and they opened the door, but they didn't go farther, they saw it's a storage

place and they didn't find me. But the very moment they get -- got out, I had to get out from the other -- from the other door. So -- and I couldn't come back because it was really very threatening. Somebody probably already denounced or something like that. So I went again to the sister of [indecipherable]. And then in a day, or maybe even faster, they found for me a place, and so I got to the family of my second mother, really. This is Stephania Ledugania, you can see her beautiful face. He is a book we were pub -- we published recently about her. She was absolutely outstanding personality, she had six children and -- and she took me as the seventh. And she was, I can't tell you what kind of person she was. And we became with her friends from the first day, and I would like to remember several little things. When I came in there, I was brought in by [indecipherable] Strimitis, she introduced me as a an orphan and now I will be the sister of her children. And she invited me for a evening meal. And of course she had also very little to eat, but a little bit more than in the ghetto, of course. And her husband was a Lithuanian general, he was already arrested and killed by the Soviets. She didn't know that, but she learned later, but he was arrested immediately, in '41, when -- in '40, when the Soviets came. And -- and when she -- and she had such a -- agi-aginyeta. She was a housewife who was cooking, and we had for this evening meal screelai. This is made out such things of -- of flour with a little bit fat on it. And what I noticed that she has put in my -- into my plate a little bit more than she has given to her own children. So I was almost crying. I was really very hungry. I-In this orphan home -- I'm sorry that I'm a little bit jumping, but I am proud of it, I was feeding the -- the -- the children who were also more than one years old, and they would go -- get every day such a little plate with manakasha, how is it -- I d -- I don't remember how it's in English. It is such a wheat - - I forgot how it's in English, b-but a-a-a porridge out of little wheat --

Q: Kasha.

A: Sorry?

Q: Kasha.

A: Kasha, yeah.

Q: It's also --

A: Porridge.

Q: -- porridge, kasha.

A: Yeah, it's kasha, yeah.

Q: I -- okay, so it's --

A: Manakasha. And -- cooked with milk. And this manakasha, oh, I -- I can't tell you how hungry wasn't I -- I wanted the manakasha to put in my mouth. And every spoon was a fight with myself. I wanted to put it the mouth, but I had to put it in the mouth of the child. And the children, like devils were also very hungry. They wanted to eat, they never left a spoon for me to eat. Sometimes soup was some leftovers, but the manakasha, never. And so I thought after the war I will eat only manakasha with milk. It was my dream. But okay, I was very hungry, so you can imagine what it meant to me that she has put a little bit more, and nobody -- nobody -- nobody noticed, but I noticed. And then at 10 o'clock in the evening, ev -- everybody went to bed, and she had this habit, she was going to -- to every child. We were -- three of her children were -- three were out of the -- living in different places, they were already more adults, and three were with -- with -- so we were four. And she went to everybody to give a kiss, and then she came to me. I was in the bed, sleeping in a bed in a dark room without windows, where her son, who was taken to Germany for work was sleeping before. And she came and she kissed me and told me goodnight. And then I try -- then it really -- I broke out with such a almost hysterical cry. And this is what I wanted to tell you, how you can be indoctrinated by atmosphere of hatred.

She was shocked, why? She came to kiss me, why am I so crying terribly? And you know, nobody kissed me already, for such a long time. I was all the time in fear. Pranas was very good to me, but he didn't kiss me, you know, or -- or -- and this -- Maria Meskauskas [indecipherable] was not such a very soft woman. And -- and suddenly she comes like a mother and kisses me. So -- and I -- I thought already that -- that -- I thought, how can you kiss a Jewish girl? A Jewish human being? It mu -- I thought that something has to be ugly in me. Something what puts off people because everybody's hunting me, is hunting every Jew. So why? What is the matter? Something must be wrong with us. So when I told her that, she also started to cry, and -- and we were speaking until four o'clock in the morning, and so -- so this night I really became her daughter, and she my second mother. And we stayed so to th -- she died on my hands with -- with the whole -- whole st -- she has a whole story to tell. But even after the liberation, I stayed in her family because I had nobody. And then she was arrested and taken to Siberia, of course, was already then, but then she still came back and we were always very close. And I think she loved me as well. She was a wonderful, wonderful person. She was a very religious Catholic, but never fanatic. She was a very artistic nature. She loved poetry. She brought me, in those times, for instance, rouge, you know, like blu --

Q: Color.

A: -- color, because I was very pale. So -- so that I should a little bit have some color. So, you know, in those times it was absolutely immoral to -- to -- to do such a thing, in the psychology of those times. You have to be very modest, and -- and very, innoc -- but she did it, and I remember this little red box, I had it for a long time. And we were very close, really. Very close. And she played a big role in my life. She was never fanatic, she was never -- she was taking in everybody. And she was very demanding only maybe -- she was more demanding from her children than --

you know, such discipline then, but she was very demanding of -- to herself, but to other people she was much more -- much softer. Yeah, you wanted to ask me about --

Q: About the ghetto.

A: Yeah.

Q: But just to finish this, and you stayed there until -- until --

A: Until she was arrested and even three months more. A-A-And she -- so it was a -- a whole story when Vilnius was liberated already, they -- they -- it started to -- not liberated, but the new occupation, but still, I must say for me it was also liberation, because I was not any more afraid for my life. And it was the liberation from Nazis, but we suffered quite -- and I myself suffered quite a lot from the Soviets as well. But -- but still the feeling was that now I can go out, I can -- can go to school and so on. So, when the bombing started it was dangerous because we lived in the center, Trakų -- on Trakų Street. So she went out to the outskirts of Vilnius, to a friend, Ponas Stabinis, and they were -- he had a cellar and they would sit there in the cellar, the -- and I was -- went with them. But then I decided that I have to save -- I -- to do -- have to do something for her. I loved her like I can't tell you how. And so -- and we lived in -- in the -- in this big, big house and courtyard, we were probably the only Lithuanians there. So -- and all the Poles were around. And the Poles didn't like too much Lithuanians. And I knew very well that if we will leave at night during the bombing, the flat alone, it will be -- they will take everything away from there. They will break in and loot the -- the -- the flat. So I wanted to -- to -- to save it. Crazy idea, but I wanted. So I went back for the night to Vilnius. I was -- I went to the cellar when it -- when the bombs -- there was also a cellar. And I really saved everything. But it -- but one day, I think it was Sunday, the fight started in the street. So I couldn't get any more daytime to them. So I got stuck there for a whole week. And the morning -- the night -- the street was three times, going

from hands to hand, from germ -- from the German Wehrmacht to the Soviet army and -- and back. And there were many events there, which I have seen in the killings of -- of -- of 16 years old soldiers, who just without anything came down the street from Pilimond, were killed by a -- by a German tank. Altogether 13 people, but one we -- we managed to save from there. But however, it was terrible, and I heard the Poles talking, who is this la -- is she lithua -- is she Lithuanian, or is he Jewish -- is she Jewish? And they were not -- and so I thought they want to give me away to the Germans, or what. A-As a Lithuanian they don't like me either. They wanted to get the key from the flat, I didn't give it to them. But it was already too hard for me and on Thursday I felt that I can't take it any more and I packed two suitcases and wanted to go on the other side of Neris, into -- in the outskirt of Vilnius where the family was. But when I had already my -- my suitcases ready, the -- the fight started again, I couldn't leave. And only on Sunday, when already the Soviet army liberated, then I -- I -- I -- I could get out and a quite famous friend of [indecipherable], Conrad Eskadatskas, he was a -- a -- a com-composer and a -- a conductor and a -- a quite famous musician Lithuania. He came also to see if somebody's alive and then we went with him to the outskirts of Vilnius to see if they are alive. So this was a terrible walk through a city full of -- full of fire, full of dust, full of dead people. Terrible, terrible. But it was still already a little boat which took us from one side of the Neris to the other. And then we got to meet each other and -- and this was also a moment which I will never forget because she couldn't forgive her how she -- how she didn't stop me. It was -- it got quite hard to stop me. I was stubborn, so -- so that she was happy that we are alive and everybody in the family remembers this moment, she was happy that I came back. And then I stayed with her. I went to school immediately and -- and then she was arrested in March '46, on the 14th of March. And I stayed still to the end of the year that the children should finish school. And then we were

already spread to different homes, and -- but I was going to all the prisons and -- and bringing her food and taking care, and so --

Q: She was imprisoned here, in Lithuania?

A: Yeah, the Soviet times. The Soviet prisons.

Q: And was she released?

A: No, no, she was -- she was convict -- she was -- she got a sentence co -- a co -- you know, they were called three people who -- who decide, the -- the Troika this was called, w-would decide they -- their fate and their punishment. And so I got to know somehow that this trial will be on [indecipherable] and when she was brought in I -- I was there with my two sisters from -- from her family. And we got from her a little note and I got a present from her. She cut off her -- the end of her braid, yeah -- braid, yeah? It's long hair.

Q: Hair, yes.

A: Br-Br-Braid --

Q: Ah, yes.

A: -- how is it called, braid, o-or -- cassa. I have it, it's my [indecipherable] I have it until now and then she was -- a handmade serviette and a little note and -- and then the -- the -- the Russian soldier who was looking after, he was quite kind, he was giving her my note and -- and giving back her present to me so we could communicate a little bit. And then after the sentence was already announced, she was taken with [indecipherable], this is such a black car, which would take the arrested people. And she was -- we saw how she was taken from the -- how she went from the building to the car.

Q: And --

A: And --

Q: -- what was the sentence?

A: The -- eight years at prison and then had no rights for five years to come back to Lithuania. So -- no, sorry, she got 10 years. My friend Tadas got eight years. And -- and then, it was also a terrible moment, you know, when she was closed into this c-car, int -- into this black car, and -- and you saw her, and she is stopped -- you are stopped to -- to communicate with her. And you feel absolutely helpless. You see -- this brutal power you feel, you know, which is just violating you. And I remember this was also a moment when I lost control and I was running behind this car on the street just screaming, and -- but of course the car was faster than me, and couldn't do anything about that, but it was also a -- a moment when you felt the Soviet power, cruelty.

Q: And -- and what happened to her?

A: She was in prison. She was deported to -- to the sibe -- Siberia and she was there and she was released in -- in -- in fi -- I think after Stalin's death. She could join, but she cou -- was not allowed to come back. She joined there her two sons, who were also deported to Siberia, not in concentration camps, but to work there. They were deported. And then in '56 she came back to Lithuania.

Q: And you met her?

A: Yeah, of course. And she lived for 10 years and then she passed away. But she was very -- she was a wonderful person. She helped so many she -- people, she saved so many young girls, she never complained. She never told about her suffering, she told only about how many wonderful people she met there, because the elite was in the concentration camps, in the gulag. So she would maybe not have a chance to meet such wonderful people in ordinary life, so -- she was -- she was very strong.

Q: Can you say her name once again?

A: Stephania ela -- Pellulitai Ledugania. She comes also from a wonderful family, her grandfather was a caretaker of books. He was kig nashise. This was a -- he was bringing, you know, education to Lithuania. Then the Tsar prohibited the Lithuanian alphabet and -- when it was not allowed to read Lithuanian books. And her father als -- also participate. They were a very, very nice family from -- from Rabalninkai, from the north of Lithuania. And her husband, the general, he could also run away, together with our government in '40, but he said that he will stay with his soldiers. And of course he was immediately arrested and he was shot it seems, in '41 or '42. And he was very, also, full of dignity, he never gave in. He got seven shots in his head. And she got to know it much later, already wi -- being in Siberia, people still live with the slight hope to -- to be -- to -- that their beloved are maybe still alive, you know. And yes, she told me also that she took me because she didn't know my parents, she didn't know anybody, I was just a Jewish girl, and she said that the Jewish population suffered so much here in Lithuania, and some Lithuanians were not so kind. So I, as a Lithuanian want to do my best. This was what she said to me as well. And she before -- I learned later on that she would try to help Jews with food in the ghetto. But when I came to Vilnius the ghetto was already liquidated. No sign any more of the ghetto, only ruins. You wanted to ask me something about the ghetto.

Q: During the period that you have been in the ghetto, was there any occasion that you had to hide? To hide.

A: To hide?

Q: Yes.

A: I don't know, because how could you hide? It was very -- no, I wa-was never --

Q: There were malinas.

A: No, no, I was not connected with any malinas and we were a very such -- I was in a family where nobody would be able to build a malina or something. And we did not belong to the establishment of the ghetto. Not to [indecipherable] at all. And for instance, my cousin who -- Walter Mark Ginsberg, who survived in Dachau and he wrote a very nice book, "And Kaunas Wept," which is published by Bet Shalom in England. He's -- he lived in England after the war. So he -- he -- th -- th -- we were -- he even has no big sympathy today, iyalas, he's in some way accusing, he doesn't trust the -- some people of the altestenrat and so on. Like for instance, you know, this famous book which written by Gollup, but now he is not Gollup --

Q: Torey.

A: Huh?

Q: Torey.

A: Yeah, Torey. So he was also iyala.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. So my -- my -- my cousin is quite critical. I am a little bit more tolerant. I -- I think there were -- Elkas was a very honest person and we had not the worst altestenrat. I think so.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the altestenrat [indecipherable]

A: I personal ha -- didn't have -- I was a child still, you see --

Q: Yes.

A: -- and -- but -- but still, I for instance -- people who knew my parents and my mother and knew that I am a -- a -- a orphan, they -- I -- I got a Jordanschein, which was a paper which like, gives you security that you work and -- and you -- you get -- you like, have some security, but it didn't help. And m -- I got this place to work in the werkstatten after I collapsed at the airport, you know. So this was done by -- by people from -- still from the altestenrat. People who knew

my parents. I somehow remember more good things than bad things, you know? This is in my nature, probably. Or it helps to survive, I don't know. I remember how my girlfriend and I, we decided that we have to -- to celebrate the new year, '42. And I remember how one Jewish guy gave us -- he knew that we -- we want to do it, we had nothing, nothing to eat. So he gave us a little bagel, but very thin, wi-with a big hole. And we -- when it was 12 o'clock, we were sitting and we were dreaming about post-war and so on. And we were talking -- her mother was also arrested and didn't come back, never came back. And we shared this little bagel. So this man I remember, who gave us the bagel. This was a big thing, to give a bagel. It was like now giving you, I don't know, thousand dollars.

Q: Can we talk for awhile about Lithuania after the -- after the -- no, not after the war, but after independence, how it is coping or not coping.

A: Oh, this is about 1990.

Q: Nine --

A: When we -- now, the last 14 years.

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

A: Please, I can --

Q: How Lithuania cope or does not cope with the part of Lithuania in -- in the Holocaust.

A: You see, it is a very hard issue, and very unpleasant issue, and you have here to differentiate many things. First of all you should know that in the Soviet times, nothing was really mentioned, and the Holocaust, if it was mentioned, was used mainly only for anti-Fascist propaganda. And you couldn't even use the word Jew, it was only Soviet citizens and so on. You know that the

Soviets destroyed finally the big synagogue in Vilna. They destroyed the famous cemetery. I don't know if you have seen the -- the last pictures of that, it is really an -- and -- and they build houses and -- and ste -- and -- and steps and so on out of this -- of these stones. So there was nothing, really, and th-the Jewish life didn't exist as such, almost. Only maybe for some propaganda. And -- and when we became independent and even before the independence, when the Lithuanian revival started, cultural revival and -- and the -- and so on, then also started the Jewish revival and my colleague, Professor Kudaba, here is his picture. An absolute outstanding person. He was the organizer of the Lithuanian Cultural Society, and then, thanks to him all the minorities also organized their cultural societies and the Jewish Cultural Society was organized. And for the first time all the questions came up about the past and -- and about the future. So -- so m -- th-th-this -- th-the situation was really m -- very complicated, complex, and you can understand that a nation who is, after being suppressed and occupied for so many years is regaining its independence and want to establish itself in the normal democratic world, it's not very pleasant to talk about participation in the Holocaust. Also, I must say that it was not very -- it was still, I must say the -- the stereotypes of the -- of the 40's and 50's were still alive. That the Jews are traitors, that Jews were communists and so on and so on. So I must say that anti-Semitism and the readiness to face the Holocaust was not a -- a simple question. But I must say that on the official level, our government, and especially I would say Vytautas Landsbergis took all the really decent steps. First of all, the genocide was condemned. The -- one of the first -- it was -- and it has no -- it -- the people who took part in -- in this genocide can't be -- can't be [speaks Lithuanian here] I don't know how to say. They -- they have ever to be, always to be condemned, it doesn't depend how much time passed away past then. The -- one of the first things the government did was to replace the stones in the -- on the steps of tower of Kaunas, to

take all these cemetery stones, gravestones away and put the o -- the other ones, not to go on those [indecipherable] th-the 23rd of September, which was the day of the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto was announced as the day of genocide, and it was an order to -- to put out all the flags, Lithuanian national flags with -- with a black --

Q: [indecipherable] ribbon.

A: -- ribbon, yeah. The Jewish cultur -- the Jewish community was recreated and -- and supported. They cemeteries were looked after and m -- I am very proud that my former student, Vito Tostalakis was the first. He was a teacher then, he took his -- his pupils and they went to clean up a cemetery not far away from Vilnius. And killing places were also, bit by bit, together with the Jewish community, they were cleaned and looked after. And of course, Jews got all the rights ar -- citizens and Lithuanians have absolutely equal rights. That --that's absolutely a matter of fact that I would say that maybe a little bit weaker was the question of conde -- of the trials, you know, this Lileikis and so on, but I must still say that on the official level, everything was -- was quite okay. And m -- on the academic level, the breakthrough started pro-probably from '95, something, '96. And I look -- came up and there were, especially our young historians, of middle age historians were ready to face the truth and -- and more and more information came up about the Holocaust. So I th -- and now we have really already a changed situation on the level of the [indecipherable] intellectuals and with -- and not only a civil society is now really a lot participating already in -- in facing this question. You know that Lithuanian in-intelligentsia created the house of memory, which is working in this direction and -- and they -- they announced already four times a competition, who were the Jewish neighbors -- for schools.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Who were the Jewish neighbors of my grand and grand-grand parents. So the children are coming out through all Lithuania, to the little cities and finding out who lived here. And so they go back to history [indecipherable] and -- and learning from -- from this terrible history. And I must say that we made now about 700 schools -- 700 teachers are working with the Holocaust topics. Holocaust is told in the military academy, and in military schools and the military academy. A lot of -- we have a lot of educational centers who are dealing with that -- with that issue. And really hundred, hundred of schools and pupils. We have now, you know, that Adamkus created the commission to investigate crimes of Nazi times and the gulag. And we have their commission which also published and found out a lot. I must say that our genocide center, which was first of all like dealing only with the anti-Soviet movement is now more and more facing also the Holocaust situation. So I would say that on the academic level it is -- and such educational level, there is already a breakthrough and a dialog. A lot is really done. I must also say that when Respublika, for instance, published the article of the chief editor of the newspaper, a terrible article, "Who rules the world?" And the answer was the Jews and the gays. You heard, probably, about this article. So what -- not everybody remembers, but you should remember that the first protest was done by the Lithuanian NGOs, Lithuanian organizations and Lithuanian individuals. And during two days, this protest against Tomkus's writing was signed by about a hundred organizations, about a hundred individual peoples and much more would sign it if it would -- we would keep -- not me, we -- I didn't, they didn't even allowed me to sign because I am Jewish. Only Lithuanians signed it, really. So that on -- organizations, not only individual peoples. So it is really a breakthrough and sometimes you should not forget that it takes time to -- to -- but -- but anti-Semitism is still there and still -- it -- you can't say that it's all over.

Q: In all this positive picture that you just portrayed --

A: Yeah.

Q: It's so positive that it may seem a bit unbalanced. The educational activity, the academic activity. Is it -- is it put in focus, th-the -- the fact that those who murdered the Jews in Lithuania mer -- were mainly Lithuanians, or just the Germans --

A: You see, it -- no, no, no, they -- everybody -- it is hard to recognize, it's not so easy, but -- but people more and more recognize that some Lithuanians really, they were the executors. Ma -- not always, but mainly. But the initiators of that still were the Germans, the Nazis. And this is also clear. You -- this is also a mistake when you put everything only on the shoulders of the -- of Lithuania. The -- the worst thing is that Lithuanian independence was declared. It lasted only for six weeks, and the administration of -- of -- which had never real power, is temporary government, didn't really know to do a lot about saving Jews. Let us put it openly. So this is really when you can ta -- maybe speak about some responsibility. But otherwise they were auxiliaries. They helped. Lithuanians helped but I wouldn't say that -- that it was done without, absolutely without Nazi encouraging. And as you know, in Yager's -- in Yager's report, it is said that the -- the Nazis could never succeed so well if they couldn't find so helpful Lithuanian auxiliaries, yeah. The partisans who helped them. But -- but still they don't deny that they were - and they had the full control -- this is what Yager says, from the second of July, they had full control of all the executions.

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

Q: Do you --

A: So they -- they -- it was -- you know, here I -- I must say that I know that I -- I don't -- I -- I don't justify killings and so on, but I think that Jews are sometimes too much inclined to blame only Lithuanians. Because they saw like Lithuanians blamed Jews that they made the deportation. It's just a mytho -- mythology. Jews had no power to make it. This was done by Moscow, by the K -- by the NKVD, by the -- by -- by very few Jews and even there were some that were mainly -- mainly executors. But if a Lithuanian saw a Jew coming, so okay, the Jew is deported then, yeah?

Q: But it's not by the same token because the Lithuanian did have guns and we know that about 15,000 Lithuanians took part personally in killing and shooting the Jews. This we know.

A: But they were organized. No, not 15,000, it's less now. Vu -- vu-vu -- but I don't want to argue about figures, but I want to say that Lithuanians -- Lithuanians were in a terrible situation. In a terrible situation. Here deported, it was a shock to the whole nation. Influenced by a terrible Nazi propaganda, which was also taken as a tool by Luff and by some Lithuanian officials, yeah. Then, I must say that the past, the -- the antagonistic past which existed between Christians and Jews also had some role to play. So I -- but -- but the nation was really in a shocking -- in a terrible -- in a terrible state at this very moment. And it was really, in some way in the beginning [indecipherable] and then it came, of course it's dirty business. But -- but I can't -- I can't blame -- I will never blame a nation because I know that people were absolutely shocked by what happened [indecipherable]

Q: But I'm not talking about the nation.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: I'm talking about few thousand of killers.

A: Yeah.

Q: Many of them are still alive now in Lithuania.

A: No, no, not many. Not many. How can you say many? There are not many alive, and -- and maybe -- of course they were -- they're somewhere hidden. I wouldn't say that our procurator or our court is very much interesting to persecute them. But -- and this is maybe the weakest point, but not only we have problems with our -- with our court and with our procurators, not only in the Jewish commission, in others as well. So, I think, you know, really that --

Q: How much we have?

A: Finished?

Q: He says that it's finished. I would like to thank you very much. Sorry the -- always we have more to say and l-less time.

A: Yeah, but we stopped at a very -- a very -- a very important point.

Q: So I -- we should put another tape. [tape break] So we were talking about the question of how Lithuania is coping with it --its past.

A: Yeah. I don't know how I succeeded, but I tried to explain you the -- how complicated the situation was. And you see, being Jewish, and here is really -- this is very important, that -- and I suffered myself, and Jewish people suffered so much from generalization, from accusing. If one Jew is bad, all the Jews are so, and so on and so on. So I can't do it to anybody, you see. And I think that we have to understand, of course in a different degree, but Lithuanians and the Jews are victims of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Lithuanians are also victims, because their deportation to Siberia, the -- the -- the terrible historical period after the second World War, when Lithuania was still fighting for its independence, and of course it is a very controversial

moment. But -- but we have to take it also in account. You -- you can't see only your own suffering, you see? And therefore, I am very happy I did not -- I didn't want to make you a -- a picture that now in Lithuania everything is solved. But a German historian, Joachim Tauber, a very good friend of mine, he told me that in Germany it took 30 years from discussions on the academic level to the conscious of the people to recognize what happened. So, it is also -- we have to be a little bit patient. We can't -- we can't, you know, impose this terrible thing, I think it was the biggest tragedy in Lithuanian history, the Holocaust. And I think that for me the Germans, th-the Nazis are even worse enemies than the Soviets, why? Because the -- the Soviets, we were still -- Lithuania could -- could resist the Soviets. And -- and -- and they didn't take away the honor of the nation. And the Nazis in this -- in those times, they made out of some Lithuanian, killers. So you lose your -- it's hard for me, it is very sensitive, everything, so in -- in English it's very -- quite hard for me to explain it. But you understand, maybe, what I mean.

Q: I understand what you mean and it's very difficult for me to hear such a sentence, the Nazis made out of some Lithuanians killers.

A: Yeah, they made the situation which --

Q: Really, the kil -- th-the killers who were Lithuanians joined the Nazis, the German Nazis --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and took the opportunity to murder Jews and to loot their property. Why didn't they -- weren't they brought to justice? Really, if Lithuania is so positive --

A: No, no, many people were brought to justice. First of all, there were Soviet trials --

Q: The Soviet trials --

A: Yeah, there were Soviet trials, which you can't trust hundred percent.

Q: But -- but I was asking only after the independence, because --

A: I told you that i -- during the independence it is not -- it is the weakest point.

Q: It's the weakest point.

A: It's the weakest point, yeah. It is the weakest point. That's I must -- I -- I must -- I -- I have to admit. But according to the law they have to be sentenced. And you know how it is very strange, but sometimes it's probably now you can't prove there are not enough businesses, I don't know what, but of course I would -- I would -- as a Lithuanian I would take the trial those people and I would recognize -- I think that you -- only when you recognize the whole truth, then you are liberated, see? But -- but you can't also impose all the time, on -- on another nation what -- this is a -- a thing which has to grow out of the nation itself, not imposed by anybody.

Q: If at -- if at all.

A: Huh?

Q: If at all. If the nation is capable of --

A: I think that every nation, and we have already enough people who are capable and are taking -
- Brazauskas even went to Israel and apologized, and he was attacked here for that. But now more and more people understand that maybe he was right. You see, it takes time, it -- I see, in the 14 years already, a big breakthrough. I see also the positive things. And I think that if you want to achieve something, you have to think in positive terms. You can't accuse all the time people who have already nothing to do with that, you see?

Q: Well --

A: And I [indecipherable] for instance, I will -- for me, Holocaust will always be a thing which I will never forget, and I think as a Jewish person I will memorize it. But I don't want to impose on others to memorize it. That has to be -- in Israel is had to be memorized forever, but here it can -- it is already a question of -- of the people -- of the local people. And I will tell you,

recently I was invited to Siauliai for a talk about tolerance. And I had a big audience, over a hundred people, different people, and you know that Siauliai is a city where Murza is located, he is the new Lithuanian neo-Nazi, Lithuanian fascist. And I got a question, I don't know if you heard about that, that -- that m -- during Christmas, next to the Christmas tree was standing a menorah because last year Hanukah and Christmas was almost the same time. And Murza with his guys came and sir -- oversi -- and -- and crashed this menorah, he was destroying it. So they asked me what I think about that. So I answered them like that. You see -- you understand that I have two identities. I am Jewish and I am Lithuanian citizen. And as a Jew, I wouldn't even put on the main square, the menorah. I would put the menorah in a place which was maybe a Jewish place or a synagogue, and I would remember and -- and -- th-the day somehow very -- very modest. But as a Lithuanian I would be very happy that the menorah stays next to the tree, because there are no any more Jews here. There are no any more people can light the candle. There are no people who can be memorized by somebody because there are no Jews any more. So as a Lithuanian, I would like to memorize -- I would happy to ca -- to light the candle for the - - my killed compatriots. So you -- can you imagine the -- the reaction was I got applause. And people came then and said that -- thank you.

Q: You know, this is a very nice thing to say, what you just described. I wonder if you could have said such a thing as a Lithuanian, unless you were also a Jew.

A: I am. I am double. I am double.

Q: Because -- no, I am talking about what --

A: No, there are --

Q: -- you have chosen --

A: -- oh yes, I can give you names of Lithuanians who would say the same, and even more than I said, because I am still careful, and they would not be careful, they would be much more critical about Lithuanians. I can name such people like Iapramus Markos, Iacunis Markos, Avido Tostalaikias, Iakeenos Verjunas. Like Ludas Troska, like Guidos Alexandravichas. I can --

Q: Of course, I --

A: -- give you a lot of names of Lithuanian --

Q: I'm sure, I'm sure about this, but --

A: -- yeah. Vytautas Landsbergis told it.

Q: I'm sure about --

A: He said Vytautas Landsbergis [indecipherable] many years ago that the -- the Holocaust is not any more a Jewish problem, it's a Lithuanian problem. None of -- there are a lot, but not everybody wants to hear it. I will give you another example.

Q: Wh-What do you mean not everybody wants to --

A: No --

Q: -- you mean everybody out of Lithuania [indecipherable] people on the inside Lithuania?

A: Inside Lithuania and -- doesn't want to hear it, and -- and I must say that the Jewish approach is sometimes also a little bit --

Q: Anti-Lithuanian.

A: Non -- non -- no -- non -- anti-Lithuanian and non-sensitive. And I really don't agree with that. I will give you another example. Yo -- yud -- yudka -- Judel Bayli -- Baylis who was already twice going through all Lithuanian scho -- many Lithuanian schools to talk about his story, and meet with children. And he was always nicely very met, because he is really -- he's an -- he is a goodhearted person.

Q: He's a charming person.

A: Charming person, yeah. And once after his talk, a Lithuanian boy came and he said -- he asked him -- he was almost in tears, he said, Ponas Baylisi -- Mr. Baylis, my grandfather was sh - - was a Jew killer, what should I do? What should I do? Because he was shocked by all that, what he said. So he embraced him, he kissed him and he told him, you have already done. You un -- realize it, you understand it. You are not guilty, you can't be guilty. And the -- and they separated as friends, you see? He didn't -- or I can give you another example of my experience. I took in a Lithuanian girl to live, just -- she li -- she lived [indecipherable] I was asked by my friends to take her in. And in Lithuania really aba -- almost everybody was told that the Jews are using blood for matzos. And she lived with me and after half a year she told me that she was told she shouldn't go to live with a Jewish woman, because she always will have some blood on her body, Christian blood. And -- and th -- sh -- now I must admit, she said, that I was watching you all the time. I was watching through the keyhole when you were in the bathroom if you had blood or not. And now I know that you don't have it. So I also embraced her. I told her, my dear friend, I'm happy that you realize now that there are a lot of mythology. I don't accuse you because if it was told -- y-you were told by your grandmother or by your mother, or by your aunt about that, why shouldn't you believe them? Why should you believe me? But now I am very happy that -- so you -- you -- you didn't commit a crime. But now you know, and you can say to the others that this is not true.

Q: So to --

A: You see, so we had no -- I was not hating her that she is -- she has a s -- prejudice.

Q: So we -- we have two stories of happy end to this interview. Judel Baylis' story --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and your story.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you lost -- you lost --

A: I lost my whole family.

Q: No, no, no, you lost the -- the live and the good nature of humankind, you still think in a positive way.

A: There is no other way. You know, Sisyphus, he was pushing the stone up the hill, always knowing that the stone will fall down. But still he did it because he had no other way to live. So I have also no other way to live. And if I can help one soul, one person to get rid of hatred and to get rid of suspicion and -- and understand another -- we -- we speak always all -- we have to understand the other, that we shouldn't be always treated as the other, but we ourselves are treating very often the others as the others. I can tell you another story of a family, I can even mention the name, it's William Good, who was jumping out of the Paneru -- Paneru pit, he was shot, but he was alive and he escaped and then he survived, also helped by Christian people, but in the woods. And -- and his wife is also a Polish wil -- a -- a Jew from Vilna, a Polish orient -- more oriented than Lithuanian. And he was also from Vilna and they had a lot of prejudice against Lithuanians because for them -- I understand it also, because after the war I was even asked by people, how can you live in a -- in a country which is soaked with blood, with Jewish blood? So -- and they were so full of -- of -- of I don't know, fi -- some feelings, anti-Lithuanian feelings. And then I told them that you can't generalize it. There are such wonderful Lithuanian people. Such wonderful people. And I brought them into a family of wonderful Lithuanian people and they came and they talked and they shared and they were, you know, even crying

together. And when we went out, Parella, the wife of William Good told me, Irena, thank you very much. You take from us away the burden of hatred. I think hatred is the most terrible thing.

Q: I see no better point in ending this conversation.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah --

Q: It's a wonderful ending.

A: -- yeah, thanks, yeah, yeah.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Not at all.

Q: Thank you very much. We could have gone on and on and on [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, this can be forever.

Q: But thanks a lot.

End of Tape Four

Conclusion of Interview