

**Time-coded notes for Interview with Liza Silbert  
June 26, 1988**

:80 - 1:40 Liza Silbert comes from Poland, from the city of Vilna. She grew up in a middle class home. Her father dies just before the war. She had three brothers and one sister. Liza is the only survivor from her immediate family.

1:40 - 3:25 Liza's home was comfortable, but her family was not rich. Both parents had business. The children went to school and to college. Liza was in high school. It was very comfortable. Her father had a grocery business. Liza's childhood sticks in her mind. She remembers she played in a beautiful yard with flowers. Her family were Orthodox Jews but were not fanatical. Her father had a little beard but was "modern".

3:25 - 4:20 In 1940, the Russians came in. In 1941 the Germans came in. Young people started running away. Some friends were saying that Liza's family should run also, but her mother did not want to go. They had lived under the Germans during World War One.

4:20 - 5:15 Antisemitism was an everyday occurrence. People threw stones at Liza. They lived in a gentile neighborhood and she had gentile girlfriends. She remembers her friend's brother, who was a pilot, had said that Jews were taking away all the jobs.

5:15 - 7:20 In 1941, bombardments started. Soldiers were marching, there was artillery. The Germans were coming in. Liza's brother was shot by the Germans; he left a young wife and 1 1/2 year old child. The Germans had said that a Jew had killed a German, and so they went around shooting Jews on the spot. When questioned about the year this occurred, Liza said she thought it was 1941, but wasn't certain.

7:20 - 8:50 It was unsafe to go into the street. The Germans were taking Jews away. They started giving orders: Jews must wear armbands; Jews must abide by curfews. Controls were getting tighter. And tighter. She remembers that Jews had to wear yellow stars. Liza began "feeling like a Jew". One morning, they were surrounded by Gestapo. They were given fifteen minutes to take their belongings and get out. They had to leave everything.

8:50 - 10:55 Liza's family was kicked out of their home. Liza was seventeen years old. She remembers walking out; the street was surrounded by military-- the SS-- carrying machine guns. There was a line of Jews. Liza describes it as looking like a procession to death. Liza's number was 47. The SS were taking Jews in trucks and gassing them in the trucks. Many Jews were taken to "Panar" (?), a place where people used to vacation, and their bodies were dumped there.

10:55 - 12:44 Liza remembers some Poles laughing, saying "now we can get rid of the Jews, we can get rid of the cancer." After leaving their home, Liza's family was pushed into the ghetto. The Vilna ghetto consisted of only a few streets. Everyone tried to grab a little space. They found a house with two rooms. There were five families in there. Everything was an effort. It was difficult to get water; there was only one oven. Liza said it was "hell." There were

epidemics; people were dying like flies. There were only two washrooms in the yard for many, many people. Liza and her mother, brothers and sisters were there.

12:44 - 15:70 The Germans started to take people away. They wanted to eliminate the educated people. They also told people they had to work. Liza had to go to a big courtyard one morning at 5 a.m. She went with a friend. At 6 a.m. the Gestapo came and selected slaves. They had to march 10 km. in the heat. They then had to go to work building a bridge with logs. Guards with guns were watching over them. At one point, the guards threw bread out for people to eat; people were fighting over the bread. The Germans were laughing. Liza and her friend wouldn't take the bread. A German slapped them and told them to take the bread. Liza was petrified.

15:70 -17:70 This was the first time Liza was humiliated. She couldn't believe that these people could be such barbarians. Her sister went out to work and never came back. Liza's mother couldn't take it and became very frail. Her mother didn't want to live anymore.

17:70 - 18:41 Liza's mother gave up her bread to the children. Liza's younger brother, who was in delicate health, was doing hard labor and got pneumonia and died while they were in the ghetto. Liza says that killed her mother.

18:42 - 20:40 The "actions" taking people out of the ghetto were coming frequently. They heard that another smaller ghetto was being built. They found an apartment in the other ghetto and went there. In the beginning, conditions were better there. Liza worked in a brick factory. She walked 10 miles a day. One day the Gestapo wanted to take 100 people. Liza hid, but the Poles fingered her. She was caught by a Gestapo. It turned out that they already had 100 people so Liza did not have to go. They ended up taking 10,000 people. The ghetto became very quiet.

20:40 - 21:70 Liza became very ill. She had 104 degree fever and rash. She went to a small hospital. The Germans started taking people out every night. Her brother heard that the ghetto would soon be liquidated.

21:70 - 24:05 In the other ghetto, there was an apartment with two hiding places in which an older man lived. The man showed them the two hiding places--they in a wall which was camouflaged on top of the oven. Liza and her mother hid in the wall on top of the oven. The Gestapo came in to this apartment and decided to make their headquarters there. Liza and her mother were forced to hide over the oven for 48 hours. After the Gestapo left and they came out, they found their neighbor hanged. Liza's brother took them to another hiding place outside the ghetto. They stayed there for three months.

24:05 - 26:60 Then they were found. They were taken outside. Liza saw that the sun was still shining, life was going on, people were coming and going. She asked "Why me?" They were taken to city hall and were supposed to make a "report". Liza's mother was called to go inside. As her mother was being called in, Liza saw an open door and just decided to go out. She pushed a gate open and walked past a guard. She walked into the middle of the city. She started wiping her face because she was very dirty. She had no purse; she had no place to go. She found a Jewish leader and asked him if he could take her into the Jewish ghetto.

26:60 - 27:70 Liza had a cousin in the ghetto, but he could not take her in because she had no work permit. She finally got a work permit. She stayed in the ghetto until it was liquidated. She never saw her mother or brother again.

27:70 - 29:00 The ghetto was being liquidated. The youth started to organize themselves. A hiding place was built where about 85 people could live for 3 to 6 months. Liza decided not to go into this hiding place. It turns out that the building where the hiding place was demolished. Liza asks herself "Why did I survive?"

29:00 - 30:60 Liza went to Kaiserwald after the liquidation. Just after the ghetto was liquidated, people were taken to a cemetery and had to stay outside in the rain for three days. The Germans began separating people, to the left and right. Liza was with her cousin. She went to the right. She remembers seeing a German kill an infant. People were then packed into cattle cars. There was no food or water. Girls were raped in the cars, Liza heard them screaming. They travelled for four days and four nights. The train stopped and they were at the camp.

30:60 - end People were taken to the showers. Then Liza was taken to...to work on building a hospital. Liza had to lift bricks. She did this for six months. A selection was made. Half of the people went to Treblinka and half went to Riga. Liza went to Riga. She worked for Krupps. There were German civilians there. They made ammunition. When the Russians began coming in, they were moved around. Liza was liberated in January 1945.