Devinki, Maria Braun
RG-50.106*0002
Two Audio Tapes

Abstract

Maria Braun Devinki was born on June 1, 1920 in Hanover, Germany. She grew up in Wodzislaw (Voydislav, Loslau, Vodislav, Vodislov, Vodzislav) and Sosnowiec (Sosnivice, Sosnovets, Sosnovice, Sosnovits, Sosnovitz, Sosnovyets, Sosnowiec Niwka) Poland. When Hitler's army invaded Poland, the front windows of Jewish homes were boarded up so the residents could not see outside. The Devinki family had money, but since it was saved in the form of stocks and bonds, they could not get access to it. Germans took over their house, and they were forced into a ghetto. Maria and her two brothers were sent to an ammunitions factory in Skarzysko (Skarzysko Kamienna, Kamienna Skarzhisko, Skarzhisk, Skarzisko Kamyena) for a short time. Maria then got married because she and her husband thought it would increase their chance of survival.

The Devinki family had a non-Jewish friend in the Polish army and Underground who took them to a farmhouse where they lived in a bunker. Maria's father had already been sent to Treblinka, so her mother and two brothers lived in the bunker as well. The farmer had plans to build a brick house, so people at the local church realized that he was getting money from hiding Jews; because otherwise he would not have been able to afford such a project. To ensure their safety, the Devinki family relocated to another bunker. In the meantime, Maria's brother went to visit a friend in order to sell him clothing in exchange for 30 zlotys. When he left, his friend followed him, killed him, and took back the 30 zlotys.

The Russians arrived and they were freed. Maria moved to Sosnowiec but was unhappy. Her other brother was killed by AK, the Armia Krajowa; so she decided that her and her mother needed to move out of Poland. They relocated to Regensburg, Germany in September 1945 before finally settling in Kansas City.

Oral History

Tape 1, Side A

03:24 Maria is a Jewish Holocaust survivor and was previously interviewed in September, 1994 in Kansas City at the Holocaust Museum—Midwest Center. She belongs to the New American Club. She does not speak publicly about her Holocaust experience. Maria came to D.C. with 28 people and the mayor of the city. She raised two children in a strict manner. Not much was said to her children about the past. She has grandchildren. She decided to tell her story after losing her husband fifteen months ago. Why keep it in her mind when she can tell the world how they survived, what life offered them; we want to teach the world that nothing is forever, we have to treat each other what is right. We are here to talk for the ones we lost.

11:55 Maria Devinki was born on June 1, 1920 in Hanover, Germany. She grew up in Poland in Wodzislaw and Sosnowiec. Her father came from a

family of five brothers; he was the oldest. Her father was in the army in World War I. In a very religious family they can't take more than one son into the army; since he was the oldest, he went in the army. Her father was captured by the Russians as a prisoner and held by them for two years. He was hurt by some kind of bombing; his left hand was ruined — two fingers were cut off. He also had a mark on the back of his head (?) that was pretty severe. After he came back from there, he married in that little city of Wodzislaw; and from there they moved to Hanover where she was born. Of course, being involved in such a situation, the Polish government assigned benefits to the veterans. The Polish government gave him some kind of benefit, and his benefit was a license to sell certain things that were not permitted to be sold in every store; like liquor, cigarettes, salt, sugar, tea, coffee. In those years, especially in a small city, there was big demand, and it was very difficult to get. He had a pension too; he was probably pretty hurt and pretty much damaged since they gave him all the privileges. But the point is — he was a religious person, came from a very religious home — those people conducted more religion than cared about business; my mother took over the business, and she operated the store. All those imports; all those things had to come in from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy to Poland. Poland had most of them, more like wheat, potatoes, and other sources of food; but all those luxury things were coming from different countries. And we had the privilege of having an open business for all those things. So that was our business; we lived very comfortable with it. My mother was a good business woman; she was operating all those things.

17:28 We lived in a very good neighborhood in that city. We had a good clientele; the majority of our clientele were not Jewish people because we didn't live in an area with too many Jews; this was like the higher class of neighborhood. We operated the business for years. There were three children; two boys, one girl. We all went to school; we all graduated. In Poland it was seven grades; after seventh grade you graduated. At that time I was 14 years old because you start when you are seven. After graduation I went back to gymnasium; I had two years of gymnasium. I couldn't go too much further because the time got where it started within Germany; and the rules and regulations started getting pretty bad for Jews. Even in '36, '37 we didn't feel that much, but there were already other things going on in Germany; with the Kristellnacht and other things. The news was coming; this Hitler took over the country. It started getting very difficult for Jewish people, particularly business people, professional people, whatever. It didn't make a difference that we lived in a neighborhood that was not primarily Jewish. So, my school stopped; I went two years to gymnasium, I had one more year to finish, and I could be a mathematics teacher; I went for math. But not allowing any more Jews to attend school, types of school; they cut it off, certain cities and certain schools. So I had to do something else.

20:13 I stepped in and helped my mother to operate the business. I was working with her and so were my brothers. One of my brothers was working as a bookkeeper in a little factory — steel, iron, stuff like this, for building suppliers. He actually didn't finish; he had the same problem, he couldn't finish everything, but he finished business school, so they hired him for this. My youngest brother was 14 at the time the war broke out; I was the middle child.

21:10 We heard the bad news, but there was nothing specific. We didn't have any televisions, the type of information we have now; we had the radio. Every once in a while there was a broadcast, but we just could hear what they want us to hear; we couldn't have the true story. So the fact is that we lived with the idea: *Oh, it will pass; it's just some kind of a bad situation right now. And go back to history; if somebody is educated, you know what happened to so-and-so and all through life, all through thousands of years.* But, it didn't pass so easy. September 1, 1939 the German army stepped in the city, took over the city. From that day on, we see killing, we see unusual things we never expected or lived through; I mean as far as I can say. I never know that a person kills a person; the life was taken by God. This is something, if you get old and you get sick, you die. I was too young to understand that you take a gun — we didn't know too much about guns — we know you about to die, you get a gun. But living in the city was peaceful. Life was just different, totally; maybe now it's a little different too than my vision is. But 50 years ago it was totally different. I was 19 years old.

Interviewer: Did you notice, was there any clue before; was there any anti-Semitism or anything that gave you a clue about what the Germans were doing?

23:16 We heard what they want us to hear. They didn't tell us they're killing people. They didn't tell us they're sending out anybody to camps. There were just stories going around. Of course, the Polish people were not very kind to us at that time; it's not exactly all the Polish people. You had a group of Volksdeutsche; if you had a name, like my name is Braun, so I could be German. If you married somebody from the German people, you're half a German; and live in Poland, then you are Volksdeutsche, not a full Deutsche. And those people were taking a lot of advantage. They were stupid, there was not too many; of course in the city I lived, it's farm towns, it's not too many educated people, not too many intelligent ones to understand that it's a war, and we're all going to suffer, and it's going to be a lot of tragedy going on. But it's an opportunity. To have a store, we take everything away from them; to have jewelry, we take everything away from them; if they're bankers; whatever the case would be; and that was going on. And true at school was the same thing; there were students, even at my school where I used to go, were doing a lot of uncomfortable things for the Jewish kids. They could take a match, put it under your coat; it was a joke, but they did this to a Jewish girl. I went to a school,

where it was Jews and non-Jews. I went to another school, it was a Hebrew School, but that was all through my years, from five to seventeen years; and I was graduating to the highest whatever. That school was just for Hebrew, nothing to do with any public class schooling. I had quite a lot of non-Jewish friends; I was very popular at school. I was a good student, that's number one; and I was well-dressed, that means a lot, even now. We lived in a neighborhood where I had mostly non-Jewish friends. We were doing our homework in my house; we lived in a pretty good size house. All the gals were coming to my house, and I was the popular one; doing the mathematics for them, the painting, all those things. I was good in it, so I had a lot of friends. The fact is that just a short time everything changed.

26:25 And Hitler came in; he came in 1939. Right there and then started a little uncomfortable situation where Main Street was separated; tried to block off the windows for those people that lived on Main Street if they were Jewish families. They have no view to the front; they have to have a view to the back.

26:56 Questions start getting around in the neighborhood; you see what done to so-and-so. Children are children; what they understand? They say uh-oh, something wrong with those people, they must be sick; there must be something. They didn't want to have a part of it. Until we find out, all of us, the young and old, there is no — it's not the easy thing, it's going to be more serious than that. By then it was too late; because it was going on for months.

27:25 Later on they start taking us out to work. Two brothers and me; they didn't use my father or my mother in '39, just used the children. We were working on the railroads; we were working on the streets. Like for example, here they have paved streets; in that part of the city they have stones, big stones. And underneath, sand; we throw on the stone and make a street for them. And natural, this was good to take a bunch of kids like us; the women were throwing the sand, and the men were putting in the stone. Of course they didn't pay us. We had to be there 9:00 o'clock, 8 o'clock in the morning. We had to group all at some kind of a place.

Interviewer: How did they tell you …?

28:20 They go from house to house; it was the Polish police — for sure. They had to cooperate with the Germans; otherwise, they'd be killed. When they take over the country, then nobody has the power but them. And the one that want to live and the one is really some was cooperating for one reason — they want to exist; and the other was cooperating to make money or to take advantage of. That's what a lot did — take advantage on it. Of course, they pay the penalty later. So, from one thing to another; and when they were through with one job, they looked for another, for whatever it was necessary to do in that city. Then they sent us away on

the railroad, and we were working there; it was not far for us from the station, six miles from the city.

Interviewer: Did you live at home while you were …?

No, we had to go there every morning to work and come back in the evening. Later on, it start getting a little bit more serious, they kept my brothers there; the two brothers. And they released me; this was already in '40, in the middle '40. The city started getting a little more crowded and food shortage, shortage of food. We had problems; people have to bake their own bread because you couldn't buy too much, because the army used a lot. And actual they didn't worry about anybody else, but for them to be protected.

30:06 And some of them shipped it even; took stuff away, because they didn't have to pay anything if they went to a bakery or went to any place else. They didn't have to pay nothing. For example, one good day two of those Gestapos come in to our store, and they cleaned up everything. They had a truck in front of it; throw everything on the truck. And I was stupid enough to stay in front of my mother and I said — my mother was taking away some (everything was in bulk, not in packages) was taking off from the bulk a little bit tea, coffee, chocolate, whatever, things. And he said: *No, no, she cannot do this.* [Note: something in Yiddish]. I asked him: *Why? She needs it; she has three children to feed.* And he took a strap, and cut on my face, back and forth. I had stripes here for months; didn't heal. People were telling me later, I was lucky; he could have killed me because he did this on other occasions. So, was no question about it that life was unsecure; no justice. You couldn't ask anybody why he's doing this to me, what I done it wrong; I'm a normal person like everybody else.

Interviewer: They took everything you had; how did you survive?

That's the second question. Like I say, we were; that's what we had …

Tape 1, Side 2

31:51 We were still connected with farmers, and some money we had. Everything what we had on Pekao we lost because military generals took over it. It's like stocks and bonds, government things; that was Pekao. And that's what my father was receiving for his pension; went straight to Pekao. And of course this was military that claimed it, because no Jewish people can take out any more money from there. We were secured by all type of — what everybody else — if you're wealthy, you have a little bit more clothes than somebody else; you have some jewelry, some money in the house. .

32:40 In the old country not everybody put money in the bank; you kept something for security. For a while we lived; we could buy food from the

farmers; we could exchange for goods what we still had. Until it got from one to another, they decided that they had to separate the Jews from the Gentiles and make the ghetto in the city. Everybody has to move in a few blocks, circle; give up their belongings and the houses. We had a big house. We had to move in to the quarters where our janitor was living; and give this to the Germans. We lived there; it was seven people. We lived in the two rooms until '42 — when they start Ausweisung (ph ?) [Note: i.e. deportation], partial deportation; take the young people, then take the older people, then clean up completely to make the area Judenrein. In September 1942 we had contact with some people who had (?) authority, the Polish authority. Since we were in business, a lot of those people were buying on credit and never paid us; because, of course, we didn't expect it. But we still had contact with them; we talked to them. They tried to help us by virtually telling us stories. One of those policemen was telling us that Jewish people were involved at that police station and came in and told us this; that was the final Ausweisung. And everybody started to look for a way to get away.

35:02 At that time my father was already taken away; he was sent to Treblinka. I didn't know where he was sent, we just know they took him away. When they took him away, we thought he was in a working camp; he might stay in a working camp for a while, but we had no contact. There was no way that you could write a letter to each other. My two brothers were close enough, six miles away, working at the railroad station. By that time, before the deportation came up, they came and took them — took us, me and sent us to Skarzysko**.** Skarzysko is a city where they had camps; but not death camps, working camps. We made ammunitions for the army. We lasted over there a short while. And I'll tell you the story of how we come out from there, but it's confusing.

36:14 When that contact told us what's going to happen, my husband came into the railroad where I was working; we were not married yet. He told me that so-and-so is going to happen, and they are going to send everybody away to some kind of camp where we would not see each other. We didn't know death camps; we know camps. But he says that he was told that the young couples have a chance; the older couples will go there. The young singles are separated; you don't know where you are. Young couples have a chance because they need workers, healthy workers. If we get married, we have a better chance to survive, and we could watch for each other. I said that it was not a bad idea, but it's not the time to get married. And my father is not here any longer; I don't even know where he is. My brothers are here. Who's going to marry us? What kind of marriage do you expect? He says: *Who cares? It's not a time to worry about anything extreme, but just to be together.* We knew each other for years. He was seven years older than I was, but he was watching me since I was a little girl — since I was going to public school, high school. We were very close friends; as he was an older young man, and I was too young. So we just flirted, but nothing serious.

Interviewer: What did he do?

38:01 They had a textile business; they were very wealthy people. They had a big operation in that city. The same things happened to them; they came in and cleaned up all the houses, the retail store, and everything else. Again, like I say, that was the last thing everybody worried about. We'll have less clothes or we'll have less food, as long as they leave us alone; because for some reason or another, we didn't experience anything like this. And we were young — 19 years. I had a friend also 19 years, and I know she wouldn't dream what are you doing at a time like this? I was smarter then than she's smart now.

Interviewer: What happened during the two years that you lived in the small quarters with seven people?

39:15 There was me, my mother, my father, my two brothers, and my mother's sister and an aunt. We had a very, very big house — about two blocks long. And it's not just ours; it was left by a grandfather. In the old country when you were building a family structure, it was built like a castle; for the whole family. There were my mother's sisters, brothers, uncles — everybody has his own quarters; five rooms, seven rooms — whatever the size of the family. And they took all this away. My aunt was a widow, she was 83; she had a sister, she was married and lost her husband. So we all shared these two rooms; all seven of us. But that was not the worst; we shared something else too in our life. That was two years we lived there. And then the Deportation came up --- no, we got married; I'm going back.

40:40 We came back to the city; it was like six, seven miles away from the railroad station. A few of our friends our age were with us; a group of young people. And we discussed this with them, and they decided 'yes', it's a good idea. Four couples went to a specific place where they have services in the evening for somebody to marry us because we didn't have the parents to do anything for us; and there has to be somebody to give us some kind of authority to be married. When we hit the place, there were not too many Jewish people that had that authority. The only one that has that authority, it could be a rabbi. One of those Jews was one of my uncles, he was in that group of ten; and he married all four of us — four couples. [This was September 20, 1942.] Of course from the four couples, I am the only one alive; all went. After we were married, we were called one good day to come in. A night before, we heard in the city that it's going to happen — tomorrow, next day, whatever. Everybody — we didn't hide, because there was no place to hide. And if to hide, we have to be prepared. Somebody has to give us some kind of places or whatever.

42:28 At seven o'clock in the morning — the night before we heard about it, we thought it was going to be in a week or so. Seven, eight o'clock in the morning, they knocked on the door; my grandfather's living in the same house also, and his wife. He was 83-84; also aged. Knocked on his door; they come out. She didn't see, she was already aged, and she didn't see — blind. She was holding on to my grandfather's arm because she didn't see where she's walking. They're screaming, yelling — 'Get out, get out, get out;' and she holds on his arm, not even dressed. And one of the Gestapos knocked her over her head with a little … or was it a gun or was it a … some kind of instrument. It was pretty serious; she fell on the floor; and he grabbed them — the old man was that size. All the people shamed (?), and threw them — outside was a truck sitting right by the street — in the truck. How long he lasted — it's just God's known; could be an hour, who knows? Or they killed him; anyway he was gone. Then they're going from house to house, and they come to us, we go out, woke up, and they took us. The older people went right away — away on trucks. The younger people, they took us on a platz, a plaza, a spacious place; where they can put everybody out, and say: *left, right, left, right, left, right.* We didn't know who's the left and who's the right; but one went to camp, one went to Auschwitz or any other — according to the look, according to whatever they see in people. Me and my husband were saved. But, we know it's not going to help. A few weeks, months, whatever after we work and are helpful; come down and we're not going to be capable to go on with whatever — who can predict? We started looking for a way …. Everything, we had times like you know — a second, a minute, a minute, and a second — that's not anymore.

45:12 I had a non-Jewish friend in the Polish army as a main person, army man. He was working in the Underground, in the Polish army. What was his reason? I don't know; he was trying to save us. He came to me before, and he asked me: *If times get so serious, you want me to find a saving place?* (This was before I got married.) *A place where to hide you?* At that time I was not serious enough to say yes or no; but, when it happened, I contacted him. I said: *Remember what you told me?* He said: *OK; there's still hope. Let me take you on a farm*; he and a teacher from school. On that farm, he said that he had already talked to the farmer because he had talked to him before when he had approached her. The farmer was willing to do this for so-and-so much a month — money or other things left that could be exchanged for money. Of course nobody knew how long this would last; we were hoping maybe three months, maybe six months. Nobody predicted a five year history. They picked us up in Skarzysko; my brothers were in Skarzysko. We were transferred to Skarzysko after this [Note: getting married]; all of us, the group that was married, not married. [Note: between 1940 and 1942 Maria went back a forth between work and sleeping in the cramped quarters with seven people.] But we contacted him [Note: in 1942] because we needed a hiding place; the situation is like this.

Interviewer: How did you contact him?

48:19 How? There were still people coming to the … There were workers, Jews and non-Jews.; it was not just Jews. The Jews were the slavery, and the non-Jews were the ones who supervised, watched over us. The Germans couldn't spread around the army between such nonsense like working on the railroad, working on … So they used the Polish people; the ones that assigned it; a German or even a Polish policeman. We had contacts; we knew quite a lot of people; we lived in that city for a long time, and my husband had a wealthy family there; and another business. You do business with people, whether they like you or not, there is still some kind of connection. When we were in Skarzysko, my brother, the youngest one, (when he was 15 years old) approached one of those Gestapo; that he give them all his clothes. He was dressed up with a jacket and boots; it was already in the fall; he had gold pieces in the boots, hiding away. We all put some jewelry in places that we can dispose it and be able to get out some bread money for it. And he said: *I give you my boots. I give you my clothes. Give me a uniform and take me to the station.* And that man fell for it.

50:16 He opened the boot and found the gold pieces; he fell for it. He could have killed him. It's God's will that he didn't kill him, because he could have had all those things and killed him; and forget about him. He took all those things, and he took all three of us to the railroad station. We all arrived in that city where we're supposed to go; to hiding. That man was waiting for us at the station and picked us up in a wagon of hay. And we all crawled in, and went to that place, of that farmer. We dug a hole in the barn, six feet deep, ten feet square; and covered this up with boards and covered the boards with hay and straw. Pretend it's a part of the barn.

51:40 And little by little, that gentleman, that gentile, brought in my mother (my mother wasn't in hiding yet), and brought in my husband, and my husband's sister. So we were a total of six; me, my mother, my husband, the two brothers, and my husband's sister; the six of us in that hole (*bunker). That was not the end of it. We even brought in my sister-in-law's two children, but we lost them in a short time. They were just there a few months, but we tried to save them. We didn't succeed; they were too young. They went out from being safe and got killed; one was nine, one was eleven. But, we were trying in that we didn't sleep lying flat, but sit; everybody was sitting — their clothes… We stayed in that bunker for months. It was very difficult with food. If the lady, the farmer's lady, was in a good mood, she cooked; she brought down potatoes and baked the bread. This was good enough; as long as we had potatoes, we had bread, we had water — we can live. But if something just didn't work very well in her household, she took it out on us. We could sit two or three days without food, without anything. The only advantage we had, in the middle

of the night, we could pull out from the barn — they have those spaces for the animals where they throw in potatoes, cooked potatoes [Note: trough].

54:17 From these leftovers, we took it down. If we needed a drink — water, something — there was a vale outside; we had to go down. And this was to clean us and to wash up too; because in the daytime, we didn't have that type of thing. So we had to wait until midnight, everybody; the farm is quiet, asleep. We went out one at a time; washed ourselves, cleaned up to a point — I don't want to even remember how. Of course we got sick; I had all type of sickness. And my mother was sick; we didn't even think we would survive. We didn't care, frankly; I personally — I cannot speak for everybody — I personally didn't care; I was just doing a favor, the rest of them hung with it. That's my opinion; but to my opinion was — big deal, who needs that kind of life? Being a princess, having everything in home and being dressed and being popular and being somebody; and no time, nobody even cares. All my friends — they don't even want to talk to me. I'm just like a disease, who cares to live in a time like this? It's even embarrassing; you can be the most beautiful child, but you're still a child, you think like a child. The fact is, myself, I didn't know what's 'commit suicide'; I didn't know what you do not to live. But I didn't care; I say whatever happens to me, if they take me out and they kill me, so they kill me. I didn't know how, the feeling of killing, but just listening to it, I agreed to be the victim. What can I say; time went by. After quite some time, the man was getting wealthier and wealthier, they found, by paying him so much money each month. The gentleman outside — my friend who found us the place — gave him an ultimatum. He told him before he boarded us in, he said, listen: *I know a lot of farmers taking this* [Note: i.e. money], *and after a few months they get tired of it. They kill them and take away everything they had. They have nothing; everything they have, I have; and I'm the witness. If anything happen to them, the same thing will happen to you.* And on those agreements, he took us in; so we had some security. We know as long as Jusik [Note: the friend who was the go-between] is not going to be tired of us, we will live; unless we die from diseases or whatever. And of course, they used to come on the farm for food. The Gestapo, the German army, used to come to every farmer — take out a pig, a cow, poultry, eggs, whatever; this was common. Every time they come in — three, four — with a truck, they were going around with the rifles and digging — trying to see if the ground was soft. If it's soft, somebody's hiding.

58:02 And the minute they come in, they asking, have you Juden here; do you have Jews? Say *no.* But that was already common; there are a lot of people in hiding. One Sunday he comes home; he says he wants to talk to us. *What is it?* His name was Wadick (ph sp?). *What is it?* He said: *We heard in church, stories; that the rumor's going around that on the farm that we have Jews.* And I asked him, I says: *What makes you think it's serious?* He says: *because I told them I'm going to build a house.* They said: *How can you build a house if you don't have Jews there to pay you*

for it? These farmers were poor people; they had a little house, from straw, whatever. He says he's going to build a brick house, and he's bragging about it. His wife is going to the city, buying better clothes than she used to wear. Naturally, things like this give you some suspicions. So we decided — and that was already in '44. We decided, that if he already told us this, it's not going to take very long; or he himself can call the police and tell them: *I have Jews here; not by will. They just come in, and they hiding and I discovered they're there and there.* Or tell them: *They're coming to rob me;* or anything. What to rob; even potatoes is a robbery. We decided it's not going to work; we have to find another place. And my man (my friend) come out, because he used to come out every once in a while and talk to us. He picked days because he was in the city. He knows what days of the week the Gestapo comes in; not every day they were there. The army was there, but the ones in black uniforms, they just come in for visits. They stake everything out for everybody, for killing somebody. So he chose those days that were safer for him to visit us. And we told him the story; it's not going to work. And he said: *OK. I have another place for you.*

1:00:57 The guy's a very poor farmer, but I told him — *I expect one day it's going to happen.* He was a very smart businessman; he was in business. They had a lot of farms; but he himself was in the automobile business, like the buses we have going back and forth — he had those buses, that man. He was with people; he was not just a person who doesn't understand life. He could see what is going on, and he was, like they say, a patriot; in Polish they say he was a real patriot. He believed that one of those days we get rid of the Germans, and Poland is going to be Poland; like it used to be. To him it was a challenge that he had the opportunity to save lives; Jews, non-Jews, or somebody. That's my opinion; he didn't get any money. We just rewarded him with gifts, later. But he had no benefit as far as financial; everything we left with him he used for that purpose. Matter of fact, he was short when he took us over to the other farm, when he told him: *I don't have any more money to pay you. But, they had pretty nice homes from both sides of the family. If they survive, you will have something. If they don't survive, I will see to it that you get all those things, for that belongs to them.* So the farmer falls for this too. After all, that's smart or not? They took a chance; frankly, they took a chance for their life too. Not that we had heaven there, but by the same token, he didn't have to do this either; a lot of people didn't want to do this. When he came back and told us that he made arrangements with the other guy, but it's a good walking distance. It was quite a few miles — four, seven, eight miles out. I remember it was farms, farms, farms. Monday we have in our city — like exchange food — like a market. The farmers come with food, with everything, to the city; exchange for clothes, for equipment to work on the farm, for appliances, for stuff like this.

Tape 2, Side 1

00:05 We decided that night it's going to be the best night to walk out from this place and go to the other place. Who's going to take us? We dressed as women — the men and the women; and those little babushkas that the farmers wear; and baskets — eggs. Everybody has a basket — three eggs, whatever. If they catch us or something — the language we know; German, I can speak German to them; Polish, I can speak Polish to them. What are they going to do, uncover my face to see whether I'm a Jew or not? Everything; I have to just answer. So we walk by, and of course it's always a Wache (ph, sp?); always somebody watches — they had stations; like a station of so many soldiers. We had to walk by something like this, regardless of which part of the city we would go; they were on all four corners. We walk by, and he comes out, and he stops. *Where you going?* — in German; this was a German. And I said that we were going back to the farm. *What do you have?* [I replied] *eggs*. I was afraid he would come close to me; I cannot lie. He said: *Go; I couldn't eat your eggs*. You know — if I would say 'kielbasa' or 'vodka', or something else, he probably would stop me. But 'eggs' — 'go'; they had plenty eggs. Back to the place, and we did the same thing. We dig the same thing, and we moved in at that place; and that was in '44. And we stayed there; didn't have any contact with anybody. It was very primitive, old people — farmers; no newspaper, no radio, no anything. We couldn't send them to the city to buy papers because it would be suspicious. The farmers know who is ignorant and who is not educated. We lived the kind of life we possibly could live — very boring, very uncomfortable; short of money. My brother went out to a near farm where he left all his clothes, all his necessary things, with a friend of his; since we were so short. He was hoping when he survives, he needs the clothes; he didn't bother taking away from it. But since we were so short — and the farmer really didn't have enough money to buy even for the cattle's food — so we felt for him. So my brother, on a Saturday night, he went out to the other farm, and he said: *I have a couple of suits here; I have to take them and sell it.* He [the other person] said: *I'll buy them from you.* He [my brother] said: *OK, whatever you want to pay me for them.* He [the other person] said: *30 zlotys.* He [my brother] said: *Fine.* He took the 30 zlotys and visited with this friend of his for a while; and walked back to us.

03:44 Walking back, a mile or whatever from there, he followed him; took away the 30 zlotys and killed him. We see, one day he's not there, the next day he's not there; we thought he was visiting with those people because they were friends. One good day the farmer came down; he said: *In the city they say they killed another Jew* — because every day you could hear. And my mother immediately, for some reason, she felt like that's the one. She said to him: *Do you know who they killed? No — a young man.* She sent him back to the city and says: *Find out what kind of clothes he wears, or somebody will tell you something.* The man came back and he described the jacket. That's it; then we know — it's my older brother. It

was his friend, yes — for 30 dollars, they killed a person. That's the way; that's the kind of time we lived in. In a lot of cases, frankly, I think, the Polish people were as guilty as the Germans. They did more horror to the Polish Jews than the Germans. The Germans took us to work, put us in a crematorium because that was what their Fuhrer wanted them to do. And they claim they had to believe in his philosophy — the party people — even got paid for it. And time changed; but still they had their own explanation when they come to judgment. But the Poles didn't have any interest whatsoever to do anything like that, because after all, that country was already occupied by the Germans. And the Germans should be to them somebody not a friend, but an enemy. Why help an enemy? They didn't do it to help the enemy; they did it for a lousy 30 dollars. If we go back in history, people are not ignorant, we know we're all human — we all have some kind of evil time of life. That's what happened.

06:46 So we lost one; this was already April 15, 1944. We continued with the shortage. In January 1945 the Russians started coming in to Poland. We heard the planes cruising around those farms and those little cities. We were wondering, being underground, what were the planes doing on the farm? We know that the Germans have no reason now to cover Poland; they have no reason to be in that part of the country. If we know the map, we know what part of the world they should be in now. And knowing they were fighting with Russia, they should be far, far away from that part of the area. But, who can tell? We had no newspaper, no radio; how can we even say? We asked the man if he heard anything what's going on — the people on the farm talk. And he said: *Yes, the planes were going to Warsaw, they were throwing bombs, and they say the Germans are losing the war.* OK; it's good news — whether how soon or what. One good day he's knocking on our things. He said: *Folks, you're free. You can come out from there.* My husband says: *Uh, uh. No, Brozenski (ph sp?). We're not coming out.* We thought they wanted to do something to us. He said: *The Russians are here.* So we opened a little bit, and we said: *Brozenski, from where do you have that news?* He said: *The Russians are newest (?) city. Everybody under fire is hiding, because we don't know what they're going to do to us. But if you (are) Jews, you can go back to the city.* And we said: *If you're hiding, why would they be so good to us? We're hiding with you.* Because on another day we got out from the bunker, and we had no clothes; it was the winter time — the 17th of January. We had no clothes, able to walk — and in Poland, it's very cold in this time of the year. And the ice on the ground — we had no shoes; everything deteriorated in five years, what we had. So the lady, the old lady — she was so poor — gave us blankets from the horses; torn, rags, something not worthy of even saving for a rag. But it's still something; you cover yourself up. We walked back to the city. We come back to the city; everybody was in turmoil because everybody was again afraid of the Russians. We're still not free; we're still under some kind of…

10:23 We settled in a house because everything was occupied; not owners, but the Germans supplied the houses for whoever worked for them, whoever did something for the German army. So we couldn't get in our house; a postman was living there. So we went to my sister-in-law's house. We moved in; another couple came in a day later; a single man came in.

10:57 Grouped together, that particular city had 3,000 Jews. By the time they all got again into the city, we have 17 alive; 17 from the 3,000. Whether they were in hiding, in bunkers, in camps, or whatever … We grouped all 17 in the same area; we were afraid to separate. We lived there for a while. I was a very close friend with the mayor's sister-in-law; she was my age. The mayor over there was the burgermeister. We lived close; I told you we lived in a good neighborhood. Across the street from us he had an apotheke, a drugstore. His wife's sister was my best friend; so I had left her all my clothes, all my goodies. When I came back, I said: *Clothes I have no problem because Danjeska (ph sp?) — I will stop, and she will give me back my clothes.* I went in, and I thought she's passing out seeing me. I didn't know — is it the reason because she felt sorry for me, the way I looked or is the reason…? I didn't know why. So, I was waiting for a good answer. She said: *You know something — I wouldn't want you to be here.* I said: *I don't intend to be here; I just like for you to give me some of my clothes — some shoes, something so I can start getting dressed.* She says: *I'm sorry to tell you there are no clothes left — nothing. Your jewelry, your clothes, your coat — everything the police took out from my house.* I said: *You sure you have nothing left?* If she would be really a sincere person, she could have given me something from her clothes; if it's true — that's what I'm trying to tell. I said: *How the police know to take my clothes?* She said: *You know you were too popular; everybody knows what kind of clothes you wear. And they come in, they know.* The jealousy was so extreme — what you wear. I said: *What can you give me? I cannot give you nothing; I want you to leave.* I said: *Can you give me some potatoes? We're really hungry.* She gave me a couple potatoes — that was my best friend.

14:10 OK; so no reason for me to worry and stay in that city, or do anything. I said to my husband, we have to move. We have too many friends here from the past; but they wouldn't want us. They don't want us — period; because they're occupying our homes; they have our goods. We stuffed up so many different friends with goodies and goodies and goodies. And everybody was afraid we want everything back, or want some back, or whatever. So I said, it's no place for us; let's go someplace else. Even though I was young, I was always capable to do something; I could sew, I could write, I could read; I could do anything I want to do. We packed; and I stopped a Russian truck, and they took us to a different city — me and my husband. I settled in that city; I know that city from before — Sosnowiec. I went to that city; I start peddling around. I see in clothes, it's good there. This is three miles away from the German border.

15:42 We could walk over, from one place to another. It was open already; of course there was always Germany and Poland had a border in Katowice (Kattowitz, Stalinogród). It was a huschel (ph sp?); where we could go back and forth without worrying about gleiwischt (ph sp?). I bought some clothes; I exchanged for food. I went on the union station; I bought food from the farmers in exchange for clothes, with people that need food because the big city had a very good shortage of everything. And from one to another, I make myself a little money. I opened a store, a grocery store. I don't know too much about grocery stores; but, who cannot sell groceries? What is it — it's food. I worked in that store for a while; and I was very unhappy — my mother, my brother, still in that city. But my brother was a very capable person; he took us out from camp by age 15, and now he's age, almost 20. I was not comfortable, and I worried about him; and I contacted him constantly because I wanted him to move away from that city. He said that he's doing well financially. He was a good mechanic too. By 15 years, already, he drove a car. He's fixing bicycles, cars, sewing machines; and he's selling them. He buys an old one, a broken one; fix it, sell it. So he was doing pretty good for a while. But for me being so restless, not having him close to me, since I have nobody — I lost everybody; and that's the only thing I had — my mother and my brother. It's the whole family, from 96 people — we were a family of 96. He decided he's going to move. I find him a place there, and matter of fact, he came to see the place; and he's supposed to move on a certain day. He came to see the place; he bought a lot of stuff to take home with him, from Katowice.

18:24 When he brought everything home, it was May 1, 1945; it was already four months after liberation. Coming home in the truck with goodies, going into his house, the AK (Armia Krajowa) stopped him and killed him. It was four months after; he was 20 years old. So I lost another one. I went back to that city, packed my mother up, and took her with me to Sosnowiec and decided there's no room for us; not in Sosnowiec, not in Vaterland (?). We have to go someplace else. We have to forget about that country; we have to forget about that part of the world. There were choices; there were two choices. We can go with a visa to the United States or to Israel. Israel was not having yet a country, it was '45; but they accepted people — took a long time. Like you have to have …. You have to register, and who is coming from. It takes a year, two, three, whatever; but it's a question; and you get your visa. Our visa came in 1950. But in the meantime, I have to move away from Poland; this is number one. We packed again what we have; we move to Germany. We moved; we took a route. Wherever we going to get stopped or held back, we stay. We were travelling — we were in Czechoslovakia; we were in Linz; we were in cities all through the route. We finally come across, in Linz, some people from a neighbor city we know, and they say they're going to Regensburg. *Who's in Regensburg?* They don't know. *We heard it's a city, let's go.*

We went; the whole group from the camp over there in Linz went to Regensburg. We went with them.

21:06 We settled in Regensburg; that was '45, September; such a fast transaction. We got there by halting Russian trucks — *stop, take me*; three miles, six miles, twenty miles, whatever. If we have to walk, we walked. We walked through forests because it was waches (ph, sp?). In some places you couldn't pass through without a passport; *Where're you going? Who are you?* It's a very uncomfortable time when one country takes over the other one; they don't trust anybody. There could be espionage; could be anything. The fact is that we went through, we walked; however we smuggled on through, we arrived in Regensburg. In Regensburg was organization — they were helping survivors — already established. They give us temporary … we always in one place. But food was available; clothes were available. It was an organization. You go in, you can find a dress; dress yourself — it's old, new, whatever; just something to cover your body. And so we had, like they have here, those stamps — we have those kinds of stamps; you go and get cheese, you get milk, you get whatever. And we lived a month or two, and then we got a little apartment for us; for me and my husband. My mother was not with me yet. The two of us went because we didn't know; we couldn't drag an older person with us. Wherever we would go, finally, if we have a destination, we stay; then I go pick up my mother. I did so; after three months being in Regensburg, I went back. I already had enough money to travel like a human being, by train; went back to Sosnowiec, picked up my mother, and brought her to Regensburg. We stayed; we all applied for the United States because my husband had an uncle in New York. We were hoping, through him, our visa would come a lot faster; but sounds like he was too old to sponsor three people. So we had to wait for the Federation, UJA, whatever you call it now, for them to help us in that respect, which they absolutely did; lasts quite some time. In the meantime since we were in Regensburg and waiting, we had to do something. We opened a business, then begin it, we walked out; different things. I was doing a lot of sewing, a lot of everything; trying to make dollars and cents. My husband was trying to buy whatever he possibly could. We had good connections; we had languages in that respect. We went to old factories, bought old surpluses, whatever was not sellable or was not; and brought into the city.

24:52 Then we got the opportunity from the city to get the stamps; when you need clothes, you need stamps; you need shoes, you need stamps. There was no such a thing in those years you can buy direct for money. Everything in the city is assigned to you. We got the opportunity; we ran the store — we did that type of …. My husband was pretty capable, and I had the languages. I didn't worry about whether write, read, or whatever. It was not like some survivors at that time, they couldn't help themselves as far as — not that I was so knowledgeable, but I was good enough to do all those things. Through this, we had a store; we made good money; we

were pretty good off in no time. We had everything a human being expects, and my son was born — in Regensburg. Of course, in 1950 we gave everything — I had a partner to that business. We took in also a Jewish man, a German from our state, from Hanover. He was from Hanover, she was from Prague — the wife. We took them in as partners, so we left them the business. We walked out with just what money we had; we moved to Kansas City. We were assigned to Kansas City according to the visa; we didn't pick Kansas City; we didn't know what Kansas City is. We were actually going to New York, but they didn't give us the privilege of going to New York because they said a lot of people were settling in those years in New York; like it's overdoing. So they sent us to Kansas City. A very nice lady from the UJA was waiting for us and picked us up in a car.

26:51 We were people already — back to life. Somehow nothing is forever; not the good, not the bad. We have a G-d Almighty that always watches us. It's not true some people feel like, why G-d let this happen? If it's really such an injustice, sometimes even a good father spanks their child. If you don't live the right way, you have obligations to live what your religion tells you; and you go against, you losing those opportunities. Somehow, the same thing what's happening now. If we don't watch out, and we don't look — 'cause we're all equal, we don't worry about one is black and one is blue; one has more money, one has less money. We should all be equal because we're all G-d's children. I raised my children this way, and I hope they will continue to be what they are now; and there be some kind of benefit to the war. Because they're good children; and they believe what I believe. Prejudice is not going to bring us no place — whether it's Jewish or it's another religion, or whatever it is. If we're not going to teach the children, bringing them to a point to understand; don't think a Jew has horns; or don't think a Black is dirty and filthy. You give him the opportunity, he can wash himself as well as you can do. He can be as good as anybody else. You don't have to be pure white to be the best person; you can be anything and be a good person. Just think of what the world — why are you here? Why, we're all G-d's children; we're all here for a purpose. So let's think about it; and let's do the right thing. That's what I can tell you about my life.

Interviewer: Do you still have contact with the people who hid you?

29:11 I had contact until two years ago; he passed away. The wife is still alive. I never had contact with the farmer [Note: just the friend]. I would send him [Note: the friend] money from Germany when I lived in Germany. I would send him money from the United States. Whoever went to visit Poland, I sent money with them. My cousin from Canada went, I sent with him. He sent me beautiful pictures of him, his wife, and children; and he wrote me letters. We were in contact constantly, constantly. In the beginning it was difficult to send money. So I sent packages from

Chicago, from Pekao, every time they had …; for Christmas, half a dozen packages that were shinkunders (ph sp?) and clothes. I was buying those coupons they were selling for a suit; three yards of coupons, Pekao; so and so much money. I always sent three or four coupons. He sold them and made some money. Whatever was available; every connection I had to send them something, I sent. One time a nephew of ours was there to visit him, and he said [Note: something in Polish or German]. I called him, I says: *Monique (ph, sp?)I want you to leave him the money. That's the reason I send it.* He left it; he said to him: [Note: something in Polish or German]. Of course, he was the angel of life; let's face it. It could be both ways. G-d sent him; or he was so righteous to achieve something like this. This is a good question because he has it, I know; you have to be rewarded for something like this.

31:42 What else can I tell you? Because there is a back story; there is a front story; and it was going on. I remember a story; we were girls, and we had typhus start in the city. And they picked up a number of girls; we were eight, nine girls. Most of the time they want the kids that were more educated, understand, and they can read; and they can go through a certain alphabetical piece to find out what to do in a case like whatever …. And we were given an armband — the star, the Jewish star — we had a Red Cross on top. And we were able to go to those sick people and help them because they were afraid to go. That would kill them; they were afraid. Typhus is such a disease, that they would catch it. So they assigned us to catch this. There were nine girls; from those nine girls, I am the only one alive. Every week somebody else was killed; just taken out and killed for some reason or another.

Interviewer: What about when you were living underground?

33:23 There is no — no, actually it's no way that a human being can even have the feeling or understand unless … My kids don't even understand. If I tell them how sick I was, and when I had czerwonka [Note: dysentery] … [Note: something in German or Polish]. For that reason very few people survived with medication; and I had none. And you are supposed to drink water for this; everything is supposed to be boiled, cooked, cleansed. It's very, very important. We have no cleanser, we have no bath; we have no hot water. I had no tea. I had to drink the water from that vale, from the outside. And the bread — sometimes she brought down — was molded inside. She didn't give us the bread which she baked today or yesterday. What was left through the week, she put another batch of bread, so she give us the old one. That bread I had to eat; and my time was six weeks, I had czerwonka. My son asked me one time: *What is czerwonka?* I said: *It's red.* I don't want to tell him.

Interviewer: Did you need to be quiet during the day?

34:54 Oh yes, oh yes; there was no conversations, no nothing. That Jusik — the one looking after us — he brought us, every once in a while, a paper. Of course the papers didn't give us that much, but at least we had something to read. And I was the one crocheting and sewing for the people — for the farmer. She brought me materials from the city, and I cut… Matter of fact I had a couple of nightgowns, beautiful nightgowns, I took it with me. And she liked it; but she was a tall woman, and I was a little short girl. So she wanted me to make community dresses. She had a little girl, three years old; so I cut them through, and make from them little ribbons around — by hand, by hand. Matter of fact, we had a light; a three — if you ever talk to your father he'd understand what I'm saying — they had those little lights, a number three, with kerosene inside. A little thing sticks out, the wick; and this couldn't stay lighted because there was no air. This was covered; we seven people had no air. The light went out. Sometimes I was sewing, and in the middle of everything, the light is out. You don't open the window because there's no windows. You don't open the opening because you're afraid. As long as we can talk about it; we alive, we have people. We can tell the story — what my father could tell; what my mother could tell; what my brothers …. They're not around to even hear that story; now I'm left by myself.

Interviewer: What about your father? What happened to him?

37:08 He went to Treblinka; in 1943. I had a friend; she was on the same train. That's the reason I know. The 6th of January, '43, the train went to the chimney. My father didn't see me from the day he left. [crying]

Interviewer: But you took care of your mother. And she came with you to Kansas?

37:53 She came to Kansas City; she died here — 25 years ago. She was a sick woman. We took care of her; we did the best we could. She was a beautiful person, so talented. She could do everything; it's unbelievable, unbelievable. She got herself a little house in Kansas City. And she put in her own little …. An old, sick lady; she put all the screens in the windows by herself. She was going around buying little hooks and all those things; make jewelry. And went to the dime store and sold the jewelry. She could do anything; she could sew, she could …. There was nothing she couldn't do; she was a very talented person. But she suffered; she had heart trouble since she come out from the bunker. We were young — younger people …. Another thing, what killed her was when she lost that second son; they killed him after the liberation. After this, she was totally — almost gone. It could happen — a car accident; it could happen — a sickness. But if someone's going to kill you after something like this; and for no reason. They didn't want anything from him; just, we don't want you — that's all. All the stories; people give you all those testimonial things. But there is really no way anybody can remember; maybe to them,

this is important. But there's so many more important things. And it's important; most important is to tell the world: *Watch out.* We all should feel the same way. We should support education. We should support all those organizations in what they're doing because that's the only survival. People are stupid, uneducated, or don't know 'why'; and somebody comes in like Hitler: *I will give you food; I will give you everything* — screams, yells. And everybody says: *OK; Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler;* not knowing what are the consequences.

41:38 It's a different story. There's quite a few survivors from bunkers, from somewhere in the forests in a place like this. But the bunker story was really critical, very critical. Life was so — the camps were uncomfortable, we know this; and there was nothing like the danger and everything else. But not to have the opportunity even to look out and see — is it sunny? Is it raining? When is a holiday? We didn't know anything. My mother had a book with her, a religious book; and we were trying to establish — when is a holiday. We tried to see — is it stars; is it moon; is it what?