

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Tania Rozmaryn conducted by Gail Schwartz on February 23, 1997 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is tape number one, side a.

What is your full name?

Tania Rozmaryn.

And what is the name you were born with? Marcus, Tania Marcus.

And where were you born?

I was born in Poland in a little town called Smorgon. Actually, I was born in Vilna, but my parents lived in Smorgon, so that's where I lived.

And when were you born?

June 16, 1928.

How far is Smorgon from Vilna?

I would say 40 miles approximately. I really wouldn't know exactly because, as a child, I didn't know how to measure distance.

Let's talk about the members of your family. Who made up your immediate family?

My father, Yaakov Marcus; my mother, Cyla Marcus, who, God bless her, is still alive, she is in the Hebrew Home; and my older sister, Rivka; myself; and my younger brother, Nathan.

And how long had your family been in that area? For many generations? How far back did they go?

Yes, they had lived there for many generations. I think there was an interruption during World War I. They went to Russia. But then they came back, and they had rebuilt their homes.

Did you have a lot of extended family in the general area?

Yes. Would you like me to be specific?

Absolutely.

Yes. In Smorgon, I had two aunts and uncles, my father's two sisters. The older one was Fruma, the younger one was Manya. She was married to Mayor Goldberg, and they had three daughters-- Bella, Sarah, and Esther.

In Vilna, we had the rest of our family. There was my mother's sister, Pola Fil, and Benjamin, and they had four children-- Ida, Mira, Richa, and Dovidl. We also had relatives in Vilna on my grandfather's side, two sisters. And they are extended family. So most of our family lived in Vilna, and they all perished in Ponar. There were over 80 people.

What kind of business did your father have?

Actually, my father had two kinds of businesses. One business was a hardware store, where he used to sell-- he was with two partners, with Mayor Goldberg, his brother-in-law, and a friend, Motel Majerski who both perished. He had a hardware. And he was selling gear, farming equipment, to the farmers in the area, because Smorgon was a small town surrounded by farmers. And he did very well.

He also had another business, which was a-- a place where the farmers used to bring their flax, which, of course, is made into linen. And that was a very large place with several hundred people working there, cleaning the flax, sorting them, and then pressing. And there was, I remember, in the back of the plant was a rail coming from the railroad station. And freight cars were there, and they would fill them up and ship the flax abroad.

Did your mother work?

No, my mother did not work. We had a big, beautiful house. It's still standing there. The Russians took it over. And my mother was busy with her children and charity work. And she had a housekeeper and life was very good before the war.

How long did you stay in Vilna before you moved? You said you were born in Vilna, and then-- but you grew up in Smorgon. How long did you stay in Vilna before you moved to Smorgon? You.

Yes, no, actually, we lived all the time in Smorgon. But my mother just went to Vilna to give birth to me in a proper hospital. That's how-- I was just born there, and then back to Smorgon.

You were talking about your home there, which you said was a lovely home. What kind of a neighborhood was it in? Was it in a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

Yes, the neighborhood was really mixed. Across the street from us was the house of my uncle and aunt, my father's partner. But then I remember, to the left, it was a non-Jewish family who we got along very well with them until when the war broke out, and we left. And when we came back, they had cleaned out our house and wouldn't give us anything back. So it was a mixed neighborhood, yes.

But this was a neighborhood of upper-middle class or upper class?

Yes, upper-- upper-middle class, I would say. But actually, in this small town, there was no such a thing as a middle class or upper-middle class. You had a very large big, beautiful house. And next to it, there was a hovel or a-- a small house, where poor people lived with the wooden floors and no plumbing.

So the city was not divided specifically Jewish and non-Jewish neighborhoods, or wealthy or less wealthy. It was sort of the whole town was mixed. People lived just wherever they happened to be comfortable.

So you lived right in the center of town?

Yes, in the center of town.

How religious was your family?

Well, interesting-- very traditional. Because I know, of course, Shabbat and Kashrut was always observed. My father would learn when he had the chance. But he never wore a yarmulke except mealtime.

And I remember after we had our meals and we said the prayer, he would take off his yarmulke and put it aside. Nobody at that point-- especially in Lithuania. And we considered ourselves more of Lithuanians than Polish, because Smorgon and Vilna were occupied by Poland since World War I. And basically, it was going from Lithuania to White Russia to Poland.

So it was really-- it was considered the culture. And the Jewish way of life was in Lithuania-- very Zionistic, Jewish-oriented, a private Jewish school, which was called Tarbut. But we did not have Hasidim in town, or people that we call now Hasidim, with a beard and payots or shtreimel. There weren't any at all.

Did you have any religious training as a young girl?

The only religious training in school was that we had one hour of Bible. Most of the subjects were taught in Hebrew,

even secular subjects. But no specific religious training, except what we absorbed in the house.

So the school that you went to was a Jewish school. It was not a public school.

No, it was a private Jewish school called a Tarbut. And these type of schools were very prevalent all over Lithuania. And my father was very instrumental of building that burgeoning school.

Your family was very Zionistic?

Very much. My father was very, very dedicated to Zionists. I remember people would come to our home, and there were all kinds of meetings about Palestine.

And he wanted very much, before the war, to emigrate to Palestine. But at that time, you needed a special-- a special-- they called it a certificate. But it was probably some kind of a visa or special permit, which he couldn't get unless the authorities in Israel would grant it. And it never came.

Did you have any other interests as a child? Music or reading? Anything that you liked to do outside of school?

Oh, well, I was in the fourth grade when the war broke out in 1939. So it was just that-- I used to. I would read. And as far as musicals, my father had a mandolin, I remember. And he would play for us, especially, every time, the Jewish national anthem.

And every summer, we used to go on vacation to a little village near the Viliya. That was a river that passed through not far from us. And it was rather very, very pleasant. Most of the Jews who could afford would go there in the summer. And there was a lot of swimming and boating and volleyball playing and lots of walks.

My father would take me-- even though I remember-- as a little kid, he would take me to the forest. We used to go to gather wild strawberries or rare hazelnuts. And he would talk to me a lot. He used to tell me stories that, at this point I realize-- and I said to myself, I was a little girl. And those are really philosophical questions and ideas. He probably had a premonition that he wouldn't be with me too long and conducted very serious and mature discussions with me.

What kind of topics did he talk about?

Well, he would talk about Israel and Jewish history and Jewish legacy and family relations and relatives. And it was rather-- where I considered myself at that time mature, that he would share with me all kinds. But mostly, he always, when he came from his business, no matter how tired he was, he would always sit down with my sister and myself and ask us what we learned. Take us on his knee, what we learned, and review it with us.

And when he had time, he would take us to the-- to the stadium where they used to play soccer. But during the week, when they didn't, then he would teach us how to ride a bicycle or just-- in the wintertime, he did beautiful things for us.

First of all, we were going skiing and skating. And he bought me a pair of skates and skis, so we went cross-country skiing. And then since he knew many farmers, he would ask the farmers to come with a sleigh and horses during the wintertime. And we would all get into the sleigh and with the bells jingling, and we would go all over through the villages around town. It was just great, yes.

How would you describe yourself at that time? Were you a very quiet child? Or more outgoing?

Yeah, I was very quiet and very shy. And I think that it did haunt me. I did suffer, for many, many years, for an insecurity and inferiority complex.

And I always thought-- my mother was ready to give her life for me-- for me, for my sister, for every-- she was a wonderful, wonderful mother as far as helping us with knowledge, with homework, and to make sure we are dressed and proper manners. But never, ever would she hug us or kiss us.

And I feel now, when I come to visit her and I kiss her and I hug her and she kisses me back, I feel that she lets go. But I feel she was not the only one. I think that at that time, the Jewish parents felt that praise of showing love to children would spoil them. And they wanted the children to grow up wholesome.

But what they didn't realize, what we know now, that by not doing so, by keeping a distance, the children grew up very insecure. But she was the most wonderful, selfless person in the world that I knew, even in comparison to other mothers. [CHUCKLES]

You said that you did have some friends who were not Jewish in the neighborhood? Is that true? Did you play with any children? I'm talking about before the war, of course.

Yes, of course. Actually, not friends, they were neighbors. But they always let us know that we were Jews. Like, for instance, in the summer, when we went down-- our house was on a corner on the top of a hill. And down the hill, a block down, was a little brook, a river. And we liked to go swimming there in the summertime in-between going away to the big river for our summer vacation.

So the non-Jewish kids, they always came. And they were throwing mud at us and chased us out of the water, and we would run. In the wintertime, the brook would freeze over, and we tried to go skating there. And they did the same thing. They would come and cause us trouble.

And even in the house, I remember we had a metal roof. And every time they would pass by, they would throw rocks. And of course, the sound was-- was horrific. Because when the rock hitting the metal, it was like-- like, amplified terribly. And it was very frightened. We've never stayed home alone at night. We were always afraid to be there alone.

When these type of things happened, did you talk it over with your parents or your sister? How did you handle this as a child?

Oh, we talked about it. But it wasn't a surprise, because it was known. This is what the shkotzim used to do to the Jewish children. So we knew that there is nothing our parents could have done about it, because the kids would pass by and throw rocks on the roof. So there was nothing a Jew could do about it.

What was the first big change that you noticed in your life? Of course, you were young. Was it September 1939 when the Russians came in?

Yes, exactly. Well, the first change came in September in 1939 when Germany divided Eastern Poland, and our-- our town became under the occupation of the Soviet Union. Actually, the war broke out on Sunday. And somebody had told my father, because what the-- what-- no, no, I am-- no, I'm jumping ahead-- that happened in June 22, 1941, before the Germans occupied that.

But when the Russians came, they took over the town, and they took away my father's businesses. And they made my father go to work in the forest. And I remember he used to come home with calluses on his hands.

And immediately, they converted our school, that was the private Tarbut school, into a Russian public school. And they opened a non-kosher coffee shop there, which was shocking to me, even though we weren't so-- we weren't so "very religious," quote, unquote, as you would perceive now. But the house was kosher and holidays were observed without question.

And of course, the preparation for Passover and other holidays was tremendous. And there it was, a non-kosher coffee shop and the school. And we felt it. We still had food and clothes to wear, but everything else was taken away.

My father and my grandfather had cars which was taken away. My grandfather was the first one, that he bought-- I think it must have been in '36 or '37-- a truck. It was a shining blue Chevrolet. And nobody knew how to drive. And there wasn't even a gasoline station.

So he brought a chauffeur with his wife from Germany. Rex was his name. He gave him a house. And his job was to take care of that truck. And he was the chauffeur.

And I remember my experience the first time, when he took me and my mother to Vilna to visit our relatives. I was in total shock to be in that car. So they, of course, they took everything. The Russians took everything away from us.

How did your father explain this to you? You're 11 years old now. How did he-- what did he say to you when these terrible things began to happen?

Actually, I really do not recall. The love, of course, at home was the same, and we had food. But I remember seeing my father very down, sometimes depressed. But there were no-- I don't recall any discussions about the situation, none whatsoever.

What kind of work was he forced to do?

To go to the nearby forests with other people that were wealthy and to chop down trees. And to sort them up into certain logs or whatever it was required. He would come home on his bicycle, very tired, exhausted, and depressed.

And what kind of contact did you have with your relatives in Vilna then?

With the relatives in Vilna, very little contact. We didn't go there. When somebody used to come to visit, they would usually bring us regards from the other relatives. Otherwise, there was really not much of a contact.

Did you talk about the changes with your other Jewish friends?

I really don't recall. We sort of took the changes for granted. Because the Russians really did not torture us. As a matter of fact, because we had a big and beautiful house, the Russian Army had confiscated one of the rooms for a Russian lieutenant. He was a tank commander. And that was before they started the war with Finland.

And he was in our-- he was in our house. His name was [? Kutchov. ?] And he was a very, very nice man. He would sit with my parents and talk a lot. And he would bring us food from the army.

And I recall, even in the morning, sometimes he would wake us up to go to school. He was really very nice. And we felt that, in a way, it was safer, because we did not suffer from the non-Jewish boys and girls' anti-Semitic outbreaks.

So seeing people in Red Army uniforms was not frightening for you?

No, not at all. As a matter of fact, they came to our school, and they organized-- they organized the younger people into the Pioneers. This was the organization for the young Communist Party. And the older ones in Komsomol.

And they didn't accept me, because I was a daughter of a bourgeois. And I was very upset. I was very jealous that all my friends were walking around in navy skirts, white blouses, and red scarfs and go to meetings and go to parades. And I was very jealous.

And then my father found a relative who they used to be very poor. And of course, they were acceptable. So she became a leader in the Komsomols. I remember, he talked to her, and she persuaded somebody to take me into the Pioneers. And I was in seventh heaven at that time.

So what kind of activities did you then do with them?

Well, it was interesting. We used to have meetings. And of course, on special days, there were parades. They brainwashed us so immensely that we felt all of a sudden that we were proud of the Communist regime. We used to sing our praises to Stalin. And we were very happy to do that. And of course, at home, we never-- my parents never

discussed it with us.

I imagine now, thinking back, they probably did not want to contradict, because there was nothing that could have been done. And they saw that we were happy, my sister and I, having been liberated from the anti-Semitic outbreak. So they just let it go, I suppose.

So you did not experience any anti-Semitism in this Communist youth movement?

Oh, no, no, no. In the Communist youth movement, on the contrary, everybody considered each other a brother and a loving sister.

What languages did you speak at that time?

The basic language at home was Yiddish. However, in the first year-- my father spoke Hebrew at home. Like I mentioned, he was a very dedicated Zionist. When the time of the [NON-ENGLISH] came, he was always very, very active.

And so in school, in the Tarbut school, we were required to speak Hebrew, even outside in the street. And we were afraid if a teacher would catch us speak any other language, we would have been penalized.

So at that time, I spoke Yiddish, and I spoke Hebrew. And interesting, even today-- I am a teacher now, of course, I've been for so many years-- and people think, even Israelis, they think that I was born and lived in Israel. Because even though my vocabulary was maybe 50 or 80 words, but my accent was absolutely typical of an Israeli, a sabra, which it remained with me.

So we spoke Hebrew with the limited vocabulary, Yiddish, and Russian. In the two years that the Russians were in our town, we only spoke, in school, Russian. At home, still Yiddish. But Russian was spoken all over the place.

Did you know Polish?

Interesting, we were under the Polish regime. However, we only learned Polish one hour a week. And we had a Polish teacher. And only in the municipal offices, if one had to go, had to speak Polish. But for me, Polish was a foreign language.

Now I speak Polish well, because two of my sister-in-laws are from Poland, and they always spoke Polish, and I learned Polish from them. [CHUCKLES] But at that time, no, I couldn't speak Polish at all. No.

Did you have a favorite holiday? Favorite religious holiday?

Well, the most favorite religious holiday was Passover. I remember, as it was a little town when my mother started preparing. First of all, it was-- the preparations started in the winter. In the beginning of the winter, my mother started stuffing geese to have [them fat ?] for Passover.

So on Hanukkah time, the geese were slaughtered. And in the house, they were plucking them and koshering them, and then rendering the fat for Passover. And that was a special-- a special occasion.

And then, like, six weeks before Passover, my mother would buy tons of raisins and start to make wine. Because everything was so difficult, when I think of it. Like, in the fall, everything had to be bought, like, all kinds of vegetables and fruit into the-- put into the cellar for the winter. And then my mother would put up cabbage, sauerkraut, and pickled pickles for the winter.

And in the fall, she would-- we had a big garden with strawberries, and then and she would make all kinds of jams from strawberries and raspberries. And everything went to the cellar in big, big jugs in preparation for the winter.

And then, of course, for every Thursday, my mother would send me to the shochet, my sister and I, with the chicken or a goose to slaughter for Shabbat. And then, of course, it was brought home, and it was plucked, and it was-- it was cut opened and koshered. And every little thing was so complicated.

The only things that my parents used to buy was, of course, butter, eggs, for everyday use. Otherwise, everything was bought in bulks-- cheeses, [? heads?], salamis. Lots and lots of long salamis were hanging in the-- in the cellar. And so Passover was my most favorite holiday because, of course, the cleaning and the house and everything.

But then we didn't have, at that time, even the wealthy people, special Passover dishes. Everything was being koshered. And I remember the big things my mother would-- had a very big pot and a special-- special oven outside, where she would boil the pots and everything.

But with the silverware, we used to go, there was a public bath. And in the back of that bath, they had a big fire, and they had a big-- a big cauldron, I would say, with boiling water and rocks. And everybody would bring their silverware or their dishes to kosher.

But we had-- everything was meat. There was no dairy whatsoever for Passover. On the fingers of one hand, you could count the dishes that people would prepare.

But then before Passover, my mother-- we would get dressed and had new patent leather shoes and white socks and new dresses. And all the girls in the neighborhood, we used to go to the rabbi's house to wish him a happy Passover. And everyone had a little dish. And the rabbi would give us charosets that he prepared for the whole town. And that was just fantastic, yes.

Did this continue after the Russians came into town? There were no restrictions?

No, no, no, all this stopped. Everybody would make Pesach as best as they could in their own home and nothing was done on the outside. We still had the Seder, and my grandparents lived in the same town-- my Zayde Berel and Bubbeh Chaya Basya. And they used to come.

And then my grandfather used to sing nicely, and non-Jews would gather around the windows to listen to my grandfather sing all the songs for Passover. Which I carried on and transferred it to my children. We sing the same melodies at our Pesach Seder.

Well, now it's, your father's working, and you and your sister are members of the Communist Youth group. And you're going to a regular school now, you said. So were there any other changes, restrictions, in your life at that point after September '39?

Really no restrictions whatsoever, except, of course, there were less material things in the house. Which it really did not diminish from the enthusiasm, because we felt that to be a member of the Communist party, it's an honor, and we have to do without many things. And we just accepted it.

And then the next change?

Yes, the next change was the 22nd of June, 1941.

Well, let's talk a little bit about-- so your father continued to work in the forest all the way through the next year, year and a half, and life went on. OK, and now you said--

And then the change was my grandmother was very sick in 1940. And she was taken to Vilna, because her other daughter, my mother's sister, Pola, was there, an older relative. But she had passed away. And my grandfather came back. And he had a big house. He didn't stay with the children. He was always a very successful businessman.

And he was tremendous. When we grew up, I must-- I must mention this. His name was Berel Danishevski. And he had

a big business. He had a business of-- in those days, they didn't have the plastic tubes for sausages or for salami.

So he was contracted from the slaughterhouse that everything-- whatever was slaughtered there, he had people that they would take over and clean all their intestines of their animals, and then salt it or blow it and dry it. But it was so much that he exported it to Germany. And this is actually why he bought the truck.

And many times, he was away on business. And when he was away on business, one of us was asked to stay with my-- sleep with my grandmother. And I remember, I was always petrified, because their house was a big, beautiful, comfortable house, but it was near a Jewish cemetery. And I was always petrified. I couldn't sleep there, even though my grandmother would close the shutters. I was very frightened.

But whenever he came, he always brought us all kinds of goodies and toys. And he would do it in an interesting way. Like, when we were home, all of a sudden we would hear a violin outside. And we would look out, oh, there is zayde, Zayde Berel, playing the violin. He brought us violin and all kinds of special toys.

Let's talk a little bit about just some more changes before the summer of '41. You had to go to regular school. Did you experience any anti-Semitism from any of the teachers or any of the other children in your school?

No, we didn't. Actually, they were now-- there were no non-Jewish students. What they did was they took this Tarbut school which was going up to the eighth grade, and they converted it as it was to a Russian school. So essentially the same students were there. There were no outsiders.

And the teachers were-- there were other teachers. Most of them Jewish, who were communists. And they were our teachers, of course. And I remember, we had a teacher, [? Zukerman, ?] in algebra and in Russian language. Interestingly enough, we were-- we had one hour a week, we had a German teacher, and we had to learn German. Then she became an interpreter, of course, when the Nazis came.

And there was one other thing that was very, very nice there. This Dr. [? Zukerman, ?] his wife had training in drama and in music. And she had organized and directed many plays and skits with us, and the choir. And it was just wonderful. I loved singing in the choir. I loved to participate in the plays and in the skits.

Were there any restrictions on Jewish history or the Hebrew language at that point?

Well, Hebrew language, it was finished. Jewish history and Hebrew language was finished. And they started teaching us Yiddish more. And even the plays and the skits were all in Yiddish. Because at that time in the Soviet Union, they were pushing their idea of Birobidzhan. And therefore, actually what they did was that our school was converted to a Yiddish school more than it was a public school.

This is tape one, side b. And you were talking about the musical shows that you took part in in school. Anything else you wanted to say? You also had said that you couldn't study Hebrew anymore and Bible.

We couldn't study Hebrew or Bible or Zionism, for that matter. It was all Yiddish or Russian.

Did that upset you, those restrictions?

I don't think it did, because I loved the school so much. I loved, especially, the teacher that would direct and conduct all the plays. And I was so happy, because she had a concertina. And many times, she would let me look at it and try it, and even let me carry it to her house, which was a tremendous honor. [CHUCKLES]

No, I don't think so. It's sort of-- I don't know. I look at children at this point, at my age at their time, and they are so sophisticated, and they're so knowledgeable. And I think of myself of being so naive or stupid.

But I think it's because we were not exposed to all the knowledge and bombarded with all media that the children have now, that it-- I guess every child my age was that gullible, naive, and perhaps stupid in comparison to children this age



in our time.

Now, you're 13 years old. And it is June 1941.

June 1941, it was a Sunday. And I remember that on a day before, on Saturday and a Friday, my mother-- somebody came and told my father that we are on the list to being transported to Siberia, because my father was a wealthy man. And that's what they did, the rations. Little by little, they cleared out the town of the bourgeois, of the rich people, the business people, and they would ship them with their families to Siberia.

So somebody told my father. And they said, be prepared because this was-- on Sunday morning, they are going to take you to the train. And there are freight cars there, and they'll ship you to Siberia with the family.

So my mother prepared, first of all, whatever valuable things we had-- gold pieces and jewelry. And she sewed it into the lining of our coats. And then she prepared a knapsack for everybody. She dried bread into, like, [INAUDIBLE]. And whatever could be prepared to take along as food, she had it all prepared in bags for each and every one, according to age, how much we could carry in our bags. So when the Russians will come Sunday morning to take us to the train and ship us to Siberia, we'd be prepared.

But that never happened. Because 4 o'clock in the morning, the Germans started shooting and bombarding our town. And that was the end of the Russian regime.

Had you, before that, heard of a man named Hitler, as a young girl?

We did hear between '39 and '41. On the radio, we had a radio in our house. And sometimes my parents would sit and listen to the speeches of Hitler. And they would tell us that this is a dictator in Germany. But it never occurred to us that it might concern us, me, or my family. We really lived in such seclusion at that time, that all we were concerned was the daily existence in our town and our family.

Your parents understood German?

They understood German. I know that my parents were-- they would discuss politics a lot. I even remember that at one point when I was there-- I don't remember what time, but historically, I could pinpoint it, because my father read the Jewish newspaper every day. And then he was discussing politics with my mother. And his friends would come.

And at one point, I remember we were on vacation, and he read-- he read the paper. And he was talking about Franco and Addis Ababa. And I-- I just-- the names sounded so peculiar to me that I-- I knew they were somewhere in the world.

But to give you a perception of the timidity and naivete, that when somebody would describe a place, that as-- actually, if you say now to go to Mars or go to Venus, it's credible. But in those days, when somebody would say, so where are you going? Where do you think I'm going, to Honolulu? Honolulu was farther than any galaxy that we could perceive at this point. We didn't even know that a place like Honolulu existed, because it was sort of a paradox-- oh, you're going to Honolulu.

Although, I must recall, when I was in school when the Russians came, they did teach us a great deal of geography. And I loved geography and history. I loved it very much. And I remember that at one point I had to give, as a test, an oral test, a comparison between the Japanese islands and the British Isles. I don't know how well I did, but I had to do it. [CHUCKLES]

So here it came. And the Germans came, and they started bombarding the town. And my father immediately said, let's run. Let's run towards the Russian border. Maybe we'll make it into Russia. And this is where we ran to the East.

And my father still had his bicycle. He put most of the things on the bicycle. And we had our knapsacks ready for being shipped to Siberia. So we took it all with us, and we walked. And thousands of people were on the roads.

When you say we, who are you including?

My father, my mother, my sister, my brother, and myself. And everybody was going towards East, hoping that we could make it into Russia, to the Soviet Union.

And as we were walking, and the roads were so filled with people, every now and then, a German plane would come down very low over the people and machine gun. And when we saw the planes coming, we would run into the high-- to the fields. The wheat was already quite tall. And we would run in and hide until the plane passed. And then we would come out again. And we marched maybe 15 miles to that little town, Lebedev.

What was it like for you to leave your house?

It was very difficult. We looked around. We left the house. But we knew that there is a purpose, that we have to save our lives. And as a child, it really-- because I never ever really had suffered hunger or loneliness or cold or not having a comfortable room, my own room, or beautiful clothes.

So that it never dawned on me that it could be different. So I felt, well, let's go. We'll have it-- wherever we will go, we'll have it again. But, of course, it wasn't so.

Did you take anything special as a 13-year-old girl? Anything personal?

I think I took a little-- a little book with photos in a scrapbook. Yes, I took that with me. Definitely. Anything else I can't recall. Probably maybe a favorite doll or something. But even that, it's just amazing.

Now going back, before the war, my parents were so wealthy. But I remember having a few dolls, but nothing in particular. And there was one girl in my class that had relatives in the United States. And they had sent her a doll that when you-- putting her down horizontally would close her eyes.

And everybody was so fascinated. And everybody wanted to be friends with her. And when she invited me or other girls to our house to play with that doll, it was a special holiday. It's just amazing how things were and perceptions in those days.

Do you want me to go on now? We're going to-- so we came to Lebedev. And in Lebedev, we had relatives. They were a sister of my grandmother. Her name was Golda. Her husband's name was Reuven. And they were very, very poor.

I remember once when I was younger, my mother took me to visit them. And I just couldn't understand why they didn't have a nice home. And the floor was a wooden floor and no rugs. And he made magazines. And he would sell them in the market. Very pious people. And they had three children-- Moshe Aaron, who was married; Michal, a young man; and Rivka, a young girl.

I remember their names distinctly because I make it a point, whenever it's their Yizkor, the memorial service, I make it a point to mention each and every one of these relatives by name so that I remember their names.

We came to their home, and they were very happy to see us. And they made us so comfortable. But by the time we got there, the German tanks were rambling already on the streets of this little village. And they took over the town in no time.

The following day, we were still there. And then my mother and father were discussing what to do. And they said, look, we are here, strangers with relatives who are poor. They could hardly sustain themselves. And the Germans occupied us anyway. So that makes no difference whether we're here or in our town in Smorgon. Let's go back to Smorgon.

So my parents discuss the matter, and then they decided that it wouldn't be safe for my father to walk with us, to go with us. Because mostly we would go by foot, unless a farmer would pass by with their cart and would take us.

So they decided-- my father, they said, look, it's peaceful here, my father should stay there. And my brother-- who was very, very-- he was born in 1935, so he was six years old-- should stay there. And my mother, my sister, and myself should go back to our town. And my parents made up that when my mother will come home and see what the situation is, she would go back and bring my father and my brother home.

So we started out. My mother, my sister, and I, walking. Just in the opposite directions where the German tanks were coming. They were moving East, and we were going West to Smorgon.

We came back to our town. We walked into the house. And the house was empty. My grandfather was there in our house, because his house was burned down during a bombing raid. And in the meantime, he had remarried. He married my grandmother's sister who had two small children.

And they were there on the floor. There was a table and chairs. And everything was gone. And he said that the next door neighbor, the Christian, took it all. My mother walked in to talk to him. And mercifully, he gave us back a bed with a mattress.

This is the neighbor you're talking about.

This is the neighbor, right. And I think we still found some food in the cellar, but it was-- it was very scarce. But all my mother was concerned is about the situation in town, what was happening. And she looked around. She spoke with friends and with neighbors and relatives. And they said that, so far, the Jews are afraid, but everybody's sitting in their homes.

The Germans have made decrees posted that every Jew should give up their furs and jewels and art and whatever valuables they have. They should bring in to a certain place. If not, they would be-- if it would be found, they would be killed.

So my mother decided that it was no different from what-- from what it was there in Lebedev. And she went back to Lebedev to bring my father and my brother.

Did you and your sister go back with her?

No, my sister and myself stayed with my grandfather and his wife in our house. And then my mother came there to Lebedev, and she found that everything was finished. After we left, they gathered all able-bodied men-- the Germans-- and they took them away. And we never saw our father since.

There was some rumors somebody came, and they were telling us that they tried to-- he tried to escape. And they didn't tell us exactly-- I knew that they knew exactly what happened to him, but they didn't tell us.

But they didn't touch my brother. So my mother took my brother, and she came home. And of course, I remember crying. I remember tearing my hair and my skin. I just could never-- could not imagine that my father was gone. But it was the fact.

And then they started asking all the Jews to come out to work. And it was mostly at that time, in the beginning, to humiliate, because there was really nothing to do except to sweep the streets. So whoever was in town, a rabbi or businessmen or-- Balabatishe people would come out and had to sweep the streets.

And something else, which was very humiliating. They didn't have-- it was a small town, and it wasn't paved. It was still like it was during World War I. And they had the cobblestones. And in between the cobblestones on the side street, there was weed growing. So they would make the people, men and women, sit on the road and, with knives, cut out the weeds from the cracks of their cobblestones.

Then one night, Germans came to the house. And they started knocking at the door. And my mother was petrified. We

had a German shepherd outside. And we had the fruit garden, a vegetable garden, a flower garden, and there was a dog house. And the dog started barking. And they came in. The first thing they did is they shot the dog. And then they started banging.

So we quickly-- somehow, my grandfather managed to hide my mother. And they came into the house, and they looked around. And whatever they found that they-- that was still there that they liked, they just took it, and they walked out. I think there was still a fur coat of my mother that they took, and they walked out. And we were there for several months.

Were you in hiding also when they came in? Or did you see these Germans?

No, we saw that there were two Germans that came in, and they looked around. They didn't pay attention to me. And we was tiny little girls, my sister and I. I look now at a 13-year-old girl-- tall, developed. I looked like an 8-year-old, 9-year-old girl.

What did a German soldier look like to you?

Well, very tall, impressive uniform, blond, strong, but didn't do anything to us. He didn't hit us or anything. Just looked all over to see what he can find to take with him. And that was it.

And then they started-- they announced that everybody has to-- they had fenced off a certain area, which was predominantly Jewish, it was the shul there. There were two shuls there. And most of the Jewish-- the poorest Jews lived around there. They fenced it off, and they created the ghetto.

And all the Jews from the town had to go in. Although, they had another ghetto. North of Smorgon was, after World War I, they tried-- the Jewish people tried to organize a farm community. And they called it the Karka'i. Karka'i in Hebrew is land. And there were maybe 20 or 25 families who lived there. As a matter of fact, I had some friends who used to come to my school from that area in there, from that village.

So they created one little ghetto there for those villagers and another one for the people in Smorgon. So we came to the ghetto with whatever possessions we could carry. And they assigned us in a house, in one room, that were, like, four families to one room. So it was my mother, my sister, my brother, myself, my grandfather, and there were three other families in the same room.

My grandfather was very, very industrious. He knew how to-- he was a survivor. So he decided he could do anything he wanted to-- very, very capable man. He decided to become-- he figured, well, people would have to fix shoes. He decided he knows how to fix shoes. He announced to everybody he's a shoemaker.

And I remember he was sitting there in the corner at a small table and fixing shoes. And people would bring a piece of bread or some vegetables. And this is how he sustained us.

And then they started taking people to work, to work outside the ghetto with permission. And they took my mother and my sister. Every day, they had to go out to work. And what they did was, there was a high school in town. And they converted the high school into a lodging place.

So the German soldiers, when they came-- when they came from the West, pushing towards the Russian front to the East, they would stay there overnight. And they would have food there, and they had the Jewish girls there to wash their clothes and to darn their socks.

And some of them were very nice. They didn't rape the girls or anything. There were boys working there, too, I remember. There was one boy. His name was Kapyl. And he came back, and he didn't understand.

He said, a German soldier came over to him, and he took off-- nobody saw-- he took off his jacket, his uniform, and he put it on him. And he said, listen, Kapul, I know he says the war will be over and we'll lose. And he said, if you will survive, don't take your revenge on the soldiers, just kill the German officers. This is what he told the boy.

And day after day, they went to work there. And then my mother was assigned another job. They had a soup kitchen in their synagogue. And my mother was assigned to cook there. And then people, of course, who were starving, came to the soup kitchen and she-- we didn't have to. At that time, we still had food.

And we still had food, and we still had the jewelry and the golden coins that my mother had sewed in. She was so brave. And we had to wear the yellow stars in front and in the back. She was so brave.

Because my father used to deal with farmers, so she knew some of the farmers in the neighboring villages. So at night-- and there wasn't barbed wire around the ghetto. It was just a wooden fence. So at night, she would cover her yellow stars, and she would take a gold piece of something, and run out, and run to the neighboring villages, and she would exchange it.

Then she would come still in the middle of the night with some flour or even some ham or whatever. At that time, Kashrut was forgotten. With ham or whatever they would give her, she would come back. And so we still, more or less, had food. We still had some things to exchange until 1943. So and then I was sent to work.

Let's back up a little bit. What did you do in the beginning when your mother and sister first went out to work?

I remember I would sit on my bed all day, or go out with friends in the ghetto to talk. But mostly, I had some books that I found in that house. And I would sit and read those books.

It's interesting. I recall, it was worn, heavy anatomy book that I found. And I just sat there, day after day, on my bed, and I would read that book. Because I'd never-- we were never taught anatomy until then, so I was very fascinated by it. And I remember I would sit on the bed and read the book.

What was the sleeping arrangement like? You said there were so many families in this one room.

The sleeping arrangement was my mother, my sister, and I were sleeping in one bed. And then my grandfather and his wife in another. And my brother would curl up on the floor on some kind of a straw mattress.

What were the sanitary facilities like?

It was an outhouse. And there was usually, in those houses, they had a water pump outside. So we used to go outside to the pump and take water for washing or cooking or whatever we'd need it. Taking a shower, of course, was out of the question. We would just wash ourselves in the basin. Sometimes we had a curtain and closed it off so we could wash in privacy.

Had you gotten your period by then?

No, no, not until-- not until I was 16 or 17 years old.

You said you had to wear a star. What was that like for you? What did it mean to you?

Well, everybody wore a star. And since I didn't go out of the ghetto, it sort of-- it bothered me immensely that I was singled out. But still, I did not feel tremendous suffering. I don't know, again, maybe because I was optimistic. I was always optimistic by nature, and strong. Or I was stupid. But because I did not comprehend the immensity of the tragedy at that time.

And it's interesting. Here I am speaking to children who are 11, 12, or high school kids, telling them my story. I do it, of course, on their level. And I say, look at these children's reactions. They understand. They cry with me. They know what I'm talking about.

And I said, when I was their age, I really didn't know what was going on. Maybe because they were exposed to

television and movies and all, so they have-- they have seen these kind of stories and movies. Anyway--

Did you sew on your own star?

Yes. Yes, we knew how. We had to cut out a yellow star and sew it on.

What did you cut it out of?

Oh, we had some cloth, or it was provided. And there was a Judenrat in the ghetto. And the Judenrat were very-- former business people. They're aristocratic-- aristocracy, the rabbi of the town. And my uncle, the one that was my father's partner, he was also in the Judenrat

And but it was interesting. Maybe, in many cases of the Judenrat, they were doing things for themselves first to save their own skin. Not in this Judenrat.

When something came, when the Germans would come and ask for 500 people or 200 people, they would-- at least-- and they would never, ever give a list. They said, because this is what the Bible-- according to the Bible, that when in any kind of a catastrophic situation, when an enemy comes and asks you to give people to be hanged or to be punished, according to Jewish law, you're not allowed to.

You can tell them, if you have to, you go out by yourself and take whoever you want, but we are not going to give you a list. Because the Bible felt that this is a personal matter of destiny and couldn't be helped. But for another Jew, to put somebody-- another Jew on the list, that was absolutely against the Bible, and they never did it.

And then one day, I was called to go to work. And I found myself in a very beautiful house that belonged to a landowner before the war, probably a Polish landowner. And I was brought there. And another boy my age from ghetto, [? Swierski ?] was his name. And there, we came in, and they-- I remember, it smelled so delicious in that house.

And there was a cook, a Polish woman. They took us into the kitchen. And the Polish woman told us that we are going to help her-- that the boy was going to chop wood for the kitchen, and I would help her with the vegetables to peel and cut and wash dishes. And there, I felt comfortable, because it was warm. I don't remember them giving us any food, but this is where we worked.

And then, of course, there was the living room and the bedrooms. And then in the evening, I saw a German officer came in. And he lived there. I had absolutely no comprehension who the man was. He was tall, dark hair, smoked a pipe, had a pleasant face, wore glasses.

And I knew-- when I dusted the house, I noticed a letter on the table. Somehow, I looked at the letter. And it was a letter-- his name was Heinrich [? Funke. ?] I looked at the letter, and I saw it was a letter probably from his wife.

And I looked at the return address, and I remembered it. The name was Heinrich [? Funke, ?] Berlin, SO 36, Dresdener Strasse 18. And I memorized it-- always had a good memory. And he was very nice to me.

And when I looked at-- there were letters and mail and envelopes come-- came-- and I saw that he was a very important official. And only after the war, I realized how important. He was an Obersturmbannführer. Of course, he wore the black uniform of the SS with the swastika and all. And he was always very nice to me. He talked to me very gently.

One day, he called me in. And he says, listen, Tania, I'm going to tell you something. I am over the whole-- the [INAUDIBLE] of all-- he was all of White Russia. You know a Obersturmbannführer. He was a very, very important Nazi.

He said to me, I want to tell you something, all the Jews in this region are going to be killed. However, he said, if you will have a chance, when they'll take people to a labor camp, he said, go, because that might save you. And that's all he said to me. And I remembered. And life went on in ghetto as it was. And I used to go to work there.

Did you go home to go to sleep?

Oh, yes. Yes, I used to walk home. I had a special pass that I could walk the streets. They used to give out-- people that came from-- went from the ghetto to work had a pass. And I came home, and everything was just as usual.

Then one day we got up, and my uncle that was in the Judenrat, Mayor Goldberg-- as a matter of fact, I have a picture of him here, I'll show you later. And he spoke with my mother, and he said, the Nazis, they want us to give them 300 men and women to a labor camp. And they don't want to go and pick. They want us to give a list.

So he told my mother. He said, look, we had no choice. We had to give a list. But what we did, we put our own family members-- each and every member of the Judenrat had to put a member of his family on the list. And this uncle of mine had a daughter. She was, at that time, maybe 20 or 21, Bailey Goldberg. And he put her on the list.

And he also put my grandfather's wife on the list. And my mother, you know, we started discussing and talking, and they said, now, what's going to be? How could she? She has a little girl with her? How could she go? And then I got up, and I said, I'll go in her place.

Apparently, you know what he told me, to go to a labor camp. I said, I'll go in her place. And they hesitated. But then my mother said, Bailey is going, too? My cousin who was already past 20. She said, she'll take care of me.

And I remember, I still had, from before the war, a pair of beautiful red leather boots. I had a shearling coat, gray that was embroidered. And my mother-- it was winter-- she gave it to me, and she gave me food. And she got permission to walk with us to the train station. And she was walking next to me and crying and walking and crying.

But I saw her, that she walked over-- the people that came to take us were not SS. They were called T.O.D. They were the German soldiers in construction that was a-- they had special groups, special brigades for construction. And I saw she was walking next to that-- the officer that was leading us. And I noticed that she pushed something in his hand, then she walked to the station with us.

And we cried and we kissed and we hugged. And they pushed us into freight cars, like the one you have at the Holocaust museum. And my mother left. And I was there with Bailey and another-- there were 300 people.

And the train started out. They closed the cars. Train started out. And we didn't know where we were going. It was dark. There was only a little window for air on top, two windows.

And then the next morning we came to a place. And the cars were opened. And we saw that there were SS people talking with the people from the construction, talking with each other. And they kept us there maybe for two hours, three hours, and we didn't know what was happening.

At the end of the three hours, they closed the cars again, and we proceeded. What we found out later was that the [INAUDIBLE] Commissar of White Russia didn't want us to go anywhere. He told them to pull up to Ponary, where all the people, the Jews from Vilna, were killed in that forest.

And this is when they opened the cars. And this is when the head of the construction company negotiated with the [INAUDIBLE] Commissar that he needs these people badly to build a road from Kovno to Vilna. And this is when he closed the cars, and he took us into Lithuania.

We came to Lithuania in the morning. They opened the cars. We got out. And there were trucks, open trucks. And they told us to get in the trucks.

Let's back up a little bit. Who also went on the train with you besides your cousin?

My cousin, myself, and 300-- 298 other people from Smorgon. Which we knew each other, it was a small town-- men

and women.

So you knew the other people in your car?

Yes, we knew. I knew most of them. Most of them I knew, yes.

What was the atmosphere like in that car?

Well, there was no atmosphere. Everybody was sitting in a corner crying, depressed, not talking, or talking what is going to happen and what will be. But it's interesting. We knew that we are going to work, but nobody ever heard or discussed liquidations, Jews being shot and killed, or concentration camps, or crematoriums. It was absolutely-- it was not known at all.