

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Eva Kristine Belfoure
February 2, 2001
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with Eva Kristine Belfoure, conducted by Gail Schwartz on February 2, 2001 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, D.C. and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

EVA KRISTINE BELFOURE

February 2, 2001

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on February 2nd, 2001 at the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is tape number one, side **A**. What is your whole name, your full name?

Answer: **Eva Kristina bel – Vetulani Belfoure**.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in **Kraków**, in **Poland**.

Q: And when were you born?

A: 1924, October – on October 1, 1924.

Q: And let's talk a little bit first about your family. Who made up the members of your family?

A: Well, I was the only child. On one side I was wanted, on the other one I was unwanted, but I don't wish to get this off. There was this, I was the only child, okay, that's it.

Q: And your parents' names?

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A: Oh, my mother was **Anna**, and **Seftrik**(ph), and my father was **Ada**(ph) **Vetulani**, and that's it.

Q: And they had been in kr – **Kraków** –

A: **Kraków**.

Q: – **Kraków** how long? Had – had they – had it gone back for generations?

A: No. My mother really come from a wer – now it's a suburb, it used to be a village by **Kraków** and my father's family came from **Italy**, I think, during the Renaissance times. And we're really not Italians, we're Etruscans, that's my father said. And they got to **Poland** through northern **Italy** and **Hungary** and then when the salt mines were opened in **Poland**, why they – since the Etruscans were very good engineers and sa – all that kind of s – mining engineers especially, so that's how the **Vetulanis** came to **Poland**.

Q: What kind of work did you father do?

A: Well, he was a kind of lawyer specialist at the University of – of – the – at the [indecipherable] University of **Kraków**. My mother was a very simple woman, and let's see, that's all I know.

Q: All right. And did you have a lot of extended family? Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents?

A: Mm, no, my – both my grandmothers were dead, and I was raised from the age of one to five by a – a sister of my aunt, in the country. And then I had to come back to

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– to the city because my father was afraid I will starting talking like a peasant and he wanted me to go to school in **Kraków**, and I had to come back and I hated being in the city. I mean, the smells of the city and the life and the skies and all that. No animals, no – I mean, I just hated the city, but of course I had to put up with it.

Q: Was your mother alive then?

A: Yeah.

Q: But you – you – you said you were raised in the country?

A: Yeah, because she couldn't keep me.

Q: I see, okay. And –

A: And neither could my father cause he was in – studying in [**indecipherable**]

Q: And so then when you came back you lived with your mother and father?

A: No, I lived with my uncle and his two sons. That's where I learned that boys are many different than anybody else.

Q: Then you came back to the city, and what kind of neighborhood did you live in?

Was it a in – in town neighborhood?

A: Oh, in – it was a **padguzher**(ph) neighborhood, which is a next to the **Kazimierz**.

I'll be – do you know what **Kazimierz** is?

Q: Yes, it's a Jewish section.

A: Yeah. And well, I went to a school, elementary school. And next to the Polish school there was a – a chi – ha – what is it called, **hadder**?

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Q: A **cheder**.

A: **Cheder**, yeah, okay. So then we moved to – then when my mother was established, we moved to another part of town called the **miniki**(ph). And this was just like one house removed from **padguzher**(ph), but nevertheless and I went –

Q: But this is still in **Kraków**?

A: Oh yeah. And I went to an elementary school there, from the third grade on, and stayed there til the seventh grade. And then I went to a gymnasium, and then came the war.

Q: Right. We'll get to that, of course. In the neighborhood where – were there many Jewish neighbors, or was it –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: – mostly a Christian neighborhood?

A: No, it was a very mixed neighborhood. And most – mar – very many of my school friend were Jewish. As probably somebody some – somebody said, oh you – you look like a Jew, or you act like a Jew, because you know, and you forget it, or you might pick up some of the jests or expressions and all that.

Q: Did – did you go – did you play in their homes? Did they come to your house, you go to their house?

A: Well, they always came to my, especially – well, the religious a-a-always come to my house on Sundays, but a – I could not go to the religious homes, so I don't

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treffna(ph) their kitchens, but I went to the house of the non-reli – I mean not the Hasidic ones. I mean, I was – I was welcome, but yet I was more welcome in their non-Hasidic Jewish houses.

Q: Oh, I – jus – just to repeat, because they didn't want you in their kitchens, that you may touch something?

A: Well, I don't know – yeah. I mean, that – I ask my friend, I said, what is this with your parents? She says, well, you know, we have those dietary rules and – a-and I don't know, one time I think I went to get something to drink, and I touched the wrong thing. And the – the girl said, you know what? We'll come to your house.

Q: What – now, were you – at that time were you living with your mother and father?

A: No, I just was living with my mother and her husband.

Q: Oh, she remarried.

A: Yeah.

Q: And who was your stepfather?

A: Oh, **Sylvester Voist**(ph). She – she worked for a library, right. I mean, not – not the library, or a bookstore.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He was a big socialist, and one of those guys who couldn't work very well himself, but he was a – he started a sports club for workers and all kinds of stuff.

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Q: Were you close to him?

A: Yeah.

Q: And your relationship with your mother, was that a close relationship?

A: No. I don't think I was ever a wanted child, I was an accident. She want – no, really, not – not that, she wanted a boy.

Q: Oh.

A: And of course, I did – you know – I don't know what these people have with the ha – wanting to have boys, you know. I understand in **China**, but not here, but not in **Poland**, but then she wanted a boy. And, I wasn't. And after that she didn't want any more children cause she was afraid it's gonna have more girls.

Q: Now, did your mother and stepfather have any more children?

A: No, no, no more.

Q: So then you con – you were the only child in the family.

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: When you were at this school, the elementary school with Jewish students, Jewish and Christian students?

A: Well, there were Jewish and Christians but then the next school was the public Jewish school, so –

Q: So some of the Jewish students went to that and some went to yours?

A: [indecipherable] mm-hm.

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Q: Did you have –

A: The Hasidic children went to the chi –

Q: **Cheder**.

A: **Cheder**, and when children make lots of noise then the Poles would say, you're not in a **hider** – **cheder**, I mean, in a –

Q: Right, right. Did you have any Jewish teachers in your elementary school?

A: I don't think so, because all the Jewish teachers were in the **cheder** school.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: But there were Jewish teachers too, but not many.

Q: Mm-hm. And was the relations good generally fo – in the school with the children from the two different religions?

A: I never knew any difference, so I really, when people talk about anti-Semitism and this and that, I don't – I didn't – I didn't feel any, you know, except once in awhile or – later on the Polish – the teach – teacher of Polish would say, you don't say it's – it's a st – it stands in a – it stands in a newspaper, that's a German expression, which of course you pick it up from if they were talking Yiddish at home, you know, th-they tranpor – transported that into Polish, and that – that's the only thing I remember the teacher says, that he says don't say that because that's not good Polish, and that was the only thing. But I – I didn't see any difference, I mean,

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I played with them and went to school with them and – and I did even a sinful thing because sometimes we would feed them ham sandwiches, and –

Q: How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you outgoing, or were you quiet?

A: Oh, I was very outgoing and very curious. Any [indecipherable] that did – I was always very inquisitive, why is it so, and a – and – and – and how it could – it – how is it that is so and so. And it was in the same school that – I don't know what grade he was, but anyhow, the – there was a time when the ve – Viennese Jews came to **Poland**. And of course they were very rich and brought their stuff and bought houses and all that, and – but the kids had to come to school with us. And a – they didn't sp – when they – the parents always spoke German, but the kids would answer them in Polish. And – but there was this one who, well I think we were just so jealous of her because she was big and – and she had a maid who carried her satchel to school. But of course she was so heavy that she couldn't carry all this stuff. And there were four of us going along the side – in the – **Beniki**(ph) there was this – this close to the **Vistula** river, so there's this part where you walk, but – but then it comes down. Not in a ditch, but it just – and the bank lowers a little bit towards the street. And low – we all – there were four friends of us, and we all wish we'd got together, and so whenever this girl and the maid would come, we wouldn't let her through. And one day, I don't know why, one of us, some newcomer came and she – sh-she joined the

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group and it came so that we pushed this other gir – not the girl, but the maid fell down. And so she went to the school and she complained that we are misbehaving and all that kind of stuff, and then the teacher called us in and then the principal called us in, and then the teacher said – cause she went to the principal and then the principal told the teacher that – what kind of children she's bringing up. Course, that was a class of 40 kids, so she couldn't really watch over everyone. But she says to us, why did you push them, or did you push her? And somebody says, because she is a Jew. And the teacher said, uh-uh, then you would push Holy **Mary** in the ditch too. No, never. How would we? She said, oh yes you would, and you would put **Jesus** in a ditch, too. And we said why? She says, because they were Jews. And of course, nobody ever told us that, you know, you always talk about all this other stuff. And we had a religion class every day, so the Jewish girls went to school, th-they had a free period, and then on – when they had to go to school, I think on Sunday they had their religious school, so for religion they went to their own rabbi. And so there was – I had an afet – uncle who was an atheist, and he all – and this preacher – I mean, this religion teacher always says, any questions? And this uncle of mine always would ask – say ask him about this and that, and there were all kinds of questions, you know, that a priest couldn't really answer to s – little children. And so this day, it – I'm just keep on, you know, telling him [**indecipherable**] when he said, are there any questions, I say, yeah, yeah, he – but he just want – disregarded me, because he

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didn't want any stupid questions again. But I almost knock his glasses off, and I say – so he says okay, now what is it today? And I say, is this true that **J-Jesus** was a Jew? And he say, yeah, and his mother and his apostles and the first Christians were Jews. And then I say, how come we never knew about it, you know. But anyhow, I think that from that moment on, mine attitude toward Jews was changed. You know there was that, before when I – when I looked – course, you couldn't tell who was a Jew if they were not having the **itzkeys**(ph) and all that kind of stuff, and the **mitzkeys**(ph) on top, or **howarts**(ph) with all this stuff, you couldn't tell. But then since that time I keep looking, you know, whether I – cause there was this stupid idea that I recognize **Jesus** in one of them, but I mean – anyhow, that's how my attitude – I never had any non-attitude toward Jews since they were my school friends, okay, and school friends don't talk about religion. You talk about your school things, and your girl things and you don't talk about big things. But since then I – I was more friendly, and how would I say? Yeah, more interested, you know. And so then when I was [**indecipherable**] my best friend was **Sarah Feldman** and they lived on the corner there. By the way in the same house that the pope used to live as a little boy. And that was on the **Vistula** river. W-We live on this corner, on the **Debieniczka**(ph) market, and on the other one, **Sarah Feldman** live in this house, and here's some place lived the present pope as a young boy. And **Sarah** was telling me something about the **Diaspora**, you know. Course, it wasn't

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called **Diaspora** in those days, but she says [indecipherable] Jew, and I just didn't believe her, you know. I always thought there – I thought this old par – Polish Jews were – there were no Jews anyplace else but in **Poland**. Especially then, when I went to school, we are no longer – we are asked never to call them Jews, but Poles of Mosaic confession – or persuasion, pardon me. Because my te – now my teacher said, this word Jews is a word that came from **Russia** and it was an insulting word. And that's where you to – when we – we shouldn't be using it. And – but then, you know how when you says Pole of a Mosaic persuasion, how long that is, your mouth, you – to say she is – and we never said she is Jewish. I don't know, maybe we did. No [indecipherable] and we always says in the Jewish she or he, because in Polish that's possible. And anyhow, that's how I was brought up. You know, even today when I do the translations for the Red Cross and it says of nationality Polish, and religion, I always say Mosaic, because I – I had to – and they always would put – tho-those who correct those things said Jewish, and I said no, so I wrote j – the Polish Red Cross and I said, now what is it? Because when I went to school, in [indecipherable] documents, it said confession, it says either Roman Catholic or Evangelic or whatever, or Mosaic. I mean, there was no such a thing like Jewish. So – and besides I say to this lady in the Red Cross, that's an insult. And [indecipherable] Jews used an insulting words where it's possible, you know. And – because they didn't know any different. But anyhow, so that's how – if you have

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friends – and this also played – how to say, not – I don't know, of course, in – in the gymnasium too, we had girls who were Jewish, and one of my – I was one **Eva**, and the other one al – **Eva Kliseberg**(ph). But then we were in – we used a bad Polish – well we – if we wanted to insult her, if somebody wanted to insult anyone whose name end in **erg**, like **Kliseberg**(ph) or **Oberberg**(ph) or something, well in Polish there, to indicate a young girl, a daughter of somebody, you end – you put the ending **uvna** to indicate that she is an unmarried young girl. Now, but if your name ends in **G**, **[indecipherable]** and you end and you add this **uvna**, that gives you a word for human waste. And so the teacher would say, my goodness gracious, we – you're supposed to say po – in Polish, the – the **gare**(ph) changes to **jer**(ph). And she **[indecipherable]** and all that kind of stuff and how she was a movie star, theater star. She played with **Martha Eggert**(ph) and this Polish singer, forgot his name. But anyhow she was a beautiful girl, I **[indecipherable]** Polish officer who was an invalid, he left his – lost his leg during the war. And I will never see such a beautiful girl, and we were so jealous of her mother because her mother was always assisting her, comes to class, picks her up and all this. And the jealousy is a long-lived sentiment, you know. But anyhow – but, I mean, she survive **Auschwitz** and she lives in **Szczecin**, or **Stettin** and she is in the theater and we correspond and **[indecipherable]**. And one time we had the school ball and the – both of us were chosen queen, as a – were a little crown on the – and she didn't even know. And –

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and – and I said we just look at the school picture and you see you got something on your head. And I don't know how the teacher did it, but they give us two crowns, one for her and one for me. But she was a gorgeous little girl, and she probably still is. And of course the girls – and the only time that I saw her during the war was on the street. And she is working together with the other ones to work on the – to clean the streets of snow. And when I saw her I couldn't believe it. I said, what are you doing here? And she says, go away because they gonna take you, too. So I ran away. That was the only time that I saw her during the war, before she went to **Auschwitz**. But she survived. I couldn't imagine she wouldn't, you know, with her luck and beautiful looks. And she was a good – she could have very easily said, because – that she was not Jewish, cause you can't prove it. But then you could be denounced sometimes and that was even worse.

Q: Were you a very athletic, strong child?

A: Oh no, I was very anemic and I know that because I couldn't get to write – th-the Polish or European one has a little hook, and I never knew whether the hook was on the right, the left. Anyhow, I couldn't make a very nice one, and the teacher always complained, this Madame [**indecipherable**]. And she said, why can't you write a one as beautifully as you write a two? Because the two has those curly-curlyes and I kind of like them, but the one, it was just too sharp for me. And I – and I say, w-will I live to the year 2000? And she said – she looked at me and she says, you? And –

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cause I was small, anemic and thin and she looks at me, says oh child, no, no. None of us will live to the year 2000. But then she says, why? Why do you want to live to the year 2000? I said, well because you always praise my two and you always complain about – I didn't say complain, I don't remember what exactly I said – or because you love – you like my two and you don't like my one. So if – if it was the year 2000, I always get a praise for you. And that's – and I was a thin, and then I – very anemic, had to drink this horrible fish liver oil and all that. You never – your children – I mean, this the ge – your generation didn't have to suffer from this fish liver oil, but we did. I sold it too, I – I paid my cousin, one of the cousins I was living with to drink it for me. We put it first in the flower pots, but then we – everybody knew there was a fish odor in the flower plants, but he loved it, so he was just gulping it. I think I paid him like a cent or something like that.

Q: Did you like to read, did you have other interests?

A: Oh yeah, I was an avid reader, I always get prizes for reading nicely and reading many books. And I used to misbehave to be able to stay after school, and the teacher always would work in the library. And one day she says to me, now what is it with you? Why do you – because that was a – for her it was a pain in the neck to have to have this – watch this kid in the library all the time. And I said well, because I can read books. And she says, what? You can get all the books you want and you don't ha – and I don't have to be here with you. And besides that, I returned to that village

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where I lived in the country when I was little and I had a cousin there. Well, actually, it was really a son of – of – of that aunt that brought me up. And he went to some kind of photograph school or something like that and here's this big box with books. And I looked in this – in this – one time he forgot to lock it, so I – I looked at – in, there was this one book about legends or something and I started reading it. And I so loved it that I went through many books, which I can understand anyhow. But anyhow, ever since then I loved reading. I learned that you can have the whole world to yourself when you read books.

Q: What languages did you speak? Ju – more than Polish?

A: Well, in – at that time I only spoke Polish. And –

Q: Then after elementary school you went on to –

A: To the gymnasium [indecipherable] had to choose, and you could either take – we – we had to have Latin, but you could choose either French or German, but that was this time when the – and my father said, you have to know the language of your enemy, so I would suggest you take German. And I said no-nothing to it, I'll never take any German.

Q: What – what did you know about German and **Germany**?

A: Well, let's see now, that was the year – see, there was already from 30 – what I knew it's from that atheistic uncle, he read the "**Mein Kampf**" and he wa – had to – and he was in the business of foreign exchange. And of course when you're in that

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business you have lots of Jewish clientele. And he was telling them, you know, that if he – if – if they know what's good for them, they would emigrate. And they said oh, what does this dumb Polack knows, you know, and all that kind of stuff. They wouldn't listen. And then I remember that during the war one of them, because he saved some of them, he said, gosh, how ba – how dumb were we that we didn't listen to you. Because they had the money, they could have gone away. But –

Q: What was your uncle's name?

A: **Jakub**(ph). Very nice Christian name, too. **Jakub Seftrik**(ph). And he was a – he was the fellow who during the war ask me – my mother was very – I'd say – I don't want to say bad words about her, but I would say she spent half a day she – oh – in prayer, okay **[indecipherable]**

Q: So she was a very religious woman?

A: Yeah, but more than that. I mean, she was overly religious, you know, she paid for her childhood sins **[indecipherable]** maiden sins or whatever **[indecipherable]**. But anyhow, since my uncle, who – he ask us – he ask me – es – he kind of asked me things that I thought were kind of funny. And he says, do you think you would have room for an old lady in your house? And I said, my mother can ope – for money my mother – for rent my mother can always find a room. So they made up – what it really was, it was the family of this lady left, and they left this Jewish old lady alone with the cook. And so, my uncle made out that this lady was a nanny

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whom the Jews left, and – and she was old and that’s why this [indecipherable] the cook was taking care of her. Which in reality she was not. But the trouble with this – so we took her in – other – my mother took her in, no-not knowing who she was. And I swore that I would never tell. And so in this [indecipherable] I was bringing food and feeding and what kind of stuff. And I don’t know what – she died peacefully, because I was taken to **Germany**, so I never went to the funeral or anything like that. But anyhow, she died peacefully in her bed. But the thing was that she had to look Catholic, so I went to the – well, and the pri – th – my uncle says, you have to buy her a rosary, cause all old Polish woman had the rosary, you know. And you have to teach her some prayers, so that she, you know – the trouble with her was that she was already a little deaf. And teaching her wasn’t very easy. So I have – I beny – I belong to the sodality, you know, as a servants of **Mary**, and I had a couple girlfriends [indecipherable] kind of change, and by the time we’re – well, she finally learned how to say **Halle(ph) Mary**, and what’s this other one. No [indecipherable] I don’t even know how you say that in English. But anyhow, there are two prayers that you have to say for the rosary, and then you have to say the “**Our Father**,” [indecipherable] the “**Our Father**.” But anyhow – but she finally got it and all she did was sitting on this bed with this rosary in her hand and saying this rosary all the time. And – but I was – I was okay. But she never talked much about Jewishness, because she was one of those Gentile – I mean, **Polandized**

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Jewish, you know. And besides, she was deaf, so when you had to talk to her, you had to shout and you really couldn't get any – she would say, huh? What?

Q: Whe-When did you first start hearing about a man named **Hitler**?

A: Oh, it must have been in 30 – '33 or I – no, it must have been '33 when my uncle got this “**Mein Kampf**,” cause they were selling it in – so it must have been in 30 – before '33.

Q: And what did he mean to you, what did **Hitler** mean to you when you were young?

A: Well, my uncle always said that he wasn't – he was a tyrant and he was dangerous, that's all he was always saying, but he didn't explain the book to me and all anything like that. But he says that this man means trouble for **Poland**, that's what he said. And our f – now tho – in those days he didn't mean much to me and except that that's why I didn't want to learn any German because that had a connections with him and my father said you – you learn the language of your enemy. And so – but anyhow I didn't take German, I took French, and I didn't –

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristine Belfoure**. This is tape one, side **B**, and you were talking about how your father wanted you to take German, but you did not.

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A: No, I took French and I didn't learn German til the war started. And when all the Poles of German heritage didn't want to sign up the **volkes**(ph) list, so they were all kicked out from what they call the **vartigal**(ph) and they had – they had to leave their homes with nothing on them, but they had one thing, they spoke German. And the way for them to make a living was to give German lessons. And so then everybody wanted to help them, and [indecipherable] then I realized that my father was right. So I took the lessons from someone, a lady, and then – then there were no more Polish schools, so there were all – people were trying to get some kind of schooling for their children. And because in **Kraków** there are lots of Poles of German descent, or Austrian descent, so they – they said, you can't just leave those children out of two – two classes of high school. We have to have something else. So they had some kind of petition and they change, because the academic high schools were all over, they were all finished, but they – they turned – they started a new school for kindergarten teachers. And so we went to school underground for normal classes to continue our high school, but on top we were doing all this getting ready to be kindergarten teachers.

Q: Before we talk about that, let's just talk a little bit about – more about before – the time before the war started. Before 1939, before September '39, did you notice any different treatment of the Jews in your town?

A: Well, let me see.

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Q: Before the Germans came.

A: Before the Germans.

Q: Or did life go on normally?

A: Yeah, life – for me went on normally because I went to the same – with the same people, I knew those same girls. And personally, I didn't. I lived in a – how shall I say it, you know, a place where – I-I didn't – I mean, I was never there where probably the action was, and there weren't any new index and index was the – there's this – th-they call this national [**indecipherable**] and all that kind of stuff. But I never associated with them or anything like that, so I really didn't notice it. And –

Q: So until September '39, life was going along normally?

A: Very normally for me and for my Jewish friends, too. But –

Q: And then what was your f – when – what – what was the first change or the first sight of German soldiers? What – what do you first remember?

A: Well, I first remember – well, the first re – memories is on the big marketplace, the Germans came in and set up their tents, the soldiers then started shaving and washing and all that kind of stuff. So **Kraków** was left alone because they thought it's – you know, they – it's a beautiful city and they wanted it as probably their capitol. They didn't even steal the golden domes from the churches. And so I – I only saw the regular young men washed and shave and all that kind of stuff. And a

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bunch of my Jewish boys who were talking to them and asking them question because they were – you know, they were – they were the ones who knew German. And we're – so if we wanted to know something, we say ask him why this and all that sort of thing. But there was no terror, there was no – terror started when the **einsatz** – wh-when – after the soldiers came, the **Einsatztruppen**(ph), that's when all those things started. And that's what is big about the difference between the Roman Catholic Poles and the Mosaic Poles started to blew up, and the big signs on the kiosks came that all Jews have to report and that no Pole is allowed to work for a Jew or any Jewish store, or in the Jewish household. And later on that any Pole caught helping a Jew or giving him food or shelter would be shot and all that kind of stuff. So people started being afraid.

Q: What was your – I mean, you were young, you were 15 - 16 years old. What – what – what was your reaction, as a teenager?

A: I just – I – I just really couldn't believe that people of **Schiller** and **Guta**(ph) could do anything like that. I mean, that was my reaction. And I just couldn't believe it, til the first person – first persons that were punished was the Polish intelligentsia. In our house there was dot – a dentist's son – I mean there was a son of a lady who was dentist. And another one was –

Q: You lived in an apartment house?

A: Yeah.

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Q: And then the other lady's son was a medical student, and then another – it was the three people whose sons went to **Auschwitz**. So we knew what was going on in a sense that we always met at this tailor [indecipherable] you know [indecipherable] tailor, and that was usually the place where everybody went to for gossip and all that kind of stuff. And so that was where we met and she was telling us about **Auschwitz**, but she just used to make a package for her son and we all would give her something to – to put it in a package and all that. And –

Q: These are Polish Christians who were sent to **Auschwitz**?

A: Polish Christians, yeah. And then this other lady – well, anyhow, we all kind of met at this tailor's and these ladies were telling us about **Auschwitz** and about their sons and we could never understand how a dentist – why a dentist would end up – in those days we had absolutely no idea that they idea was to kill the intelligentsia and leave the old, poor folks alone so they can do with them what they want. And so those three men – so we knew about **Auschwitz**. But up un – we had no idea what's – why. A-And you just keep asking yourself. And – but that's – but I knew about **Auschwitz** immediately what – because the first day, that first day that they – war was over, they started rounding up Polish intelligentsia and shipping them off. And the teachers too, and they didn't make –

Q: The first day the war began, you mean?

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A: No, th-the first day the war was ended. I mean, the Polish campaign didn't last very long.

Q: Oh, oh-oh that, I see what you mean.

A: Yeah.

Q: I thought you meant World War II.

A: No, no, no, no, no, the Polish campaign, okay?

Q: Right.

A: And that's where the horrors really started. And at first they really – although somebody said, one of the ladies, oh yeah, her son was a teacher and she says no, she told the dentist's mother, the first one to go are the teachers. And they didn't give a darn whether the teacher was a Jew or Pole, as long as he was a teacher, they just wanted to do away with the people who can stand against them or start trouble or anything like that. So because they were on a list of – of – I don't know, I heard it someplace, a list of teachers that are arrested, and it didn't make any difference who they were, whether they were Catholic or Jews, a Mosaic, pardon me. My teacher wouldn't like that. And anyhow, that's where the – then when the **Einsatztrupp**(ph) – then there all you see is the Jews in the winter, because – having to clean the streets and do all kind of stuff like that, and you couldn't go into a Jewish store and they were all closed. Or what the Jew – suppose that you – a Jewish store di – sometimes they make some kind of contract with their workers, or their salespeople and so

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sometimes they were given the – selling the business or something like that. I mean, there was all kinds of deals that were done just to –

Q: Did you talk things over with your mother and stepfather –

A: No, no –

Q: – about what was happening?

A: No, never. We were kind of sheltered, you know, in a way. I knew about what was happening, because my uncles said, if you didn't – if this lady – if you don't take this lady she – she will die. So I knew that –

Q: And why did you do – I mean, that was very brave of you as a teenager. Why did you do this?

A: Well, after all, I was a sodality and I was supposed to be doing good deeds. So, besides I did a favor for my uncle. And another thing, I used to steal apples from this lady's ya – orchard. I mean, not steal, but – well, yes. This family had a beautiful villa and they had these gorgeous pears. And anyhow, I feel like it was doing for atonement [**indecipherable**] know about the pears tha – and apples I stole from her garden.

Q: What was the elder –

A: I don't know the name.

Q: – elderly Jewish lady's name, do you –

A: I don't know because I – when I was little I didn't know the name –

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Q: Yeah.

A: – and my uncle said no names –

Q: Yeah.

A: – because if you didn't know her name, you couldn't betray anybody. You would say, I don't know her.

Q: Were you aware of the danger of what you were doing?

A: No, I wasn't, it was an adventure. Same thing like I was – and I just don't know, must have been that uncle of mine, because I was asked to – to meet somebody – oh, in **Kraków** there's a street that's nothing but booksellers, called **Spitana**(ph). And there were lots of – a very many of the booksellers were antique – it was called antiq –

Q: Antiquarian.

A: Antiquarians who were very famous, they had – so I know that one day I was approached to – I don't know, they were fe – my uncle says, you know, I have a job for you. And I say, yeah, what kind, you know, cause he always need jobs for me. And he says, I want you to meet somebody. And so I met this gentleman, this **sukanice**(ph) and he says, I-I need you do me a favor, to take this package and deliver it to the ghetto. And it turned out it was gold. And I don't know, to this day I cannot understand how they trusted me with this gold. But it – what you had to do is you went on that streetcar, then you had to jump off and get into the ghetto. And

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then, after all this trouble that I went through, this old antiquarian says, child, you tell them – he gives his back to me and he says, just tell them that I’m too old. Tell them to give it to somebody younger. And I s – and so I went second time and they said, make sure that he takes it, and he gets out. But they, of course in those days, because it was very easy to bribe somebody with gold, you know, the guards and all that kind of stuff, it wasn’t that tight yet, it was just the first – they weren’t very well organized yet, but – so I went a couple more times to deliver it to somebody else, but – and I learned to jump off the streetcars so well that when I started going to school in **Frankfurt** in **Germany**, instead of getting out on a station behind the university, on the – when the tram went around I would jump off and a policeman caught me and [indecipherable]. And he says, my God, aren’t you afraid you’re gonna break your leg or something? I said, oh no, I’ve got a good preparation for it.

Q: Right. Before the ghet –

A: It was an adventure, yeah. It wasn’t – besides, I did somebody a service, so that’s it. But it was most ma – m-most and that was, more than anything else it was the idea, can I do it? It was like attempting my luck, or tempting – trying to –

Q: A challenge, you mean?

A: Challenge yeah, it was the challenge, really.

Q: Before the ghetto was established, and we’ll get to that, did you see your Jewish friends? I mean, did you go to school with any of them?

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A: No, because all public schools were closed, there were no more.

Q: Mm-hm. But you went to this special school, did th-the – then –

A: No, there were no more Jew – there were no more Jewish girls.

Q: So what did the Jewish children do?

A: I have no idea, that's why I really am so sorry that I never – they didn't do anything. They went cleaning streets or just sat home and – and **[indecipherable]**

Q: So you had no contact with them?

A: No, because you couldn't – because we moved from one – well, as long as I had a contact, I'll be helping them little bit, or they could come, and I couldn't understand why they had to wear this – this thing on their arm.

Q: This yellow –

A: Yellow, yeah.

Q: – with the armband?

A: No, armband, was a wide, with the da – Star of **David**. And –

Q: What did you think of that?

A: That was horrible, they were stupid wearing it. I mean, you know, we used to go in the country to do the black market, and there are usually some children to buy the stuff, so those children were – children could be – I mean, who would suspect children having a big chunk of bacon around, or something like that? And there were these handsome, beautiful boys with blue eyes and with this star. And I said, what

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the – why do you have to wear this thing? All you have to do is take off your **paysy**(ph) and – and – and nobody will know who you are. And they say oh, we cannot, because that's – the rabbi said we cannot do it. And from that time on I never have any – how shall I say? Not confidence, but you know, I – dying for a religion is one thing, okay, but young people, young men who – oh, there were some **[indecipherable]** I mean, there's no question about that, but the very religious ones, under the pressure of their parents, they would never do it. But still, there were some who did it, and – and run away, and – this – that was difficult for boys, for girls it was nothing.

Q: Right.

A: I mean.

Q: How did you know that the ghetto was being established in – we're talking about the ghetto in **Kraków**.

A: Ah yeah, because in the first place there was this big thing that no – no Pole can get into the ghetto, there's gonna be a –

Q: Big sign, you mean?

A: Big sign, that's it, there's gonna be a ghetto and that no Jew can live outside of it, and every Jew who lives on the outside has to come in. And of course in our street there – there were quite a few of them. And on the corner of my street it was this – oh yeah, that's how I really know about this, because in the corner of our street, in a

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house, there was this janitress, and she took in a Jewish boy. She – one of the boys who lived in her house, and all the – some Poles said to her, why do you keep this Jewish bastard in your house? And she said – why are you raising this Jewish bastard in your house? That's about the anti-Semitism that I heard. And she said, I am not raising a bastard, I am raising my future son-in-law. And is – and then she says, if you say anything about it, I know about every one of you something, that if you betray me, I do the same, I pay you back. So that nobody did. Now I really don't know what happened, but somebody said they did get married. But – but anyhow, I remember like today, you know, somebody was saying something, do you know that she keeps the Jewish child? And to me that was nothing, I mean, there were Jewish children all over. And – but she called bastard, and I say, that's a not nice word to say. And she said, now remember how I said, that's not a bast – Jewish bastard, that's my future son-in-law. So –

Q: So then the ghetto was established?

A: Yeah.

Q: And did you see Jews leaving their homes to go into the ghetto?

A: Not from my street.

Q: What – what street did you live on?

A: That's a – **Slowacki** alley. It's really **Natuvicza**(ph), which is a side street of this – th-there's this huge alley – alleys – not alleys, avenues, they're called Avenues of

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the Three Poets, and my poet was **Slowacki**, so the beautiful houses and all that. So the smart ones already left, and the pru – I never seen any, to tell you the truth, houses of poor Jews. So the ones like they had in [**indecipherable**] and all that kind of stuff. The only – the only poor – well, I really didn't see, because even the one – my friends, they were all shop owners, so they had very comfortable houses, and –

Q: Did you say goodbye to any of them?

A: No. Because what happened is that I moved from **Dembiniki**(ph) to this other part of the city and by the time I went to **Dembiniki**(ph) again, they were already gone. So I couldn't. And one of them, the **Cohen** girl, they ar – they – just the day before the war broke out, she le – they left for **America**. And I was – and when she says, we're going to **America**, and I said, what for? And I had absolutely no idea, you know, I mean, I know that my uncle said **Hitler** was a tyrant and all that kind of stuff and it's bad luck for **Poland**, but I had no idea what they going to be doing.

Then of course, with this lady is in **Auschwitz** and all this, but I had no –

Q: Was your stepfather or father called up in the army previously?

A: Oh yeah, he was a prisoner of war.

Q: This is your stepfather?

A: Yeah, mm-hm, and he was a – yeah, he was a prisoner of war and then he was released and came home and was kind of half broken. My mother was always a bad feeling about it because Polish army was in dira – array, and so he – all of a sudden,

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I think must have been September two or three, she says, what are you doing here? And he says, well, I can't find my company. And the next neighbor was a young woman whose hu-husband was a waiter, and she said, oh, this old man is coming home and my poor husband has been taken prisoner. And so my m – or something like that. And so my mother says, go back and look for your company. And so he gets on this bicycle and he bicycled off to the front and got taken prisoners. So I think he felt guilty all the time, you know. She looked for him and she found him in some **POW** camp and make eye – made eyes at the German guards to let her drop stuff for him after – first they looked what's there, so there'll be no weapons, anything like that. And then she cried, but she says why, he got this big package, it was like a bag, he distributed all the bread and the stuff, he gave them to the other prisoners. And she says, and I worked the whole month to get this for him. But I – I said I couldn't im – really imagine that he would just eat it by himself while the others were hungry.

Q: Was your father in the army?

A: Yeah, he was in – intern – he went to **Hungary** where the Polish army was destroy, he went with the other ones through **Hungary** and then from **Hungary** to **France**, because at that time **France** was – and then when **France** fell, they were very lucky to have a general, a commanding general, **Prugar-Ketling**, a very nice

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Polish name, who led them from southern **France** to **Switzerland** and they laid their arms at the Swiss border, and they were all interned for the duration of the war.

Q: What – let's get back to the ghetto. What did it look like when you went inside?

Can you describe it at all, some of the sights you saw?

A: Well, at that time I didn't see anything, I was so – I – really, I didn't think much.

I do – I don't remember much, okay, because I was just looking for this certain house to meet this certain person. I noticed that it was cramped. That's the impression that I have that – that here was a guy who owned this – this beautiful bookstore and all of a sudden he has this one room with three or four other people.

Q: How did you get into the ghetto? What did you say to the guard?

A: I didn't do anything, I jump off the streetcar, and in the ghetto.

Q: Oh, the streetcar went into the ghetto.

A: Into the ghetto. And if you're at a certain point you can jump off and you were in the ghetto. And bi – children – I mean, I was very small, I really was, at 14 years old, 15.

Q: But ordinarily you could – I mean, if you hadn't jumped off, it wouldn't have stopped –

A: You would have to go through a – yeah, yeah, I would have to go through a gate. But I didn't have to go through a gate because I jumped off, so that I – there were – I didn't see any guards. So the same way all the other boys who went outside or inside

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got in the streetcar or – and of course the Polish streetcar drivers knew that we were doing this, so they even slowed down a little bit.

Q: So you went in several times to the ghetto?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you see any changes from one visit to the next?

A: Just this – I was kind of scared a little bit, okay, to begin with. And then I went to different houses, but except for – it was not al – enou – enough time for them to get so hungry that you could spot it. All you did – all I saw was overcrowding. That – and that people just like –

Q: Did other people try to give you messages?

A: Oh yeah, but I – I – I would just – then they are – would deliver them on the other side, to the –

Q: You did take the me –

A: – same person.

Q: Besides the message from the bookseller, did you ever take other messages?

A: Oh yeah, but not – I never knew any names or who and all that. Ther-There was just one point that they all would – you know, that gentleman, I don't even know what he look like any more, it was an elderly gentleman. And I don't know what you look like, but anyhow, bi – h-he – I would give it to him and he would distribute it.

But he never was on a col – o-on the envelope, the names and to whom it was, it was

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always on the inside. So – and they all had kind of funny names too, because one time I looked in one of those things, and the names were like –

Q: False names, you mean?

A: False name, **Roosevelt**, and – in Polish, you know, and all kinds of false [indecipherable] and all that kind of stuff.

Q: So now you were in school?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And then what was the next change?

A: Well, the next change was that they closed the school, they – because they discovered that we were going underground. And some – well, th-the – all there was [indecipherable] map of **Poland** or anything like that on the books or notebooks.

And so lots of people didn't see any use of tearing off the maps, cause all Polish books – notebooks rather, had this po – map of **Poland** and then something on one side wi – and some historical dates on the others that the kids could rem – that was the way of teaching, too. And they did say that it was forbidden. And I don't know, one time came this German inspection and they found some kid with a – with this maps and they said that's it. So they closed this school. And then – but then the parents went again, you know, and after we finished this kindergarten thing, the parents were thinking, what else can we do? And then the Germans needed people who spoke German to help them govern this new kingdom of theirs. And they

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needed people to – to do their commercial things. So they opened this school, wi – it was called the preparatory school for – preparatory commercial school from higher preparatory school commerci – oh, it gos – anyhow, the name was so long that it hardly got on the thing. But then that – we didn't finish that – yeah, so we did finish that, but before we finished this, came Germans into the school and pulled some of us out, because they were looking for children who were talented for languages. Is there any – and they did that all over **Kraków** in many schools, so that who – because they needed this workforce and they needed somebody who knew Polish and German. And so they send me to a three [**indecipherable**] in the German school. It was like – like three months long, where we learn German and typewriting, typing and shorthand. So that's the next schooling I got.

Q: And then you stayed there how long?

A: Law – I don't know how long, was three months and I just got this paper, it was kind of orange thing and it said in work, and that's when I was called, maybe the next day.

Q: To do what?

A: To be s – go to a transit camp and then go to a – to **Germany**.

Q: Oh, okay, so you finished this course.

A: Course.

Q: Of three months.

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A: And I was to be working – oh yeah, and I was to be working in a agricultural bank.

Q: In **Kraków**?

A: In **Kraków**. But this – the Gestapo needed workers, and since I was one of the best students, they switched it and send me to this Gestapo school. Not Gestapo school but with this – to type for this guy, for this Gestapo man.

Q: This is still in **Kraków**?

A: This is still in **Kraków**. But when I was in this German school, the man, the teacher was one of those ger – Germans who would – cou – would do away with all foreign words in German and just put all the Germanic words. So that when we were talking about comma, we called them **bystreek**(ph). And when I went to take dictation for this Gestapo man, e-every time that he said comma, cause he was an old Austrian, every time he – he used the word comma, but it is written with a **K** in German, I wrote **komma**. So then I typed it out and I gave it to him, you see? You can just imagine what this piece looked like. And so he – he looks at it and he says **der Polisher**(ph) **schweine**. And I just learned the word **ferkel**, which means also a sw – literally a swine in German. And I say **u-un**(ph) **du bist in Pr-Preussischer ferkel ond**(ph). You are a Prussian pig. And then –

Q: You said that to him?

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A: Yeah, and I [**indecipherable**] idea, you know, what I was doing really, I just was offended that he called me a **Polisher**(ph) swine. And – and I run out, and he got up and he run after me. But before that, we used to, before we had this Jewish lady during the war, we had a Ukrainian law student living with us. And I met her right when the war broke out and **Poland** lost and she says, now listen, you were so nice to me, so whenever you're in trouble, you come to see me, because I will – I'm a big fish now at the German labor office in **Kraków**. So if you need any help – so when I run out, I remember this girl and I runned – and I run to the – to – to the **arbeitsamt** and I told – told her what happened. I didn't tell her how I called him, but I said I got in trouble with him. And she says, don't go home, go to one of your friends. Can you think of a friend when I can contact you? And I said – I give her a name of a girl. Unfortunately, this girl lived by the railroad station, the street – you want to stop?

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**, and this is tape number two, side **A**, and you were talking about how you went to your friend, the Ukrainian law student who was going to help you out.

A: And so I w – and she said, now don't go, and she s – so I went to this **[indecipherable]** street, which is right by the railroad station, that's the transit route to the – every Polish village and town had to deliver a certain amount of people for work to **Germany**. And so there was columns of slave work – future slave workers going by that street, and they always counted them before they entered the railroad station, and if there were some missing, they would close off one of the streets and caught anybody – catch anybody who didn't have a papers. And I don't know how I didn't have that little paper with me.

Q: Y-You had papers, but you just didn't have them that day?

A: That day, yeah. And – and you could not be on the street without a working paper. I mean, i-if you were, that's – and you got caught, that's it, cause they were after getting as many people as possible for work to **Germany**, because they needed labor. And so this **Nina** went to my parents and my parents said she didn't come home, she went to this girl. And she said, no, she never got here. So she – because she knew the – how this all works, and she went to the transit camp. And I saw her

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and she fixed so up that I would go to a tobacco factory in **Germany**, that was easy work. And that's how I got to this factory in **Germany** called **Hanewacker**, which was making chewing tobacco.

Q: So we were talking about early 1942?

A: Uh-huh, January [**indecipherable**]

Q: January 1942.

A: I don't re – quite remember what – whether it was January or February, but it was –

Q: And you were 17 and a half?

A: Yeah.

Q: An-And what was your reaction when they told you you couldn't – they were going to take you away? You couldn't even go home.

A: No, I didn't go home, and – and I didn't – no, I didn't go home, because I was caught while I was going to my girlfriend's and that nobody really knew what happened to me except for this woman, this lawyer who knew where I could possibly be, if I got caught.

Q: Right, right.

A: And so she just was so wonderful that she gave me this easy job. Or she could have just let me –

Q: Could you communicate with your – with your family?

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A: No, no, not – I – they got a note from me when – when I was really in – in

Hanewacker in Germany.

Q: What – what was your emotional state at that point? Were you very frightened?

A: Oh yeah, I was frightened, but in a way it was an adventure and I knew German.

So I knew I'm gonna get through with this. I mean, I'm gonna get my

[indecipherable] out somehow, okay.

Q: You were leaving **Poland** to go to **Germany** –

A: Yeah.

Q: – did – but what did **Poland** –

A: Oh yeah, and another thing that happened to me was in that transit camp they were cutting everybody's hair off, and I had pigtails. And I don't know why they didn't cut my off. This lady – but I heard of something whisper, you know, and the – maybe she just took pity on me, and she didn't **shore** my head.

Q: Did you look old?

A: No, I was like a child, I looked like a child, okay, so maybe that's why – I think that's maybe why they took pity on me, I imagine.

Q: But what were your thoughts about having to leave **Poland**? I mean, you felt very proud of being a Pole.

A: Of course I felt proud and I was scared, I mean yeah, cause I didn't know what I was going. But on the other hand, this – this lady said – oh, oh yeah, I'll tell you why

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I wasn't scared, because after **Poland** and **Germany** had this pact of non-aggression, Polish textbooks in school didn't picture **Germany** as a horrible place. When you open a – and my cousin studied German, okay, so they had those – those books and you had just beautiful palaces and – and sights and all this. I mean, they – for some reason they did not – they changed a – they changed the way of teaching, and they were not stressing the horrible ta – thing that it – Prussians did to **Poland** before. All they was talking was beautiful **Alps**, beautiful **Bavaria**, beautiful **Rhine** river. And you can see this **Rhine** river and the castles around it and this whole [indecipherable]. And so I really – how shall I say? I say, well finally I'm gonna see those things. Was ka – I had no idea that I'll never get out of a camp, but I mean, it was a slave labor camp and you – well, there was no way of [indecipherable] if we were – but that's early on. But anyhow, I was – you know, I went away, it was like adventure. I didn't expect what was coming and god – thanks God, you know. I had no idea.

Q: Did you know anybody else in the group that you were in at this transit camp?

A: No, nobody.

Q: So you were totally alone in it?

A: I was to-totally alone, but then immediately the first thing they did is, did this delousing, and you going with this hot bath, it almost burned you and all this kind of stuff, and already there you started looking for somebody you may like, to talk and

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say what's going to happen to us, and this and that. Then somebody said, well nothing's going to happen, we're gonna go to work to **Germany**. And then –

Q: Now this transit camp is in **Kraków**?

A: **Kraków**.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And whenever you're in a situation like that you always look for somebody that you can hook up to – to – to have some kind of support or something, you know, and so –

Q: And the – the people were all Polish Christians, no Jews.

A: Yeah, no Jews. I – I don't know who they were, but then anyhow, I bet you they had a selection later on. But – but I wa – didn't witness it. And then the girls –

Q: Where – where was the transit **clamp** located, do you know?

A: Gee, I have no idea where it was.

Q: Okay.

A: It's too far back –

Q: Yeah.

A: – to – to remember.

Q: And so then what happened?

A: Nothing. I was all of a sudden – first we were in the regular trains. No, I don't know. No, first we were in a kind of cattle trains and then they changed to regular

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trains the minute we left **Germany – Poland**, and I was so disappointed with this **Germany**, you know, it was – is dirty and the snow is dark and all this kind of stuff, you know. I always think about those books with this beautiful sight, and here is this – I mean, because I was to **Silesia**, you see, so which that's all industrial region, you don't see a village or anything like that. And I said, wow. So, and finally we get to this **Hanewacker** and to this station, and they started being very nice to us. Tow – toward civilians, whenever there were German civilians present, they changed their attitude, too, cause they didn't want the – I – I imagine they didn't want the civilians to know what they were really doing with people. And especially – probably too because we were all very young, and oh –

Q: Was this men and women?

A: No, just women. And – really young girls. And it was night, and we got off, carried all our bundles, and they didn't say **raus** like they usually said, you sh – they said **ausweichen**, which means, you know, get out, but not in a very – in a nasty way. And we just walk and walk and walk and then we arrive at this factory. Oh yeah, and then we – they let us in and it was lights, it was like oh, thanks God, cause we were already hungry and thirsty. And we went to this room tha – it was like a cafeteria or a dining room or something like that. And that's when I knew about what's happening to the Jews, because when I got there – when we got there, there

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was a group of girls with yellow covers on their head, what do you call those thing?

If you have to wear it, like –

Q: Kerchief?

A: No, not a kerchief.

Q: A bandana.

A: Not a bandana, like a doctor's wear, what do they wear?

Q: Oh, a – a cap, a se –

A: Cap, something like that, and they had yellow caps. White smocks and yellow caps. And you know, I was inquisitive, so I wanted to s – they were like giving up their dishes, getting ready to go, as they went by this thing and some of them – every one of them that I watch were putting away the dishes. And I wanted to go to them cause I wanted to find out well, what is this place like? And the guard says no, no, **verboden**, those are Jews. And I – when d – he said Jews, Jewish girls, I said well, that's good, then I can't – and so I went to them, I mean when he turned around, and I started talking Polish. **[indecipherable]** And they –

Q: They didn't answer?

A: They didn't answer, and finally they called somebody, here comes this lady and says in Polish – she also has this yellow thing on her head. And she says, what do you want from them? And I say, how come they don't speak any Polish if they're Jews? And she says, because they are Jewish girls from **Vienna** and they don't know

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any Polish. That was an eye opener. **[indecipherable]** was right there, there are other Jews that are not Polish. And sa – and I am – I say, oh – she says – I say, what's with the – what are they so afraid of? Because you came and you're gonna be replacing them and they're going to **Poland**. And I said, well they would love it here, I mean **Poland**. There's so many Jews in **Poland**. My hometown every fifth person is a Jew. And she looks at me, you know, like that, and says child, child, they're not going – they're going probably to die there. I just couldn't believe it, you know, I said why? People who follow every blessed God's commandment and there's a hundreds of them. How? I mean, I just couldn't believe it. But I met her couple of days after, because they were the ones who were dishing out the food, you know. So I say, have you heard from your friends? And she said no, they were someplace in **Poland**, so they probably died. But that was the first time that I knew of the fate of the Polish Jews – not Polish Jews, but I mean Jews. And I got a history lesson th-that isn't such a n-not all Poles of Mosaic faith don't speak Polish. And so that was an eye opener, really an eye opener. Cause you have to imagine, I was inquisitive and I say **[indecipherable]**. And – but they looked at us, because we're skinny an-and they were going out. And they knew that the minute we come, they'll be gone. And here I telling about all this, how they love Jews in **Poland** and how they're gonna love it, that every fifth person is a Jew. I mean – I mean, I have ta – absolutely no idea. I don't know whether I was dumb or naïve, or – or – or I just lived in another world or

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s – what. But it – it was an eye opener. And the first shocking news about the destruction of Jewry. That was the first time that I really – and this lady whenever she saw me, cause she was like a leader of those gir – Viennese girls, you know, she just always look at me like that, you know, and what could I tell her?

Q: Sh-She was a Jewish woman?

A: Oh yeah, she was a Jewish woman.

Q: But she stayed.

A: Well, th – she left too, later, but not too long after that. After the last girls left, she left too. She gave me a lesson. She really opened my – you know, when you're young and you're sheltered by parents, they – you don't really realize what's going on because you have th – all those childish things in your mind and boyfriends and this and that and books, and you don't really take part in what's going on. And that was the first lesson that I got. And then of course in that factory there are – the second time that I really at – felt guilty. First time I felt guilty that I didn't do something for this **Eva Kriseberg**(ph), because my uncle could have pulled her out. And I didn't get in touch with her and I don't know just why I didn't get in touch with her, just because she scare me, she says, go away, go away. And th – and she says, we don't live in our – I say where are your parents, where do you live? She says, we don't live in this pla – in our place any more. We lived in this compound. And so I felt so guilty then, in this **Hanewacker** comes this big mass – big

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supervisor and couple Gestapo men, and come to this girl. And he calls her something like Miss **Ringelbaum**(ph) or something like that. And she says, oh, I'm not **Ringelbaum**(ph), I'm **Kratkauska**(ph), and he says yeah, we know who you are. And they took her. Because there were – you know, it's easy for a Jewish girl that looks – doesn't look – I just – I really don't know what that means to look Jewish, to tell you the truth. It always baffled me, how you can tell, you know. But because I lived together, I just didn't see any difference. And they have taken her and I felt so helpless. Just the day that I saw **Eva** going with this broom through the snow, I mean, this was – just nothing you can do, cause there's always some soldiers behind you.

Q: This was a Jewish girl who was passing as a Polish girl?

A: Is a Jewish girl passing as a Polish girl, yeah. And somebody must have betray her or denounced her. And then somebody said, she's not the only one. So we knew there were other ones, but then – see, the idea was to act Catholic, say all the crosses and all this kind of stuff and – and say **Jesus, Mary** all the time. I mean, there was a way of – there was a way of keeping – passing, but then sometimes – but if you came from a Hasidic home, you couldn't. There was no way. Cause first you got this idea to betraying your religion, betraying your parents, your grandparents. But – so that's a shi – there was no way for a Hasidic girl to get safe. But there were those who were hiding and there were – but that – that was one of the ways, you could

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always pray and say prayers and **Jesus, Mary** and all this, and – what you felt in your heart was a different story. And then I ask one girl, I say, y-you don't have – do you s – sometimes think that you're doing the wrong thing? And she says no, we all pray to the same God. And the same thing was, when I first started teaching this Jewish lady, pau – saying the prayers, some – some – I went to the priest and I say – because I thought I was doing bad thing converting this Jewish lady, teaching her Polish prayers, Catholic prayers. And so I went to this priest and I said – I took – you can go to confession and you know, and all that, and he says, well, confess your sins. And I said, well, I have this woman big – and I don't know if it's a sin or not, and I was telling him that, you know, I was teaching this Catholic prayers to a woman who was Jewish, and was this a sin. And he says oh no, no, no, you'll be saving her life, no. So he give me a blessing and told me to say three Holy **Mary's** and that thing was over. So I thought that meant, because then I really knew that when she says we all believe in one God, so who – who – what does it matter. But –

Q: You felt safe telling the priest that you were hiding a Jewish woman?

A: No, I wasn't telling him hiding, I was telling him I was teaching her. But I was teaching her Catholic prayers, then he says [**indecipherable**] were you successful? And I said, not very, cause the lady's deaf. And he was the one who said, well get some girlfra – don't you have any other friends who could teach her?

Q: So now you're in this factory, what kind of factory is it?

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A: It's a chewing tobacco factory.

Q: And what were your duties?

A: Well, when you chew – when you make chewing tobacco there's this – takes two people, one if – one that lays, dry strips of tobacco leaves, they kind of small ones. And then after them goes the fellow who puts – I don't know what it is, but they put – they cut up the tobacco, put it in some kind of prune juice to make it sweet, and then you go and you – a-and you put that stuff on top – no, behind him and he goes and he takes a piece of this horrible chewing stuff and puts it on the leaf, and he rolls it into it, and it comes like a little sausage, continuous sausage and he just rolls it in. He gets to the end of it and he puts it on some kind of wheel and the thing starts anew. And then they put this tobacco sausage into this – into this syrup and it gets cooked, and then – then they get it out again and they cut it in very tiny pieces, and then, this was supposed to help the war effort, because thi-this tobacco, that you don't smoke it, you chew it. This is like a spitting – well, one time I saw somebody using it here, too, **urch**. But anyhow, one thing we learned, that you cannot eat it, although was s-sweet, because a – one of us got sick from it. But, so I was doing that, and then one day –

Q: Did you see any other groups of Jews?

A: No, just those, that was –

Q: That was that one group.

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A: That was that one group and there're no more Jews – Jewish girls from any place coming. There was – they were get – getting us. And then we also said, we-ell, after they – after them we'll go away because they were [indecipherable] girls coming, so we thought, oh, they're gonna do with us the same thing they did with the Jewish girls, but they didn't. So – but we were all so scared to death then, cause we thought well, we're the next ones.

Q: Did you get enough food to eat?

A: I don't really remember, food was never very important to me, but I think – oh, no, no, we didn't, but there were always the civilian Germans who would sneak food for us. Like, if you had this woman, or the man for whom you worked, and especially if you spoke their language, they would always help you. I remember the first time there was – I had this man – boy, who – hm, I don't know how we got together with this boy there. I was working for him, or he – but anyhow – or th – he worker for z – on the other table. But anyhow he says to me one day, look in that – on that shelf and – and sometimes we would talk to – I would talk to this boy and I was telling him how the Germans were horrible in **Poland** and all this kind of stu – and – and he – I thought he was gonna – and I told him how I love books and I can't find the books. So I thought he gave me a book. And it turned out to be a piece of cake from his mother, and he says, that's from my mother. And then there – the other guys started making fun, that he was in love with me, so the mother, who was a

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spinner took him away and he was helping her and I got some – and I was helping some other men. But anyhow, sometimes, you know, they would put something for you in the – or give you something. And later on they ask us to come to their house and there was this big – big sign that says fraternization with the Poles is forbidden, don't you ever have them at your table and all that. But the way they went around this, that they would say, we need worker in my house, or in my garden. Because most of these people were in a small farm [indecipherable] and all that, so they needed help. And I heard one woman that, I don't know how I got to talking about smoked fish. And I says oh, I'm dreaming of that smoked fish [indecipherable] smoked fish and **scruts**(ph) and all that. And he says, you dreaming about that? And I say yeah, because I'm hungry. And wa – he said, you know, when we get the smoked fish on rations, then you – I – you come to my house. And I said, didn't you see this where it says no – and they said – and I said, the only way you can get me is to say you need a help to work [indecipherable] every house in **Germany** had this supervisor was a **Hitlerjugend** – I mean a **Hitler** – a Nazi party woman that watched over the houses so nothing happened. So when we heard this woman coming, I always went on the floor, you know, and pretended to be pu – shi – shining it or scrubbing it, whatever it was, you know. But there were people who almost, you know, I was just pure lucky, we all were pure lucky, and that's why I wrote this book, because when my father [indecipherable] this conversation, I said no, not all

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Germans were brutal, cruel and all that. It was the system, but there were some good people, **ah ba-ba-ba-ba**, so that's why this whole book came about, but –

Q: We-We'll talk about the book. This factory was in the town of **Hanewacker**?

A: No, in the ha – **Hanewacker** was the name of the factory and it was the town of **Nordhausen**.

Q: Oh, you were already in **Nordhausen**, okay.

A: Mm-hm, that was in **Nordhausen**.

Q: I see. And did you live in a barracks?

A: We lived in a barracks and the first – when we got there – when I got up in the morning, the first – cause you had to get – there were three stories of beds – I mean, three tiers of beds, I didn't know how to get up on them. Course, everybody got the f – you know, the ground floor. I g – I – there must have been a **[indecipherable]** they just pushed me up and said, now finally. But early in the morning, I wanted to practice coming down, how to – not to trample on the girl under me. And I went to the window and it was somebody closing the window. Th-There were – not the windows, but the –

Q: Shutters?

A: Shutters. And the guy kind of, you know, beckoned me to look out. And he says to me, look – look at the world before I lock you up. And – but I didn't know whether I should say I understand what he is saying or not, because at that time I

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didn't know whether it was good to say you know it, or it's better to be quiet so you know what they gonna do with him. And so I said –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – you know, like that. Turn out that this man was the supervisor of the barracks, kind of physical supervisor, you know. And so we all – he was so good we all called him **Opa**, which means grandfather in German. And so that's – that's how it was and then you had to get up, I don't know how – what time in the morning and **[indecipherable]** for this breakfast. Oh yeah, and there were no toilets, toilets were also in the barrack, a separate barrack. And were not – not toilets, was just a hole in a – you know, kind of a hole in the ground and – but – and the toilet paper were pieces of little newspaper, I read that a little bit, at least it was something.

Q: What about clothes, did they give you clothes?

A: No, we were – oh yeah, you – no, we had our own cl – and thanks God I had my winter coat, which was woolen, and – but they gave us smocks, so that you – whatever you were – you always wore a white smock and a little thi –

Q: And your own shoes?

A: Yeah, own, yeah. Although they did still – although I think they gave us a pair of those wooden –

Q: Clogs?

A: Clogs, yeah.

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Q: Were you menstruating then?

A: I think I was, yeah.

Q: Did they ha – provide you with any supplies?

A: No, no. We just use anything we could. But – or maybe they – no, they didn't. I don't think they did.

Q: And so –

A: We used toilet paper and all kind of stuff.

Q: And how long were you in the chewing tobacco factory?

A: Janu – February – hm, I think it was May, because that's where we got kicked out because in the **[indecipherable]** factory, we were together with the British **POWs**.

Q: They were working in the factory also?

A: Yeah, also. And they were the wounded at **Dunkirk**, so they couldn't do any – they were not supposed to be working anyhow, but they were working doing easy work. And of course we were flirting with them and passing letters and all that.

Q: Did you understand any English?

A: No. And – no. And –

Q: By the way, did you have any connection with your family, I mean letters?

A: Yeah, letters, there were letters and then later on when I – later on when I – well, when I worked for this private ana – f-firm, I used to send the letters through this

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lady. She would send my letters to **Poland** and I would receive the letters to her house.

Q: So you have this correspondence?

A: Yes, I have the correspondence. But anyhow –

Q: You were talking about the British **POWs**.

A: **POWs**, and then we always – we had to wear this **P** on our things and we always – once – if we behave we would be given a Sunday off. I don't know how many, one Sunday a month or something like that.

Q: What di-di – what did your **P** look like?

A: Well, it was a yellow background with a purple **P** on it, and you had to wear it like on your heart, and all that kind of stuff. But of course you can always cover it up with a scarf. So when we went out, we always covered that with a scarf or we ripped it off.

Q: It was sewn on?

A: Yeah, it was supposed to be sewn on.

Q: How did you feel having to wear that?

A: Awful, I mean I –

Q: Why?

A: Why? Because I [**indecipherable**] you feel like you're subhuman or something, was the time to humiliate you, just like there was the Star of **David**, that's just

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exactly the same thing. And – but with at – with it you couldn't go anyplace, and we just found out that – oh yeah, and of course this – this man whom we call **Opa**, next – across the street from that camp, those barracks, there was a – not a restaurant, but kind of joint and he said, will you be coming by? Bring me a beer. And so we would go and bring him a beer and we always – and he would never look at our passes, whether they – cause you had to have a pass. Sometimes we had a pass that was already a month old, you know. But he never – but he told us to watch out for other guys, if there's somebody else, to be very careful and all that. Well, anyhow, we trespassed the law of the camp many a many times and finally we got kicked out of this ammu-ammunition factory, **Schmidt** and **Kranz**, with – which was really working for the metal -- **metalwerker**(ph) which was making those **V-1s** and **V-2s** later on.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**. This is tape number two, side **B**. And you were saying that you were going to have to move out of **Hanewacker** because – what kind of things did you do wrong that made you have to move?

A: Well, in the first place we were going out without a – a – without this **P**, without the – you know, the sign that we are Poles. And then we were flirting with the

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British prisoners and sending and receiving letters and then there were some German women who were corresponding with the [indecipherable] so we – oh, we did them favors too, and all this and well, anyhow –

Q: Did you realize how dangerous that was?

A: No, I have absolutely no idea how dangerous. The first time that I was – this is – we were four people, four girls, and one of them says, what would I do to be in a real restaurant? And so we said, why not? We could, since we have a Sunday off we could get dressed. But we really didn't have good shoes and all that. But since we knew the German women who are flirting with the British, we could – we thought we ca – we could possibly ask them to help us, you know? And so I said, can you borrow – can I borrow a pair of shoes of – from you? And she said, what for? And I said, well, **Janka** has this idea – or **Hedwig** was her na – real name, **Hedwig** has this idea that she would love to go to a good German restaurant and we saw, on our way to church we saw this restaurant. And she says no, you could never go there because that's all this Nazi cra – cream goes to that restaurant, they would immediately recognize a s-stranger. If you really want to go, you can go to some kind of a little café or a **konditori**(ph) which is this – he serves coffee and also serves cakes. And you could go to something like that. There, nobody will notice it – notice you. So – but, I mean, there's no way for you to be successful going to a fine restaurant, but this girl is just dreaming of going to a fine restaurant after all these crummy meals

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and barracks and all this. And so – and then one time – what we didn't know is that **Nordhausen** was this forbidden place where they were making those – before they started making **V-1s**, **V-2s**, there were underground galleries where they making bombers and practicing inventions or, I mean, trying out stuff.

Q: But you were not aware of that?

A: No, I was not aware. So those two girls got a bicycle. Now, there was this bice – I don't know how this happened, but those two girls, since the Germans were so helpful, you know, th-this – oh no, this – some – this – one of the girls says, I would so love to get on a bicycle, and she says, oh you can take mine, the German woman said. And then – then the other one got a bicycle from somebody else and took off the [**indecipherable**] and went. Except that they hadn't been on a bicycle for so long that they were going like this, wa – left, right, left, right, and then the other girl was scared to fall off, so she was just pushing the bicycle. And the policeman saw her doing it, and – and he wanted to help her. And then, while he was helping her, he says, there's nothing wrong with this bicycle, but while she was getting up, she brushed on her – he brushed on her coat and well, they both end up in jail, and they said –

Q: He saw the **P**, you mean?

A: He saw the **P**, okay. And there's the one time we got this idea of going out on the railroad by a train, you know, just to see what it looks like outside of the barracks.

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And we asked this – a-again we made this mistake of asking a ticket to this place where the factory was, because we had no idea where it was. And – and I remember saying two tickets – or sa – no, a round trip ticket. And the guy says – and there was this **[indecipherable]** anyhow, they were – but, this factory didn't want to lose me because I was this interpreter, you know, so I –

Q: So – so he saw the **P** and he did not sell you the ticket?

A: No, they said, of course not. The woman who was selling me the ticket says, I'm sorry, I didn't know they were Poles, they had tickets – I mean, they had **Ps**. I mean, they looked so normal, we didn't think they were Poles, you know. But anyhow, so that was on our – and so this grandpa s – was saying, watch out, this is the last time that I can intervene for you. Because with the bicycle what happened, so she didn't come in, she says, where is she? And I said, well, I don't know, she hasn't come in yet. So she called the police and she says, you wouldn't see a – you haven't seen a Polish girl with a yellow – a yel – a red – Polish redhead on a bicycle? She must me – mus – could have had an accident or some, was there – oh no, there was a Polish redhead on a accident or something. He says no, she's not in accident, she's in jail. And so, but then she came the next morning. But – and – but she swore that she just took the bicycle, that she stole the bicycle. No, no, not what she said, sh-she saw this bicycle in the – outside the barracks and it was a broken bicycle and she fixed it. That's what she lie. And the German woman was kissing her all over that she didn't

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betray her that she give her the bicycle, but – but anyhow, so then th – we already had all this on our index, and they said that's it. And so that's how they push this in the – send us to work. We really know that we are in a camp, and that was the nation –

Q: So you were in **Nordhausen** for a few months –

A: Yeah, and –

Q: – and then you were sent –

A: I mean, it –

Q: – I mean, you were in **Hanewacker** for a few months.

A: Few months, and then I went to this – we were sent to this mashee – machine ammunition factory called **Schmidt** and **Kranz** –

Q: Also in **Nordhausen**.

A: – in it – **Nordhausen**, and we – the factory was in town and the camp was on the outskirts and we had to walk every day. But at that – in the same camp where –

Q: Now, we're talking about summer '42?

A: Yeah, because that was May. Yeah, yeah, something like that.

Q: May, June, July

A: May, yeah. And – yeah, first place the barracks were even worse than they were in **Hanewacker**. And there we were with the – supposed to be with the Russian girls, and let's see, what else? But anyhow, it was horrible.

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Q: What kind of work did you do?

A: Well – well, we were doing all kind of metalwork and all that kind of stuff, you had to put some kind of glasses to protect your eyes while you were doing all this thing. But, since they knew I spoke German, there was this old major who – who st – in a cabin, he was trying out the bullets and all that kind of stuff. And they ute – they used me like a Girl Friday. If somebody was absent and the ammunition could not – you cannot stop this [indecipherable] because everybody was doing his little bit like in a – like in a car factory, you know, that you – everybody does the same work

Q: The assembly line.

A: Yeah, assembly line. And so I would be sent – I would be sent where somebody was missing, so that it goes on. And one day they send me with a letter to this booth, to this mayor – he was a major? Yeah, he was a major, kind of old guy. And of course he had this ear phones on him and was keep on shooting and I didn't know how to get to him, so I just knock and knock and then finally I said, well, is the man of the house here or not? And well anyhow, somehow he heard me and I gave him the message and he – while he was reading this he says, go and get me some coffee in the canteen, they had a canteen there, and biscuits, or some special cakes he wanted. But they didn't have it so I bought him this biscuit and I said, they didn't have anything. And since then he always ask for me to bring him this coffee. So when I was – I was so dumb when – you couldn't believe it. In this – anyhow, since

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we were – it was very important because we would meet the English – we had to – on the certain corner we would meet the English **POWs** and we would exchange the letters. It was absolutely necessary that one of – that one of his runs first and – and in this factory you had to have those time sheets, you know, you have the time clock and you had to do the –

Q: The punching in?

A: Punch in. And I was – I was the fastest was – I was punching in for all four of them. And I was doing this one day, somebody goes [coughs] and I look up and there's this man looking down and he says, the big one would be the better one to do what you're doing. I said, I'm not doing anything, but I was saying in German. And he says, ah, if they catch you that you are cheating their factory o-of time for the four of you, you gonna wind yourself in a worse camp than the **Schmidt** and **Kranz**. And I said, well, she is carrying something. And at that time I don't know what she was carrying, her shoes or something, I don't remember, but anyhow, it saved me. But, couple of months after that –

Q: It – th-thi – when you say the four of you, those were the f – th – your three friends –

A: Four girls.

Q: What were their names?

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A: Well, real names was **Hedwig, Amalia**(ph) and **Aniela**(ph) and what was the fourth one?

Q: You.

A: Oh yeah, was me. Anyhow, so –

Q: And were you still going by your given name?

A: By **Eva**? Yeah. And anyhow, she – she came anyhow, so after a few months after that, they got us this engineer and this engineer with some three civilians or something like that, through the hall. And they stop at my de – I was doing something with those – cutting some stuff. And took off the mask and this guy starts talking to me, the civilian. But instead of as – waiting for my answers, he starts some other – you know, cuts another theme, I mean, asking a different question without wa – waiting for the answer. So he, after awhile he says to me in French, thank you for you're an – thank you. And I say in French **pas de quoi**, you know. And so this engi-engineer says to him, didn't I tell you she speaks good engli – good German? And that's it. Then I'm calling – called in the office and they said, would you like to go and be a kitchen help in this man's – this is a private firm, but they getting concentration camp people and Russian and God knows they had some Frenchmen too. And they need the – a trans – interpreter and they need a kitchen help. Well, to get out of this camp from under this woman that beat me up and all that –

Q: Y-You got beaten up?

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A: O-Oh yeah, because –

Q: Wha – how did that happen?

A: How did that happen? Well, the French who were working on the outside, the French civilians were providing f – if some – if the English wanted to escape – if the English **POWs** wanted to escape, they needed **I.D.** cards, clothing, and all that kind of stuff, and tho – the French civilians who were delivering it. But we got this message that there'll be no delivery tonight. And we had to give this to – somehow let the English prisoners of war know. But we were in contact with the girls who were still staying in **Hanewacker** so that we could telegraph [**indecipherable**]

Q: How were you in contact with them?

A: With whom, with the girls?

Q: Yes.

A: Oh, well, we were coming out to – we – somehow they had their free day too, you know, so we could –

Q: You would meet.

A: Yeah, we would – we would meet in that park. And we didn't know how to do it because this has got to – the Frenchman says it's got to be done tonight.

Q: These are French prisoners?

A: No, no, they were French civilians.

Q: What were they doing there?

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A: Oh, they were not in a camp, they were on the outside. They were slave workers, with th – except that they were not slave workers, the **Vichy** government had to provide a certain number of French laborers ex – and even the French **POWs** never went – had it a little easier too, because they didn't have to march together, they just – they were two or three employed in a bakery, or there was butch – butcher or someplace like that, you know, so they – they were free and they could do things that nobody else could. And so how we gonna do this tonight? At that moment I was giving Russian lessons to this guardsman, cause he wanted to go to the eastern front, so he was – he was – he didn't like the – he was afraid of the camp supervisor, who was a horrible woman, but he said that if I was cau – he was caught with me, giving me this lesson, it wouldn't be so bad because we can always say I was just doing something for him. But anyhow, so when we got this news, I was teaching him, I don't remember was a difficult **[indecipherable]** idiot anyhow, wanting to go to the eastern front. But –

Q: You knew Russian?

A: Yeah **[indecipherable]**

Q: How did you know Russian?

A: How did I know Russian? From the tailor. He – he would give me a – a – no, I would bring my coat to be pressed, or something like that and in order to keep me

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busy he would give me a – a Russian, because he was a White Russian, that's where the White Russians –

Q: This is the tailor in **Kraków**?

A: Yeah, and he – they were White Russians, and so he would give me this Russian newspaper and [indecipherable] I said, I can't read it, and he – every time I came he would give me a different Russian letter to print, and to learn to – so I knew how it was – you know, I could read, but I didn't know what I was reading, but that's besi – the same thing that I did with this German, that I could perfectly typing and writing, didn't know what I was doing. And he – anyhow, was wor – easy words I could tell, I mean, and –

Q: So you're teaching this guy?

A: Teaching this guy, and the girl says finish it, finish it, oh we – I have news for you, you know. And then she says, we've a – got to do something, and aw – for my bad luck, the guy who – who watches the camp for this woman, had to go around to see if all barracks were closed. And he leaves the door open. So I was going to climb though the window anyhow to get to the telephone, and get in touch with these friends who was on the **PWs** line. I mean, he was their helper, you know, like he sometimes will let him go. Or if they went to shop, he would, you know be easy f – on them. And – but this guy leaves this door open, okay? And I call and I say th – call this numb – or – no, how is that I didn't know the telephone numbers? It took

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me quite a while cause I didn't know where to look for the number of the camp. But then I see oh, she's got a whole list there in front of her of the camps, you know. But I – I just called and then I said, may I speak to **Fritz**? And this says,

[indecipherable] Fritz, and I know – oh, you're not the one I want. And I made this mistake saying you're not the one that I want, that was number one mistake. And she slammed the thing down. Then – but since I was having my finger on the number, they know what I was calling. And so she calls – she says, who is this, what's this, and I made a st – absolutely idiotic mistake and I said, well, I just wanted to get in touch with a German soldier I used to know. And that's against all the – so, she calls it, she calls this number, and he says, would you please stop bothering me?

[indecipherable] you – and I think he called her a bitch, but I no – that's what she said anyhow. She says, if you had a boyfriend that was a nice fellow, I wouldn't say anything, but **bah-ba-ba-ba-ba**. And so, how did you get here in – so, and I said well, it was open. And of course that was number three mistakes because the guy was supposed to lock the office, left it open. So f – three things against him, so anyhow, she hit this a bam – a bamboo stick and he says – whacks, whacks, whacks. And anyhow he beat me too, but anyhow – and I didn't know anything would happen because finally fainted, you know, because **[indecipherable]**

Q: You were so badly hurt?

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A: Yeah, but I think that I was so glad that I was hurt, because they would have beaten it out of me.

Q: The information?

A: Yeah, that I knew the German guard who was helping the British. And – and the guy, when we once ask him why, he says, well, one day I may be a British prisoner of war, and – well, anyhow. So that's how I got –

Q: [indecipherable] did you get back to your barrack after you were beaten?

A: I don't know how it happened, but anyhow I found myself der – with girls looking at me and they said – and they says, you didn't say anything, because if you said something you wouldn't be here any more. But I was also [indecipherable] so then this guard, this **Willie** came and brought me some hot tea and some sandwiches from the girls and I couldn't eat anything because my mouth was so swollen. And the kid says –

Q: Did they beat you all over your body, or just your face?

A: I don't mi – my body too, of course. But anyhow, he says, oh this is not [indecipherable] he said, you write – see ya – I think I'm gonna write a letter to the Red Cross, they're not supposed to do things like that. This is not a concentration camp, this is a labor camp. And I say **Willie**, it's not for civilians, Red Cross is only for military and you better not get involved in this. And I said to myself, what on earth – how can this fellow want to be [indecipherable] an **SS** man. But the only

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reason why he was, cause he wanted to go to the eastern front. But anyhow, that's how, after – oh yeah, and this old mayor – major, so used to this coffee business and the biscuits, says where is she, what's the matter? Nobody brings me coffee. And they said well, she is sick in camp. And – what happened to her. And she said, but t – if you don't – we tell you what happened, but don't tell anybody else. But he calls the camp, and the doctor comes and looks me over and he says nah, you're gonna be okay. And nothing on the inside was hurt. So that's how – that's why I already was in sort of a – people were kind of looking out for me, fo – and I was looking for a way out of this. So when this opportunity to be this interpreter in kitch – I didn't know – the girl says to me, are you crazy? You don't know what it means to be a kitchen help. You have to s-s – to peel potatoes and cut [indecipherable] and all that kind of stuff. I said, I'd do anything, I would even make up for that man if I could get out of here. And so that's how I was transferred to this private company, but the private company was working with – because they were in this – that was a building company and they would go to the woods and get these huge stumps of trees, you know, that they would use to support the galleries in the underground factory and all that kind of stuff. So –

Q: So how long were you at **Schmidt** and **Kranz**?

A: I was not very long, because from –

Q: You were a few months in **Hanewacker** –

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A: [indecipherable], yeah, from **Hanewacker**, then at **Schmidt** and **Kranz**, that was like from May to August and in August or September I was already out.

Q: In septem – and you – in September, mm-hm.

A: Mm-hm, so it wasn't long. And I stayed there til the end of stin – til liberation.

Q: Okay.

A: And the reason why he got me out of this **Schmidt** and **Kranz** was because he knew all this Gestapo and he work in this – the – see, the **SS** already was in this building, running concentration camps for profit. So there is somehow – anyhow, he knew enough people to get me out to his firm. Then when the time came to deliver me back to the camp, he had my – he again used his connections not to send me back to the camp, and he really saved my life. And I know that because I read his correspondence while I was cleaning his room, hi-his office and so I know there was a correspondence about when are you sending this – this woman back, or this girl back and all that. Then I said to the children – they had two children, I said to them, well, you better watch – I don't think I will be telling you any more stories, because I have to go away. And they said, oh no, you're not going away, my – my daddy and mommy and doing anything just to keep you here.

Q: What was the name of the family?

A: **Ratzfeldt**(ph).

Q: And his first –

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A: **Karl Ratzfeldt**(ph). That was the name of the firm, **Karl Ratzfeldt**(ph).

Q: That was his name and the name of the firm?

A: Yeah. Well, the guy's name was **Ernst. Karl Ratzfeldt**(ph) was the father's name, yeah.

Q: And did you live with the family?

A: Not with the family, but I lived – gee, where did I live first? I think I lived upstairs, there was a little **[indecipherable]**

Q: You lived in their house?

A: In their house, yeah, yeah.

Q: And you said something about he was making money off of the concentration camps, in what sense?

A: In – cause he was delivering the – no, he –

Q: Supplies?

A: Supplies to – to the camp, t-to – to the **[indecipherable]**

Q: So it was business firm.

A: It was a business firm but they was – they were dealing with what later became **Dora-Mittel –**

Q: **Mittelbau.**

A: – **Mittelbau-Dora**, yeah, mm-hm. So that's how –

Q: And so what were your duties, you were a cook?

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A: Oh my gosh, peeling potatoes and **rutabags**. Cleaning the old lady – his mother's – no, his mother didn't never employ me, she only – his old mother only asked me to carry wood into the house so I could take a bath in her bathtub, because they didn't want to send me to delousing, because that would take a whole day. So there was some kind of shower someplace in the building in this – in this Russian kitchen, so to say for me to take a shower there. So –

Q: Th-They didn't want to send you where?

A: To the delousing.

Q: Oh, to delousing.

A: Delousing.

Q: This is when you first came, you mean?

A: Yeah. And it – so, I was telling her it was too cold in there, you know. She says, well you don't have to get – this old lady says, you don't have to – to go there, you can take a bath in my house. She says, don't tell my son or my – especially my daughter-in-law. And I was – I would be carrying a big basket of – the first time it happened she told me to bring this big basket of wood. And I said, what's happening to her? I mean, she never asked me to do any heavy work, so all of a sudden – well, anyhow, she had the servant and the servant would say – she says, well, that's just a camouflage so you can take a bath. And then her son find that out. And he says, Mother, I know what you're doing. If my wife finds out, there's gonna be a murder

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in this house. Well, she says, we're not gonna tell her. So she di – she didn't, but somehow her mother, the young woman, his wife's – I don't know what it is, I must have – that's another mistake I made, cause she says, you like the old Mrs.

Ratzfeldt(ph)? And I said oh yeah, she reminds me of my grandmother, or whatever, and besides, she lets me take a bath. And then this woman was jealous that she lets me take a bath, so she would say, oh you can take a bath in my thing. But she had the diabetes and I said – I thought that was some kind of sickness you can catch, you know, and I said oh, no thank you, I – anyhow, and I – so –

Q: You're using the wood to heat the water?

A: Yeah. And, you know, it's kind of stove when you use the wood. But anyhow, so it was – was really – it was really ridiculous already. So I cleaned this hi – her mother's house and her – she told her mother, she doesn't know how to do anything, she doesn't even know how to sweep the floor. And I said, excuse me, but I do know. I mean, I used to – I don't know what I told them, but anyhow, I would have done anything just to – so I had to – and then, I had to give the children French lessons. And then, if they had guests, because lots of times, you know, in business like that you entertain a lot, so I had to work overtime. Clean the dishes and all that. Since you in – but she was a fantastic cook, so – anyhow, this old lady had the servant hang up over the house entrance a sign that says God bless this house. Then the young lady would – the wife would come out, take it down and put **heil Hitler**

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sign. And I never off – forgot how she said to me, go and hang it out. And I said, well, I'm small, I might fall down. But anyhow, she said – I was doing it so awkwardly that – that she grabs it away from me, gets on this chair and almost falls over, you know, but i-it was such a funny – and I took it all like an adventure.

Q: How did you celebrate your 18th birthday?

A: Gee, I don't remember.

Q: You were in this house, it's October '42.

A: Oh yes, I didn't celebrate, they celebrated for me. Oh yeah, and I also had to work in a garden. This woman had a garden outside the city, the old mu – the mother of the young woman, and I had to – and this one day – I forgot all about my birthday, and I – sh-she always gives me work, extra work and I said please hurry up, because I'll be late for the Russian kitchen, I have to get the food out. And she always finds this stuff to do for me, do this or that. And I used to pull a little wagon in the middle of the street and it was **loaden** with potatoes or fruits or whatever she got, or [**indecipherable**]. And I get there and she kind of laughs and I look to – go to the Russian kitchen and it says, all food has been given out, it's all done. The kitchen is closed. And I go upstairs and I open the door to this little room, and I can't believe my eyes. This had curtains on the windows and it had like a little table there and there were books on a shelf. And somebody says, happy birthday and there were those – the man and the woman. And that's how I started celebrating my birthday,

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because in – in Catholic countries you celebrate your name's days for the name of your patron saint. And **Adam** and **Eve** are not exactly saints, but – but they on the – their day comes on the 24th of December, that's where **Adam** and **Eve** celebrate their birthdays. And so that's how I cele – I really beautifully celebrated my birth – and then I said to myself, I used to believe in guardian angels, but I knew that when I saw this old lady, I said, he can rest now, because I got another guardian angel, so –

End of Tape Two, Side B

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Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**. This is tape number three, side **A**. And could you explain a little bit what you meant by the Russian kitchen?

A: Well, the **Ratzfeldts**(ph) employed Russians, foreign slave workers. And of course they got different rations than the Frenchmen. The Frenchmen got better food rations than the Russians. And so, since there were so many of them, I think 32 or something like that, they had to – the – they – the old lady and her maid originally were the bosses of this Russian kitchen, but then they couldn't manage it, so his wife became the boss of this kitchen. And of course, her mother was helping her. That was just too big a kitchen for one. But anyhow, I – what I was doing is washing dishes and peeling potatoes and starting the fire and bringing – making the coffee and the sandwiches for the Frenchmen, and then the Russians came and I would give them her breakfast and her br – their bread and then I would sn – all day long cook the so-soup for the Russians. And there was always a different stuff for the Frenchmen, too. And then when the people from the concentration camp came, because we – they – she also employed people in concentration camps and **Dora** was started, he also employed the people from the concentration camps, and – well, anyhow, to make a long story short, he wanted to – I was looking out the window seeing prisoners coming and he says, oh you – you making signs at them, which I

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was, and I said no, I was just watching why they walk so slowly, you know, because through that street there was a columns of – of – of concentration camps people passing by. And I say, an hour or so, oh so, so slow. And he says yeah, I wonder about that too. It takes four of them to lift a – lift a –

Q: Tr-Trunk?

A: Trunk. And of course he says, I – and I say, my – must be hungry. So she says, ask what they getting to eat. And of course I asked a **kapo**, and I asked the cook, because they also had there another cook, cause we just couldn't – I couldn't make it. And he says well, I don't – we – she wouldn't tell us, because she thought it was a catch and the cook wouldn't eat it. And I said, why don't you ask them yourself? Cause they wouldn't tell me. And so evidently – he says he don't have paper, he looks like they're getting enough to eat. And the **kapo** says sure, and all on paper it looks enough, but by the time everybody steals, the prisoners don't get anything, or hardly anything. And so this woman used to get couple of those Russian workers and go into the fields and there [**indecipherable**] around, and she would say w-we can glean your fields. And so – but the people who were leaving the potatoes or the **rutabags**(ph) knew that she would come and pick them up so they always left some extra, and that's how she cooked the soup for – to add it to the prisoners, because the guy said – the **kapo** said, well, she wants us to work. He says, a slave only works when somebody's watching him, but I, of course, didn't tell him that. But I say, if he

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wants us to work more, then he has to give us food. And so that's exactly what the – he was thinking too, you know. That's how they started cooking those soups. And –

Q: Who – who were the concentration camp victims, were they Jews?

A: N-No, ther – ther – I don't know who they were but I don't think they were Jews. I think they were just Poles and French, Poles, Frenchmen and Germans who wer – anybody who was in – in the – in **Mittelbau-Dora**. More – lots of them were people who knew how to – were former technicians or former engineers, or – or they – of course there was just simple labor force, too, but I mean – I-I really never learned who they were, you know. And I don't know whether they were Jews or not. They probably were.

Q: Did you see any Jews when you were living with this family?

A: You can tell, that everybody has a stripped – and most of them were political because they di – they had red triangles. So –

Q: So you didn't see yellow stars?

A: No.

Q: Who – who was **Gise** – **Gisela**(ph) – **Gisela**(ph)?

A: Oh, **Gisela**(ph) was a niece of the boss of – in the lumberyard, one of the bosses in the lumberyard, and they lived on a side house, in the same side where the French slave labor – oh, not slave, they were not slave [**indecipherable**] the French wer – workers were living. And after we got those two Russian girls and they occupied

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those two rooms under the roof, I didn't have a place to stay, so the old Mrs.

Ratzfeldt(ph) said I could live in the room where her son used to live.

Q: In her – in her house?

A: Yeah, in the – and the son was on the eastern front. And so when the family of the boss called **Langer**(ph) came out of **Hamburg**, they were bumped out, he took them in their house. And so the girl, **Gisele**(ph) was staying with me, and that's who it was and we became friends.

Q: I just wanted to read a little bit from your book, and if you could then elaborate on it when I finish –

A: Okay.

Q: – I would appreciate it. **Gisela**(ph) is telling you, you know you're getting more and more over-sensitive, she said. And you answer, "how can I avoid being oversensitive, when I feel as if I'm in a cage, even a big one like the

Rathshear's(ph) lumberyard? Everything is so weird, people are afraid of me and I'm afraid of them and of the surroundings. You don't have to be afraid of all Germans, **Gisela**(ph) was trying to soothe my nerves. Not all are rascals and not all are monsters." And then you say, "anyone can be a rascal or a monster. Give a man a gun, teach him to hate, give him prisoners and a free hand with them and the best man will become a rascal, if not a complete monster at one time or another. Even a

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child will lend his hand to the sufferings of others.” Did you want to elaborate a little bit what you meant by that?

A: Well, it was this obvious, that I’ve seen it happen and that’s how you probably turn or – so-called ordinary people into monsters when they have power over somebody else’s, or they want to f-further a career, or they want to get more money, or they want to just show that they can do with other people what they want to do, that they are this powerful once.

Q: When you were there, were you aware of what was happening in the rest of **Europe**? Did you have a sense of what was going on in the other countries, and with the war?

A: Well, I knew – well one time **Gisel**(ph) and I were – I had a key to the house, and **Gisel**(ph) – I was afraid to cross the yard, so I would open the front door and walk her to the side entrance of that – what do they call that, barracks. And since she was from **Hamburg**, one time we were – we were walking and she was talking and there were two f-flyers, German flyers and they rec – one of them says, hey, there’s a girl from **Hamburg**. And they started talking to her, and of course I was scared to death that they gonna discover me. And – well, anyhow, is – this other one says – I don’t know what I said, and he says, oh, I hate those bastards. And I say, what bastards? And he says oh, those Polish flyers. They don’t care if they die as long as they get some of us down. And that’s how I learned that there were Polish flyers in **England**,

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you know, and I was almost – and **Gisela**(ph) was just shaking, just hope she doesn't say anything to betray who she is. Of course I was so glad all of a sudden I was so – I was so glad that they are fighting, that they are there, you know, and – anyhow, I made it up that somebody is calling us, so we went into the house and I never went on the street again. But **Gisela**(ph) went out with this one flyer and the other one wanted a date, but of course that's how it gets when you wear civilian clothes and a **P**, small, not like the Jewish star.

Q: Uh-huh. So you were still wearing your **P**?

A: Oh yeah, but of course when I went out, y-you put it on – I put it so that it got under the –

Q: Under the lapel.

A: – lapel, and you – then, if somebody was looking, I – well anyhow, about the monsters, the **Ratzfeldts**(ph) used me for many things. I mean, I had this Russian kitchen, that was my main job from five o'clock in the morning til whenever the last dish was handed out and the kitchen was clean, okay? But they also would, if need be, do something – send me someplace. And one time they had to get something from the bank, so they send me to the bank. And in order to get to the bank, since I didn't ride the bicycle and I – and – a-and I couldn't get on the tram – on the streetcar, cause I had this **P**, but a-anyhow, I got to the bank and I – oh yeah, and in order to get on the bus, I took off the **P**, to get on a streetcar. But when I got

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to the bank, I'm waiting and waiting, and I was to come home immediately with this paper that they needed. And the – the bank director comes out and he says to the boy on the door, has this Pole showed up? And he says no. And I say, here I am. And the guy says, oh, but she doesn't have her **P**. And he denounced me, and then that even – that afternoon came two Gestapo men, or **SS**, whatever they are, and wa – that I de – did tell them, the **Ratzfeldts**(ph) what happened, you know, but they were to be punished for letting me walk and going – getting me go to the bank and all that, so all this was hanging together. And so when they came, they said well, either you show her – I don't know what he says – either you teach her a lesson or we do. And that meant that he had to hit me and beat me, you know, so he did hit me, but with **[indecipherable]**. And so after that when they left, you know, I was **[crying]**. And he says – they called me in and I wouldn't talk to them – and he says, what ha – what were we supposed to do?

Q: Wh-Who – who was the one to beat you, your –

A: The **Ratzfeldt**(ph), the owner. And he says that if they would have done, if I hadn't done, they would – they would have done. And he says, and you know the Gestapo. And I said no, I don't **[indecipherable]** don't tell me the story because I know all about you and – and the Gestapo man in **Kraków** and all that. So I didn't have – didn't want to say anything. But I know that he – but that wasn't his case, okay. But – but this guy in the camp too, you know, when he hit me, I mean, it was

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just power, you just – shows how powerful he is, he [**indecipherable**] hit somebody and the somebody has to suffer. So –

Q: Do you think that's true of everyone, or some people resist that urge?

A: Well, ins – under certain sim – circumstan – in circum – certain circumstances, they'll be very few people who are resistant. If you have to fear for your own life, or for your life of your family, or life of your community, you probably would do what they want you to do, if the system was like that **Hitlerian**(ph) system was

Q: Di – when you said something before about you saw some of the concentration camp workers walking along the street –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – did you know what a concentration camp was, or what did it mean to you?

A: Well, of course when they came to us – oh, well, I know that there was – there was supposed to be a p – I knew there were political prisoners and I already know about **Auschwitz** and all that. I know – but I had absolutely no idea what they do in them. And just – they just went to work, and they were dressed differently so that they couldn't escape.

Q: Did you know about the killings that were going on?

A: No, no, because nobody was allowed to talk about it. No civilians – they wouldn't even – I only learned that now from the things that I translated for the museum, from the Gestapo in whatever, that they were not allowed to even write anything about

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what happened. So that nothing – if you – somebody died in a concentration camp, they were just to give orally the information, they were not to write, so that there really were no written accounts about that, except that the Germans could help but being a s – a – how can I say, they loved to write and have everything in order, so [indecipherable] some of them did write this stuff. But they were not allowed to. But I still thin – I think still that they treated German Jews better than they did any other Jews, because someplace I think that they would return the urn with the ashes, even if it wasn't the – the ashes of the ones who died, and they could bury them – I read it someplace in those i – in those – in those testimony, that they could bury them in a Jewish cemetery. So – but they wouldn't do that for any other Jew, just the German Jew.

Q: Di-Did you ever hear about the assassination attempt on **Hitler's** life?

A: Oh yeah, everybody heard about that, you know, and –

Q: What was your response, or your reaction?

A: Gosh, how could he [indecipherable] now, in the first place, I didn't know – I thought everybody was for him, see, because openly the newspapers, the propaganda and nobody would say a word against, except that old lady with this **heil Hitler** sign that she didn't want to have over her house. But I – I ask this lady, why is it that they want to assassinate him if he is getting so much land for him and so all this forced labors and all that, and bring so much money into the thing, why would they want to

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a-assassinate him? And he says well, because he's not doing the right things. And Mr. **Ratzfeldt**(ph) said, I've – because – she was blaming the generals for losing the war in **Russia** and all that kind of stuff, that's why the generals got into it. And – but the ran – radio was full of **Goering** – not **Goerings**, but **Goebbels** saying that God saved **Hitler** and he has – he's – has to have a s – God's help to let him stay alive and all that, otherwise he would – but then when they started – except that when they started hanging up the people who were doing it, that was at the same time that I think the **Warsaw** up – ghetto uprising was going on, I think, so that –

Q: That was spring of '43 was the **Warsaw** ghetto.

A: No, then that was the Polish uprising, yeah.

Q: That's what I thought, yeah, in '44.

A: '44, and they were all – the newspaper were full of – so **Hitler** got kind of lost someplace.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: And they didn't want to advertise this idea that there is somebody against him, so that they wouldn't – wouldn't all come together and get rid of him.

Q: Right, right.

A: So they – they publicize all this uprising and he was kind of on the back burner then.

Q: Did you used to hear his speeches on the radio?

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A: Yeah, I wa –

Q: What were your – what were your impressions?

A: Impressions – I hated him already, you know, my impressions weren't that favorable, he was a good demagogue and sa – I saw him personally, too. He couldn't have a per – victory parade in **Warsaw** because **Warsaw** was bombed, so he had a wi – victory parade over **Poland** in **Kraków**, and he was marching there. And people were su-supposedly pushed through the streets and they were – so he would see people lined up and all that kind of stuff.

Q: Were you lined up to see him?

A: Oh, I know because I was upstairs on the – in the – on my uncle's house, looking down from the window.

Q: You didn't want to go downstairs?

A: Are you kidding? Are you kidding? Having seen so many people – of your own people dead, city ruined and all that? Literally – somehow we knew he is gonna lose, the minute the Americans came in. **Gisela**(ph) said, it's gonna be over soon. My uncle said, minute the Americans come in, it's gonna be over. And it was over.

[indecipherable]

Q: So you spent the rest of the war years doing this same work with this family?

A: Oh yeah.

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Q: Any other experiences there that you want to talk about, while you were working there?

A: Well, really nothing. Was a normal sa – I just loved the old lady, and –

Q: What was her name?

A: **Elsa**(ph). And she was from **Berlin** and she hated **Nordhausen**. She married this ma – she hated little towns and she didn't like the wife of the son because she married – she had already planned his marriage and he didn't marry somebody she wanted to marry. So I think I was really getting the better of this quarrel between the two of them, but they of course – they – they had – they had this – they had this aunt who lost her fiancé in the first war – war, and she was working for the Red Cross. And she just stopped working there, and I said, wh-why – why? And she says – I says, cannot see how young people can go to war so happy and laugh. Cause she saw this – she was handing coffee to the soldiers, and of course they were waving and shouting and singing. And he says, they don't know where they're going. They don't know that they're going to their death. And she – she says, I just can't take it. I just can't take young people being butchered. So I, to this day I all – the father was discovered after the war with – oh, with an English revolver or something, and of course that was in East **Germany**, and so he was in prison and then he was sent to **Siberia**, where he died. And nobody told me – everybody knew, and I – he was accused of having killed me, by some woman there. And his mother, who knew that

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I was alive, didn't say one word for me to come to his help. After all, this guy set me free, instead of sending me [indecipherable] shot this pistol and that kind of stuff. But she – there were Gestapo men in the house, and – and maybe they didn't want any witnesses and so – so she got out and – but she took the stu – children, and she told me run, run. And –

Q: No-Now – now, wait a minute. We're talking now about liberation?

A: No –

Q: No.

A: – we're talking about before that – well, it was my liberation, because I –

Q: Okay, da – can you tell it – describe that.

A: Well, the town was bombed and they – these people had a ha – house in the woods, and whenever they could escape they would go to this house in the woods. And of course, where everything was bombed, they – they moved to the woods. And I used to – and I remember that I helped them carry out the – he had a – he had there a truck and he used to take the things from the house and from his mother-in-law to the – course, his mother said I'm not moving, I'm staying here. And while I was – I brought the things into the house and I think I was gonna – a-and they were those SS men or Gestapo men, I don't know, they had uniforms, they were sitting there. And – or rather, there were – there were the Gestapo men who already changed their clothes, but I knew them. And evidently, I don't know, I was nervous so I don't

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know what happened, but anyhow all of a sudden he – they were talking, blah, blah, blah and then he says to me, ah, leave what you're doing there and come out. But he also calls the children, the girl and the little boy. And we go outside and I see him with his revolver. And I said, my gosh, is he gonna shoot me or something? And he said, now, you run and run straight to **Nordhausen** so you can see my mother, because I promised I'd bring you back, or you come back. And – but watch it. And I couldn't believe it, so I didn't run. And he says run, so my bullet doesn't get you. And he b – of course, he shot in the air you know, and I run. And that's how – and nobody – nobody told the police, or the – or the whatever they had, **NKVD**, or whatever they had in those days, that I was alive, that **[indecipherable]** his mother must have hated him, or whatever there was, you know, they were scared for their own lives, so that's why they helped this man. And I would have told them he was good to the prisoners and he helped to feed them and – and all that, but – I could have been a good witness for him.

Q: So you ran back to his mother?

A: Yeah. And – and so – and while I was going to his mother, I didn't get there yet, I saw this big American tanks coming in. And the first soldiers that were coming were the black men – I mean the – the f – they were black, the – course they used them mostly you know, just the big trucks and all that. Well, but anyhow, so here they were and they're laughing and throwing candies and all that. And I – and I don't

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know but – I don't know whether I was such a – I was really awful. I must have put the **P** on my thing. But anyhow – and they were shouting **Polski, Polska** [indecipherable]. I pick up the candy and I go, because I was so worried his mother and this maid and her servant will be suffering, you know, the American occupied, because there were few houses still standing and one – theirs was one of them. And I get in there and there sit these four American young soldiers and she speaks English with them. And they giving her, I don't know what they were eating, or something like that, so I didn't have to worry about that, because I was worried to death, you know, what on – on earth's going to happen to those two old women. There was a third one, she was a nurse, too, and she was the nurse to this old lady, but she also was a nurse in a gynecologist's office or something. So all these three old ladies, I said oh my God, what's going to happen to them? Nothing happened. They were taken care of by the Americans, so –

Q: You still didn't speak English, right?

A: No.

Q: So then what did you do when you saw them?

A: Well, when I saw them – oh, I spoke fren – oh yeah, now there was a Polish soldier – I mean, an American who was Polish, you know, and he came looking in too, looking for girls. And he has this, you know, a wedding band on his hand. I said, oh [indecipherable] that's how married men are. Well, anyhow. And th – but there

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were people who far – couple of them spoke French and the rest was in sign language.

Q: Did you feel liberated, and –

A: Oh, I did, my goodness gracious, the minute I saw that truck, I felt liberated.

Q: What was that like for you?

A: You can't really describe it. You can absolutely not describe it. I'm so happy that I lived through and I – and I got to this – that this moment has come. See ya – that time you didn't count how many people had to die to bring you freedom. You didn't think about a grave of the American soldiers, of the ones who have fallen or wounded, and – and they was blinded or would spend years and years in all those hospices. You don't think about that, all you think is about yourself and how they brought you freedom, but at what cost, you know? Y-You didn't even think about it. But that was a glorious moment. Just the fact that you survived and that you feel this – course we all knew **America's** gonna win anyhow, so yeah, especially with **Gisela**(ph) you know, who was saying me – I'm telling you, once the American comes – come, the war is over. And it was [indecipherable]

Q: How did you know that once the American – what did **America** mean to you?

A: Well, they always meant they'd always bring you freedom. In the first World War they brought freedom, and there was President **Wilson**, who – who ha – with his points, he made independent **Poland** and all that. And so of course, I mean, **America**

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was always like a land of freedom, land of liberty and y-you knew that once Americans get here, **Hitler** will be finished. Of course you never knew that for sure, because he had developed that **V-1s**, **V-2** sooner, you never know how it would have ended.

Q: Then what did you do?

A: What did I do? Well, I –

Q: Did you stay with the older women?

A: No, I couldn't stay because the – immediately the Americans issued a – Americans issued a proclamation that all **POWs**, foreign **POWs** and slave workers have to report – guess where? To **Dora**. They – out of **Dora** they made this transit camp for all liberated people, so that's how I really knew that gas chambers and hospital and – and that's where I really learned about what was going on in **Dora** before. And I stayed there.

Q: What – what did that do to you when you realized what – the extent of what was going on?

A: When I first [**indecipherable**] thank God it wasn't me, because that's what you always think, you know? And then there's this – this enormity of this crime was just hards to grasp. And –

Q: Did people talk – or did you talk about it with the other Polish –

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A: When they – they talk. And – and there were – you know, wherever you went there was something, see what we're together with – there were still the s – s – the survivors of the concentration camps were the people who were sick and they couldn't finish them off, they left them in this hospital, or took some of them inside the galleries and that's why the people from **Nordhausen** could not escape the bombing and be saved, because they didn't want to say what they were doing in those underground tunnels, and the – all the dead people there. And so they had dead on both side. And it's – it – it's really hard to believe, you know, and you just say how come me? How – how come I am alive and the many thousands died, you ask yourself, what am I for here, why have I been left? And you have this question, you know, what am I gonna do, how am I gonna repay all this liberty? That's why I always give to the – to the American war veterans, the blinded veterans and all this. And that's probably one of the reason why I work here, too. Maybe to atone for the things that I could have done and didn't do to save the Jews, that I could. And I may be – of course, I was too young to do anything, but I re – could have done more. But then you – you wonder, how come I, and I bet you every survivor is asking the same question. They say, what does God have in store for me to have let me live?

Q: So then you – you went, and how long did you stay in this transit camp?

A: Oh, let's see, that was the year – it ga – was the co – camp was called **Heilbronn**. Those were the displaced persons who were not from – oh no, and then in **Dora**

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there was a – here is a convoy transport going to **Poland**, and those of you who don't want to go to **Poland** can go west. And of course that was the time where, from what I have heard from the Russians, an the Ukrainians, how horrible Russian and the Soviet system is, I said, even worse than the Germans, than the Nazis even at war – I mean, they are just as the Nazis if not worse. And so, not going to go into any Soviet occupied **Poland**, so I decided then I'm going west.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristine Belfoure**. This is tape number three, side **B**, and you were talking about how you didn't want to go back to **Poland**, that you wanted to go west and that – and I had asked you about your parents, did you not want to go back to be with your family.

A: All my – oops – no, I've – I didn't even think about my family at that time, especially under the Soviets, I wasn't going to – to fall into the clutches of any – of any system like that any more, so I just wanted to go west. And I went west, and I went to the – this **DP** camp in **Heilbronn**. I work for them in the office there. I really started peeling potatoes again in a kitchen, but then there was somebody coming through the kitchen, and somebody must have told them that I know languages and all that kind of stuff, and they were asking for my name, and I pretended I didn't

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hear anything, cause I wasn't going to be involved in anything else. And then somebody pointed to me and says, that's she and says what are you doing here peeling potatoes when we need help in this Polish office? I mean, the Pole – they have Germans and Dutch and all that, and Lithuanians and Latvians, but the Polish liaison officer has no help. So what are you doing here? And so I got out and started working for them. And then the **UNRRA**, the – the ur – United Nations Refugee organization, the director said to me, what would you have been doing if you were – if there hadn't been no war? And I said oh I'll be – probably finish my – going to the university. And he says, well you know what? The **UNRRA** is paying for education of candidates who are coo – acceptable. Would you like to go to school? And I say, yeah, I would like to go to school. But I still stayed in **Heilbronn** and I would go to – I went to the – to the ga – **Johns** – to **John – Wolfgang Goethe** University in **Frankfurt**. And – but this going back and forth was just a little bit too much, so I got a room. I was going there for food, because I already had the room. I got a room assigned, but I n – I need f-food.

Q: You had a room assigned in **Frankfurt**?

A: Yeah, but I had to have food, too, so I was going back and forth to **Heilbronn**, getting this food. And then somebody in school sa – I was so sleepy and I said, geez, I just hate –

Q: How far was the distance?

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A: Well, I just don't remember how far, but was quite awhile, because it was –

Q: By train, or bus?

A: By train, by train. And somebody says, well, you don't have to go, you can join our camp, the displaced person camp in **Darmstadt** or someplace, and we go once a week – oh yeah, and I belong to a Polish fraternity. And they said, the hola – we – one or two people from the fraternity all go every week and they bring the food for everybody and then you don't have to go and take – do this journey. So that's why I quit this camp in **Heilbronn** and came to stay in **Frankfurt** to – til the time came to emigrate.

Q: How did that come about?

A: Well, everybody – I – I think it's the Catholic charities – no, Catholic refugee – Catholic –

Q: Relief services?

A: Relief. That's where yo-you signed up and they were looking for places for you. And I got this sponsor, and I was a domestic. Because that was the fa – the people who said they were from **Wellesley, Wellesley** hills. And somebody said, oh, there's this famous school in **Wellesley**. And then – there is absolutely no way for me to **Wellesley** on my domestic salary and besides, no time. And [indecipherable] is thinking of going to school, and I get this letter from my old friends from **Saint**

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Louis and they all go to school and this and that and they say, well, why don't you come to **Saint Louis**, maybe you can get a job here and –

Q: Okay, wa-wait a minute, let's back up a little bit. So you're in **Germany** and the Catholic Relief Services arranges for you to go to the **United States**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And when did you leave?

A: Oh, I think it was 1950.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Was ni – was June, I think, 1950 [**indecipherable**] June.

Q: So you are almost 26 by now, 26 years old?

A: Yeah.

Q: When you were in **Frankfurt**, what were you studying?

A: Oh, I really stu – I want to have medicine, because in the camps everybody said only mechanics and doctors stay alive. But since I kept fainting when I smelled this formaldehyde, the doctor said you're not – you'll never make it in medicine, go into **philology** or something like that. And so I went to study rome – romance languages.

Q: In – in **Frankfurt**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And did you help out any of the chaplains in – in the **DP** camps?

A: Oh yeah, that was before there, that was – that was right after the liberation.

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Q: What – what did you do then?

A: Oh, I just went with them from lo – to – right after the liberation there was still some of the **Nordhauser**(ph) – **Nordhauser**(ph) concentration camp inmates living, but they were sick and they were dying, so the chaplain said to go and talk to them, give them the last unction, or whatever.

Q: What was your ra – role?

A: I was just translating. And so that's what I was doing. And I really liked that work, to tell you the truth.

Q: Why – why did you like it?

A: Well, because we're helping people and just – it was – was really – it was really so touching, where these dying almost people would grab the soldiers hands, you know. And they were dying even more than did before because the soldiers were giving them candy and stuff like that, and here was somebody who didn't eat for 10 days, and you can imagine what happens. And then they're – they were not allowed to give them anything. But just to see them there, you know, and being able to shake the liberators hand, it was so touching and those poor kids didn't know what to do and they got kissed on their hands, and it was – it was just – it was hard to describe the feeling that's – that you had. A-And how it was glorious in a way and it was so sad in the other. And – but then the Americans took the ones who were still alive to different houses and hospitals and all that, so the ones got saved. But there was not

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much to be done to the dying ones except to give them a benediction and that's it. There must have been Jewish prisoners too, because there were rabbis still. I mean, there were a chaplain – I mean, what do they call them, rabbi chaplains? Mosaic faith. Mosaic [indecipherable]. Yeah, because I remember a couple of times you know, they would – they all had some things that they would rec – be recognized, you know. And they were just looking at the prisoners and just shake their hands, so there must have been Jewish prisoners too.

Q: This was in **Dora**?

A: No, that was already in **Nordhausen**.

Q: In **Nordhausen**.

A: **Nordhausen**, cause **Nordhausen** considers – **Nordhausen** was considered – they – they call it vacationland, but what they did, out of **Dora** they sent the prisoners who were dying, cause they didn't have enough room there, so they would send them to **Nordhausen Boelcke Kaserne** where they just drop them there and wait til they die. And they were na – they were not counting the dead, they were counting the living. And that's how the Americans came in, na – alls you see is this row of dead people, you know, because that's how the – in this German order they always lined them up very nicely, and so that's when the German – when the Americans came and saw it.

Q: And you saw this ba – **Kaserne**?

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A: Yeah, yeah. I did see it. But that was already after the Americans came, when – when the Americans came, when they started. The first thing that told me about – who told me shi – this Mr. **Ratzfeldt**(ph) came back and he was awfully – and I say, what's happening to him? And I said to **Gisela**(ph), why don't you go and see what happening in this **Boelcke Kaserne** in **Nordhausen**. And she told me, well, there's nothing happens, they're not counting the dead, they're counting the living, cause they have these rows of – of dead people lined up. And that's what – she says, that's what he saw. And of course, somebody's gonna have to pay for it. So that's how –

Q: And so you, you yourself went with the chaplains to these –

A: Yeah.

Q: – to this **Kaserne**. And –

A: Yeah, wherever were the – the ones who were still alive. But I wasn't going to say that I have no foreign languages, you know, but then I said – I remember the last time I li-lied, I said dear God, forgive me all the lies and bad things I have done. But when the war is over, I shall not lie – I shall lie no more, steal no more or deceive anyone. And then when the – oh yeah, and while I was liberated I see this man with all these five suitcases on him. And he was the dentist, a friend of the sa –

Ratzfeldt(ph). And he used – and he had my – he healed my tooth. And he said to me, now if it still hurts, come the next day because I am leaving. And ho – he left and he comes back and I say, I help you. And I hardly could lift what he was

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carrying, is all this stuff that he used, false teeth and all. And I get to his house and there's Americans standing in front of it, and he says **raus krauts** and all that. And I say, is there anybody who speaks Polish, but the – no, is there anybody who speaks French? And they say yeah, there's – and he says, **voulez vous coucher avec moi?** And I say, and I don't want that kind of French, I want somebody who I can tell him. And then comes – they call up this Polish guy – I mean, Polish American. And said, what do you do with this kraut? And I said, this is a dentist who is a very good **[indecipherable]** slave to – we didn't call our slave laborers then – to everybody, very fine workers and – and – and – and all she wants to do is put his tools downstairs. And he says no, this is a headquarters, cause there were few houses there were still standing. We don't want that. And I say, but he was such a good man and all that. So anyhow, so he call the sergeant or somebody else, and he says, now look in his junk. So he look in his thing, and he says okay, you can tell him he can get that – put that downstairs. And then get out of here. So he put down his dentistry stuff. And he says, and precisely who are you? You a kraut too? And I said no, I am Polish. He says, well, show me a – show me a **I.D.**, and I say, I don't have any. How do we know? You could be a kraut hiding, pretending you are Polish. And the dentist says, oh I know, in my office there is a – I have an index card and it tells there, you know, a nationality. Well, the guy says to me, well next time, don't go anyplace without an **I.D.** And I said, where I'm going to get any? And that's when

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he said, well, there's gonna be a camp in **Dora** for all slave laborers and I have to go there and get an **I.D.** That's how it happened then.

Q: Hm.

A: And that's it.

Q: So then, skipping forward to 1950, y-you had these arrangements made for you to go to –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – the **United States**.

A: And I – and I could choose, since this was international refugee organization, which meant that they both – that they had to ship from the navy, but everybody on that board had to work to maintain the ship. So if you were on one of them, you had to work. And was a cra – and I said I'm never again going to know any language, I've seen enough of it and –

Q: I-I-I d-don't mean to interrupt, but I wanted to ask you, you were in **Germany** for five – a-almost five years after the war.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: How did that feel to be in **Germany**, knowing that the Germans –

A: Awful, that's if – i-it felt –

Q: – knowing that the Germans, you know, began the war and so –

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A: Yeah, well, it felt like a land of egy – **Egypt**. A land of slavery and you want to get out of it. That's how ca – I can – that's the best comparison I can give you. And so that's how I got out.

Q: Did you keep trying to get out during those five years?

A: Oh yeah, everybody did.

Q: What kinds of things did you do?

A: Well, wif – really, to begin with, everybody signed up that she wants to emigrate. But then, you know, there were so – no, the Catholics really had a – Polish Catholics had a very little chance of getting anyplace. There was this Lutheran, this organization, Quakers and this and that, you know, so they – the Quakers took care of the – but the Quakers were wonderful, took care of the sick and old and tuberculosis people. But there was very little – that's why I only got to be a domestic, because that's the only job that was possible, and I only got it because the parish priest, or the pastor of that parish was a fa – Father **Lloyd**. And Father **Lloyd** was very active in – during [**indecipherable**] times and was a very great friend of the Poles, and he convinced his parish that they ought to at least take one Catholic refugee, and that's was me.

Q: When did the enormity of the number of victims become a – when did you realize, or when did you become aware of the enormity of the millions upon millions?

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A: Well, of course in the first place it's – you know, everybody was talking about it and – but then really, the enormity of it I found here in the Holocaust museum.

When you see all the documents of the Gestapo, **[indecipherable]** Gestapo and **[indecipherable]** Gestapo and **Posner** Gestapo, and **Warsaw, Kraków** and all that. That's when you really know how many perished.

Q: So in 1946 and '47 you still weren't aware, and '48.

A: I wasn't aware of the massacre. I was aware that people died. And of course I – once I saw – I saw the **Nordhausen** and – and I really learned that in **Dora**, how many died and – and in **Nordhausen** really, but during that time I had practically no idea what was going on. So it was after the liberation that I really, I mean now discovered the enormity of that – of the war.

Q: So now you're getting to go on the boat to come to the **United States**.

A: Yeah, and on the boat we fe –

Q: What was the name of your boat?

A: **Blatchford**. General **Blatchford**. And it's – I had to choose, since I spoke these languages, they asked for a translator. And –

Q: But you knew English by now?

A: Well, a little bit, because I went to school in **Frankfort** where I learned English. And – not very good, but I knew it. And when I – yeah, I was supposed to be a cabin leader. And to me a cabin is like four people all – I was once on a – on a ship and it

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had a cabin, I thought it was four people [**indecipherable**]. And I come down, I says what is this? I think it was kind of s-six year – I forgot the numbers where you were supposed to be, but after al – this navy man says down, down, down. And I go down, it's the last floor. And he says the number, I forgot what it was, 68 or something. And I see this man coming down and they were tol – they told us never to have anything to do with the navy men. The sailors, I mean. And I say, what are you doing here? Not supposed to be with the civilians. And he says, and what are you doing here? And I said, well, I'm looking for a cabin here, and I never – he says, can't you even read? And I say – I said, but this isn't a cabin. I says, it's huge. I mean, it was a room, and he says, what do you expect, this is army ship, and carried soldiers to **Europe**. And I'm telling you, it was as big as from here over there. Next to the machine room, with all this noise. And I said, I was supposed to work here for somebody. And he said, oh, so and so, and he looks at me, says, well, you're just too small. And I say, well. And then I say, excuse me, but I'll go up. I says, I don't want this one. He says, well, if you'd rather clean toilets. And I said, what do you mean? He said, well, cause you have to work at something. You either work for me, or you work toilets, or cook in a kitchen. But he didn't say cook in a kitchen, he said wash the toilets. And that's how I start and I later married this guy, but anyhow, that's how I got here, on this **Blatchworth**(ph). And of course everybody was throwing up. That's how I really got to know him, because everybody was throwing up and I was

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throwing up too, and he says, here's black coffee and a apple. And I was doing nothing, but he would bring me this apple and this black coffee. Because there were lots of kids in this big room where I was this leader, you know, there were mothers, fathers who – no, there were only mothers, but – men weren't supposed to be coming there, but they were coming still. And I – and – and they were all lying around and the poor kids, there was nobody to take care of the kids, cause the mothers were all throwing up. For some reason, kids didn't. And so it was my job to do something with the kids, so – and he was helping me doing that, so that was – maybe that's why I liked him.

Q: How long did the voyage take?

A: I think a week, it was – oh, eight days.

Q: Was it fi-filled with all d-displaced people?

A: Only displaced persons, except I told him that on my – that I would take this job with the two – there were 260 women, I think, or something like that, was a huge number. But I said, I take this job if you don't put any Polish people in there.

Q: Why did you say that?

A: Why? Because they were Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Russians, who else?

Q: Any Jewish people?

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A: There were Jewish people, but they got out on account of the food. They'd insisted that they have their own, they don't be mixed with other people because there will be the trouble with kosher kitchen.

Q: S-So they didn't live in your cabin?

A: No, they didn't live in my – an-and no Polish people lived in – I mean no – no Poles lived in my cabin.

Q: Why?

A: I was with Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, because I could never be accused of being –

Q: Favorite?

A: Yeah, to favor somebody of my own. So that way I avoid all the trouble.

Q: But that wa – that was your idea? Or it was –

A: It was **[indecipherable]** idea, it was my idea. And they were always complaining, the child was always complaining to me that – that the Jews were calling them worse than the Nazis, because everybody brought like little cucumbers, or like sour pickles, or something like that because – a-and a herring, cause somebody told them that when you travel and gets – you don't get seasick if you have those things on you. And you know that once you were in in a camp, you know how to stash things away. And of course on a moving ship, a plague can just develop in no time, so we're trying to get rid of this stuff.

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Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: And of course can you imagine when oh – you got – sometimes you paid for the stuff you had and you had to get rid of it. So lots of times they would say oh, you're just worse than the Nazi **[indecipherable]**

Q: Had you come into contact with Jews in – from 1945 to '50 in the **DP** camps?

A: Let me see. Oh yeah, because I work in this Polish consulate and – and i – Jews, in order to be – emig – to emigrate any place had to – I was in the legal office of the consul, according to those languages again, and in order to emigrate someplace you had to have a birth certificate. And in order to have a birth certificate, you had to have some kind of official – official place to ask for it for you. And so that's how I ca-came in touch, cause they were **[indecipherable]** Jews were from **Poland**, so the ones who survive need a birth certificate, or –

Q: But did you socialize or you just met them?

A: I only socialized with one, because in school, at the university there was nobody and oh well, later on when I got to the stateside, but not in **Germany**.

Q: No, no, I meant in **Germany**.

A: No, in **Germany** I **[indecipherable]** more friends who – whom I know from this – from the fraternity. Although they – any Polish citizen could belong to it, but they had their own. But the rabbis took care of it that nobody gets contaminated by

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[indecipherable] take this out because I don't think that's [indecipherable] was very nice.

Q: So, as you say, the Jewish people had their own social groups.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so – besides the – what is this, Joint?

Q: It's the Joint Distribution Committee.

A: The Joint Distribution Agency, they were really supe – they were really helping them in the displaced camp – camps, you know, and –

Q: [indecipherable] you were black market in th-the di-displaced camps, **DP** camps?

A: No. I wasn't aware of it, but there must have been, and I'm quite sure that there was. No, because lots of times I went to the police to translate something, you know.

Q: Did you get paid for this, or this was just –

A: No.

Q: – to get room and board?

A: Room and board.

Q: So you – you – did you have any money with you when you were on the boat coming to the **United States**?

A: I think I had 30 dollars.

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Q: Given by the Catholic charity, Catholic relief?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: How long was your voyage?

A: I think was seven days, was **[indecipherable]** it was awfully – I know it was – the sea wasn't very quiet and I was oops, all the time.

Q: And where did you dock?

A: **Boston.** In **Boston.**

Q: And – and – and who met you?

A: Well, nobody met me. I was left there stand – sitting on my suitcases. Everybody else after we – the ships we-went – our suitcases were taken down and everybody else was gone and I was still sitting there. And here comes this girl from the Catholic charity and she says, give me the telephone number of your sponsor and I will call him to see what happens. Well, what happens is that they send out a chauffeur to pick me up. But – oh, oh finally she says to me, this girl from the Catholic charities who was – spoke Polish, she took me to the little red bar or restaurant in the place there, and she left me there while she went to call. And she says, well, they said that they – and she calls again, cause nobody came to pick me up. She says, but he is there, we send a chauffeur there. Well, anyhow, all I knew about American chauffeur is from American films, you know, they look in those uniforms and all that. And – but then I see this guy coming back and forth, you know, civilian, and

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then she talks to somebody at th-the counter there. And then he comes to me, and I said, oh, must be it, and he says – I say, are you from the **Cronins**? And he says yeah. And I say, you don't lo – well, obviously you don't look it, but anyhow – he says – she said to me, you don't look like a greenhorn, or whatever he called me, you know? He expect me to have a babushka on or something like that and here I was, pretty we-well dressed, you know, kind of elegant, cause I always liked to dress up, no matter where I was, which I was sorry for, because it was a dusty. But anyhow, he went home to change, to look elegant. That's why it took – has taken him so long to pick me up. And I finally got to the **Cronins**.

Q: And who was this family?

A: Oh, they owned an apartment ho – house in – in **Waltham**, and the man was an invalid. And they were an elderly couple and they had two sons and one daughter, and they needed help. And I was very deceived because I signed the paper that I will not take a place of an American, a working place, a job from an American. But when I got there, there was this black cook, or whatever, and after a few days she says, well, I want to show you everything, how you – what to do in this house, because I'm leaving, sadly. And I said, what for? And she says well, because you are here. I almost dropped dead, cause I thought I'd be dragged to jail for taking away a work from – workplace from her, you know. But anyhow, that was in – one surprise and the second one I say was **Sarah**, when I'm in **Boston** I'm gonna come and visit you,

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and she gave me the address. And then when I showed it to this – in the meantime I – this Polish Catholic charities person, she says oh no, you can't go there, that's a j – that's a black quarter. And I said, so what? I had no idea about this black situation. So that's another story.

Q: Tell me what it was like for you to get off the boat and put your foot on American soil?

A: Well, I was still – it wasn't very s-sa – secure, because I was still a little –

Q: Seasick?

A: – seasick, so at that time –

Q: Did you really realize you were in the **United States**?

A: No, I didn't. I didn't and especially because – and I was especially worried because when we got on the ship these people were say – some of the sailors were saying, oh there's another bunch taking American jobs. And here I come to this house, when I take this job away from this – oh, so she was old and she could have re – she said she was happy to retire now. But this whole idea, you know, that I really didn't feel – after awhile, of course I came to myself, you know, I went straight and I slept, I don't know, I think 12 hours after that, I – but I had to start working again, so it wasn't – I didn't realize really that I was here til – til I started going to school in **Saint Louis**, and then we – in school we were together, we were talking about democracy and all that in this history class, and we were at some Swiss

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– we had some students from **Switzerland** and they said, oh there's no democracy in **America**, you d – you treat the blacks like dirt, and all that kind of stuff, and I said, well it's easy for you to say because you don't have any – you don't have your – you're foreigners. And well, to tell you the truth, isn't polical – socially it wasn't what I expected. For some reason I expected democracy to be, you know, some magic that makes people happy.

End of Tape Three, Side B

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Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**. This is tape number four, side **A**. And before we go on about your experiences in the **United States**, I just wanted to ask you another question about the **DP** camps. Did you have any contact with Jewish survivors, and if so did you feel any connection to them, or did you see any difference?

A: There were absolutely no Jewish **D** – displaced persons because they were in a separate camp. And so – but I knew some friends that once in awhile I would meet, but they were just in different locations and ju – only once in awhile I would see them, they would come and visit, but that was [indecipherable] or I go and visit. But otherwise we had no – since we all had to have passes to leave the camp, you couldn't leave the camp without the pass and all that, and you have to prove why you have to go and all this sort of thing. And I always lied and I said, well, I have to see family, I found somebody, and all that kind of stuff. But otherwise you just wouldn't get the pass. So I – it was difficult really to – to – to go by train or anyplace like that. It was easy, it was like another camp except that it was so called free camp, but it was also very limited. Course you weren't afraid somebody is gonna shoot you, but I mean, i-it – it was a difficult life. It was a li – it was a – it was like in **Egypt** waiting for getting out into the free land.

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Q: To the promised land. But when you did see those few Jewish survivors, did – did – could you tell the difference between the Jewish survivors and the non-Jewish survivors?

A: Well, I never could tell the difference between Jewish people anyhow. I mean, yeah, I lived with them and they didn't look like any difference to me. Of course I knew that her father use – had long beard and [indecipherable] all that and that – you know, like Hasidic Jews. But young people I could never tell the difference, cause especially in school we were all in uniforms. And you couldn't tell, I mean it's just absolutely **unpossible** for me to tell the difference.

Q: Now let's move ahead. You said you came to the **United States** in 1950 and you did say what you were doing in those years from 1945 to 1950, we went through that already. But did you try to get out earlier? Why did you, in a sense, wait until 1950? Was that the first time you were allowed to leave?

A: No, I – that's – that was the first occasion and I wouldn't have even gotten out because while I was the – after the war I worked for a friend, rather a boyfriend of my aunt was working for the Polish consulate in **Frankfurt am Main** when I was working to school, and somehow I met him on the concert, and we were – were coming down from some concert and there was this queen of **Holland** or **Belgium**, I didn't – don't remember which one, and she's the – was the woman with this fat legs and we were laughing at, saying that's she got a piano legs. And there was a bunch

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of Polish officers walking behind us. And they say oh, you Poles. And I say, yeah, you too. And we look at them, and see if they have a s – a Polish communist signs, or the Polish **London** signs, cause you can tell. And one of them asked, where are you from? And I said, I'm from **Kraków**. And he said, oh I know **Kraków** very well, this captain said, I had a girlfriend there. And he turned out to be my aunt. And then we were starting talking, he said, oh you speak languages? And I said oh yeah, I study languages. And he said oh, could you work for me a couple hours? I don't – I need somebody to translate and write German letters. And I said okay, but I was foolish, because you see, I was in the **London** supported fraternity and I was an anti-communist so to say, and all of a sudden – but I did this because he was my friend – my aunt's boyfriend. And then he was in a car accident, was killed. So after he was killed, this Judge **Shanteski**(ph) who took over the legal department says oh my God, he left me with so many – so many letters, correspondence that I – could you work for me? So I says, but I go to school, and I cannot give you much time, but just maybe a few hours. And so he – I did work, and of course when the time came – by the time I got this certificate I have to come to the immigration office, and so when they learned that I working for a consulate and for the Polish Trade and Commerce later on, well somebody told me, don't work for the consulate because they might take you back to **Poland** or persecute your family if you don't go back, and they switched me to this new office, commerce and trade representative's office. And I

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was there and I really stopped going to school because he had so much work, so I s – interrupted my studies. And the meantime I got my papers to come to the immigration office. Well, when they – but I did have some friends who were Americans, and also military personnel, and I – I went with them, or rather they went with me to this office. And of course there is this group of people sitting and asking me, did you get paid for the – no, this man, this captain says, but she work for the Americans, she work for the **CIC**. No, it was called different in those days, it wasn't **CIC**, it was this something intelligence service. And they ask me, oh did you – oh yeah, and this friend of mine said ma – re-remember that when she has to go to the **States** that you vouch for her that she work for the Americans. And so he says well – just then somebody who was asking me says, well did you get money for it? And I said, why should I have gotten money for it? I mean, I – I didn't like the Soviets and I didn't like the Polish government, and that was it. And that's – I didn't do anything outrageous, all I did is translated stuff. And – but I almost got rejected for the emigration, but then all of a sudden I got this call and this lady says there's somebody wanting to talk to you. And I said, who on earth can it be? Ba – she didn't understand the name. It turned out to be the boss of this intelligence service, who says, don't worry, your papers have been cleared. And he said, you work for us and I just – only by chance did he come across my papers. And he says, I just by chance got to your files and I saw this rejection and I – and he says, you're all cleared up

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now. So I was all cleared up and the people at **Wellesley** had to wait for me like six months, because I was supposed to come and all of a sudden I was stopped and now I'm going again, so – any – like they say, alls well that ends well.

Q: You had mentioned just earlier when you first sa – saw these Polish military people, you were walking along, you – you – how could you tell they were not Polish communists, but they were Polish, **London** affiliated?

A: Because they had different – they had the Polish eagle with the crown on it, the **London** ones had.

Q: On their hats?

A: On their hats and on wherever the –

Q: Oh.

A: – had this, mostly their hats. And –

Q: And the communists had a different symbol?

A: They had their – they had the eagle without a crown.

Q: Oh. Tell me a little bit about the fa – okay, now we're back into **Wellesley**. Tell me a little bit about the family that you stayed with.

A: Well, the family owned a department store in **Waltham**, it was one of those department stores and there was this invalid father, the mother, and that was all.

They had two sons and they had a daughter, they lived in **Rhode Island** or someplace like that, but they always – they would come home to visit the father. One

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was a navy man and one was still in college. And the daughter was already married in – I think she was in **Rhode Island**.

Q: And this was a Catholic family?

A: Was a very Catholic family, yeah, they went to church every blessed saturday – Sunday. I'm still Saturday [indecipherable] Sabbath. And it's funny, that – and that's where lots of people think I'm Jewish because when I talk, not only do I move my hands, and I say oh. I never said **oy vey**, or [indecipherable] but anyhow – so, going back to the family, and they said to begin with that if – that if I ever wanted to leave to go to school that I can do it. And of course later on I had the letter from her that I s-s – they wished I would have stayed until the father died, because he really missed me. But I got the letter from this friend of mine, and she says, well, come and you stay with us and I'm already going to school and I'm working and all this, in **Saint Louis**. And so I can get you a job in our firm.

Q: So how long were you in **Massachusetts**?

A: Were in **Massachusetts**? Not very long. Must have been May – I think about six months, that was about all.

Q: When you first came here, did you feel very much like a foreigner, did you feel the people looked at you differently in those first six months?

A: No, because maybe they did look at me differently, but I have this facility to get adjusted to any country I'm in. My father always says, you have this talents to adapt,

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or to whatever – to – to find a replace – to me, really ever – wherever there were people and good people, that was the world to me, I never felt – course, my English was horrible to begin with, but – but if I did –

Q: But you fe – you felt respected?

A: Y-Yeah. I mean, if I didn't open my mouth, nobody knew I was a foreigner, was a well-dressed, and the lady always send me to a hairdresser in her department store.

Q: Did you feel safe here?

A: Yeah, fairly safe. I know nobody's gonna touch me or anything like that. The only unsafe thing was going to the street with all those cars. But otherwise I – but I wanted to go to school, that was my aim, and it was no – **Wellesley** College was so expensive and I, with my house-help salary, there was absolutely no way I could, and no time to go to school. Had no idea how important – how great **Wellesley** hills was, everybody was talking about **Wellesley** College, and I [indecipherable] college. I was very well prepared because European schools, hi-high schools really, you like in a junior hi – like a junior college. I mean, I knew more than did junior college kids, because they have better schools, ca – for the simple reason that they don't take anybody, they – you have to pass tests to be accepted, to show that you're capable of – of working the material. So – but I never felt strange. I maybe looked strange to them, but –

Q: Now, you're 26 years old now.

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A: Yeah. And I go to **Saint Louis** and go to school there, and I –

Q: And where did you live? With a family?

A: I lived with this family in this – sleeping on a cot and all that. And – but the school was way – I don't know how – oh yes, and the girls said, you know, they said there's a Polish invasion in the – i-in this match – Universal Match Company. A bunch of foreigners getting work and all that. And you know, it'd be better if you didn't work here, because it's gonna be bad for me, too. So there I was, and that was at noon and we always went to the **YMCA** to eat. And I was crying all the way and there was a blonde woman sitting there and she says, what is she crying about? And she knew this girl. And she says, ah, because she just lost her work. And she – this woman says something – somehow it ca – wa – came to tell me, she says oh, she can come and stay with us, and we're gonna look for a job for her. Because the office – not the office, but the universal – the office of the Universal Match Company, the headquarters is really n-near where we live. And so I went to live with them, was the family of a mother and three sisters. One sister, the one that – **Blondie**, or **Bonnie**, who took me in, and two sisters from the other father. And it turned out – she later told me that she only – oh yeah, the sister said, oh she only took her in so there would be two against two, because they were always quarreling about who is a better person in this family. But anyhow, they took me to this office in **Ferguson** and the – to this Universal Match Company and the director of whoever the personnel office

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is. Oh sorry, but we don't have any work for her. And I started crying and I said, gosh, after all this. I don't know, somehow I mentioned the word camps. The minute I said the word camps, the guy woke up and he says, what camps? And of course the directors were all Jewish, to say the least – to say the least. And he says, what camp? And I says, through the tears and I said, well this and that and all that. And he tooks – picks up the telephone and he calls up the office of the Universal Match Company in **Saint Louis** and he says, I need that work for a person that you just let go. She's a typist. And, do you take shorthand? And I say yeah, a little bit, but not very – yeah, I knew Polish and German shorthand, so I always took notes in German shorthand, but – anyhow, so – and I was so lucky that next to – across the street from the girls where I lived, lived one of the personnel – one of – somebody there lived who also worked in Universal Match Company, so he would take me home and bring me back. You have to get up five o'clock because it was far away from this – yeah, ferg – was called **Ferguson**, I think. And so, I started working and I start first time on an electric typewriter. And I was used to this regular typewriter. So I – I hit this type – I mean, you know, I hit this thing and somebody says, thanks God this – it's look as if this typewriter was gonna float – fly out through the window. But somebody says thanks God sh – she – the windows were closed because otherwise I don't know what would happen. You know, I was at seventh or eighth floor, or tenth, I don't know. But anyhow, ni – so I worked there, and I stayed with the girls, but since I

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was starting going to school, it was so difficult for me because I had after cl – after work I went to school, to night school at **Washington U.** And I'm just coming home, I was asleep and I was holding onto this strap in a bus and the ba – guy would say, sleeping beauty, time to get up, you arrived. And so I said I got to look for another place to live. So I was looking and I was going through this **Washington Street**, I think, and every place it says for rent, for rent, and it – then I see this one it says for rent, for rent, and it was just cl – you know, in the middle between work and school. But it says, no women wanted or somethi – only from – only for men. I don't remember the wording on this thing. And so, as I pass by, the two old ladies were sitting on a porch and I look at the sign and I pass by. And one of them gets up and she says, aren't you gonna come in? And I say, why I'm a woman, I can't come in. And I was dressed up, you know, to kill. And so what are you looking for? And I say, well, I'm looking for a place, because I live in **Ferguson**, it's too far for me to school, between work and school. She says, well, why don't you look at the room? So, take me up. She took me upstairs and I went upstairs and this and that and I said, well how about cooking facilities? And she says, well, we don't let anybody cook, but if you promise that you never leave any dirty dishes and that you – and we give you a little place. She evidently liked me, okay? And so I stayed with them. I stayed with them until I got married.

Q: Now, did you have any correspondence with your family back in **Poland**?

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A: Oh yeah, oh yes, yes, we corresponded all the time. My father said, as a matter of fact, don't come to **Poland**, there's no future for you there.

Q: So they were happy that you were in –

A: Yeah.

Q: – in the **United States**?

A: Especially since I qu-quit the – since I quit this Polish consulate, you know, cause this was just too much Soviet [**indecipherable**] and all that kind of stuff. Our consul got arrested. [**indecipherable**] his wife got arre – he – how was it? He had to send his own wife back to **Warsaw** because before she was married to this consul, **Zambritski**(ph) I think was his name, she was married to another guy and the guy was in the Polish underground army. And so he said – has to send her back. And everybody was saying how could you – could he do that? And I say, well he did, cause otherwise he would have to go too. But anyhow, everybody was afraid. And there is this – my stepfather needed a new radio, he says oh, my old radio doesn't work. I say oh, I have a beautiful radio, I give you one, so on. And there was a cashier from the consulate that was going to **Poland** and he says, oh, I can take the radio and deliver. Oh here, take the radio. And then I hear from my boss [**indecipherable**] she said, you know what happen at the frontier? On the border, Polish Czech border or something, the guy was stopped, his ra – his car was check, the radio was taken apart and there he was let go. Then he comes and visits my

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mother and stepfather and he brings this radio and he says he's got to go someplace. And so my stepfather says oh, I'll take you there, I know where it is, you don't have to – was in the evening, so you don't have to wander through **Kraków**. The minute they stepped out of the house they were arrested. And – yeah, and then every – it turn out that every place that this guy went, people were arrested because they were saying that a con – Polish consulate in **Frankfurt** was an American spy headquarters. See, everybody that had anything to do with that, I don't know if we could have been a spy there, except maybe for me, I mean I – which I wasn't even a spy, you know. All I did was – most of my work there for them was to – to go with them and trans – translate things for them, you know. But anyhow, so he and my mother never forgotten – has forgiven me for – because when he came back he had emphysema. They say – I'm not even sure now, but it says he was put in a – that's how they would get the truth out of you, they would put you in water and they would freeze it and they let you out and all that. Anyhow that's what he was telling, and that's probably a true **[indecipherable]**. And –

Q: So they ar – they arrested him and put him in prison?

A: Yeah.

Q: For how long?

A: I don't remember for how long, but both – he was freed every – cause they couldn't – after – but when he got out he was just not a man any more, he was just a

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piece of [**indecipherable**] that was old and in – so and he died from this emphysema. And of course if it hadn't been for my radio, he would never been where he was. And so – so then –

Q: So then we're –

A: Oh yeah, so I was told – somebody says to me, I don't know how it was said, but I really – I really stopped – stopped working there for – for this consulate and I went back to school and then the papers come and then the guy says, you're all clear to go to the **United States** and I went to **Bremen** and – and **Bremenhaven**(ph) and on **Blatchford** and back, I mean in – to **America**. On the **borg** – on the ship that – that the marines – course it's really, the ship was run by the navy, but it was worked by the people, and that's how I met my husband there. But anyhow they were saying, oh there comes this bunch of foreigners who are gonna take our jobs. So it wasn't very – so, I got the bad preparation, I expected worse things **America** and I didn't see any bad things, so –

Q: So you kept up a correspondence with your future husband after you got off the boat? Cause you said you're now in **Saint Louis**, and –

A: Yeah, and I had this other friend with whom I – whom I known because of my work and – and we always – but this – this navy – the – the sailor kept wri-writing to me. And comes Christmas time and I say to one of the girls, how do you say a Christmas card, and what do you say on a Christmas card? And they all say, dear

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Charles, and so I wrote dear **Charles**, but by mistake I have sent this letter to the fellow in **Chicago**. He comes in, you know, what is this? What's this with **Charles**? And I say well – what's her name [**indecipherable**] or something says, well that's how you write to people, but what do you have to do with him? And I said, the guy was nice, he saved me from being seasick and I work in his cabin, and – what cabin? And I said, well, there are 260 people and all that. But anyhow, all he – and so we broke off. And I send this card to **Charles Belfoure** and I said, this card cost me my boyfriend. And **Charles** says, that's good, because then I can be your boyfriend. This is how we got together. And that was a big mis – bad mistake too, but you make mistakes without knowing, you marry somebody without knowing his background, anything like that, I mean the – I don't know, but he was charming.

Q: What – what – when did you get married?

A: When? '53 or something like that.

Q: And the – so you stayed in **Saint Louis** for three years?

A: I stayed, yeah, and then we – and when we got married we went to **Milwaukee**, the Great Lakes where the navy station was.

Q: Wa-Was he in **Saint Louis** doing – during that time?

A: No, no, no, no, he was in – he was in Great Lakes in the navy, he was just coming, yeah. And he was a good mathematician really, because the vise – we would meet in **New York**, and – because he was coming from the ship. And I said I

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can't come because I have a math exam. He says, oh I can help you and all that. So I thought he was a really university person, which he was not. And to me, educated person was – I mean, I just – I know from experience from other people that mismatched educationally people never get along. And so – well, I – I made a choice, and that's it.

Q: And so then in – you got married in '53 and where did you live?

A: Then we went – then he wanted to – his mother got sick and her – his mother live in **Cumberland, Maryland**, that's where his family live. And so we moved to **Cumberland, Maryland** and he got to work for the navy – naval reserves office there. He was a petty officer, and – but he was always typing. And so we worked there – I mean he worked there and I lived there in a very small apartment. And all I was dreaming about is going back to school. And next to **Cumberland** was **Frostburg**, which is a uni – was a college town at that time. And I don't know, I had some neighbors nex – next door, very wealthy people. And one time I got to know them and the man says, all dressed up and no place to go. I was waiting for my husband to pick me up someplace, and we started talking and then they invited me and my husband, and he would never come, because I said, why don't you want to come? And he said oh, because those are millionaires. And I said, millionaires are people too, big deal. But that's where he wouldn't go because they were not his – he – he has nothing to show up. And anyhow, so these people kept saying, why don't

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you just go back to college? And so I went and I got accepted and I had some credits from **Washington U.**, except they were not all acc – accepted in **Frostburg** because they have their own standards and all that. And since I signed up that I will teach two years after graduation, I didn't have to pay tuition, all I had to pay is like student's dues and all that. And I think one of my brothers will always give me – without name – naming he – without saying his name, he always give me like a gift for me for 45 dollars or something, so – specially since they saw me on the Dean's list and they were proud of me and all that. And my husband hated it, but anyhow. And then – and then one day, the marriage ended and there was this little boy. And this little boy is now 46 years old and he is an architect, but he still is sore at me that he didn't live with a father and mother and all that kind of stuff. I could – just couldn't live with a man who made a kid with somebody else, I just couldn't – couldn't take it off, cause even if I was a real Christian I would have forgiven him because I pray every day, I say forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. But, I don't know, it's not an easy thing to do. And I wanted to go to school, I knew that if I stayed with him, there was no way for me to finish school. And he also said to the chaplains [**indecipherable**] we were so happy, but – until she started wanting to go to school. So that's it.

Q: So then –

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A: So then after I graduated, and since I gradu – had some more credits or I graduated bef – oh yeah, before I even graduated I started going to graduate school in **Middlebury, Vermont**. And my son, I put my son in a Catholic camp in summer on this, some kind of lakes in **Lawrence**, or something. And he went to camp and I went to school. And so then when I was graduating from **Frostburg** State I already had credits – some credits from the graduate school. And then co – I continue and I got – oh yeah, before I even – before I even – I really never made an application for a job because one of my chemistry teachers – professor, one time I got a 65 and so I went to him and I said, how come I only got 65? He says, because you didn't know anything. And he says to me – then he explains to me how I should study chemistry and all this, says if it's water **[indecipherable]** cascading water in the sea, you think about it what's in it chemicals and all that, what it can do, temperatures. And he says to me, well, not everybody be – could be a genius or **Copernicus**. And I said, do you know that **Copernicus** was Polish? He didn't even know that **Copernicus** was Polish. But anyhow, he says not everybody can be **Copernicus**. When I was studying German, I couldn't – I was such – such a bad student, I couldn't understand the difference when to say this and that. And I said, oh that's very easy, I can explain it to you. If you're going to it, it's accusative **[indecipherable]** are in there, it's a question of the in. And if you're there, then you use the **[indecipherable]**. Well, that was my certificate for being a good teacher. Because one time I was going through a

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hall and his office was open and he had three men in it and he says, oh, there goes a
te – there goes somebody who can teach anybody. And those people were the
Baltimore county recruiters for teachers.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum
volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**. This is tape number four,
side **B**. And you were talking about the recruiters, who happened to be in the office
at the time.

A: The office and they – they said, you have a – you have a job in **Baltimore** county.
Now it's a question of what school. And I have – I have – **Janet Levin** was a very
good friend. Her husband used to be a rabbi, but he stopped being a rabbi and
become a lawyer, and they moved to **Baltimore**. And they said, why don't you come
and si – you know, we're such a good friends, you know, that to stay, and we can be
friends. [indecipherable] big friends but we can – you can be with us and all that
and your son can have a home like he used to have. Because they used to pick us up
on a Friday for Shabbas and I was a – a Shabbas goy for them, and then they would
take us back home on a Sunday. And he ha – and he had – they had little children, so
he play with them, he was older than they were, but he was this big boss and all this.
So he had like a family life. And –

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Q: How – how old was your son when you and your husband got divorced?

A: We never – we have never been divorced.

Q: Oh, because you're Catholic.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And he didn't want to be divorced because so he wouldn't have to marry all the women that he seduced, or they seduced him. But anyhow, so he – he was four years old, four years old. We just stayed together until his mother died, because his mother – he didn't want to make his mother unhappy. And so **Janet** says, come to **Baltimore**, and I said, well I – so the question was, where – what high school to get in order to – since I didn't drive a car I had to be close by. And so **Janet** was looking for a school – for a place to live, and the secretary of the school – because I finally decided **Woodlawn**, but as – I couldn't take it, because they were – and somebody just – their teacher got married so in the middle of the year, in January they were without a teacher for four – French four and five. And so I said I will take the job, but I need a place to live close by so that I can walk to school. And so when they were asking in the – all those places that rented apartments, one of them says, oh, I'd – we just rented an apartment in **Woodlawn**, and she's also a teacher. And the secretary says, her name wouldn't be **Belfoure** would it? And she says yes, how did you know? And she says, oh [**indecipherable**] so she – the – the director later on

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said the principal [**indecipherable**] she came running into his office and he says, we have a teacher. And so that's how I – except that it was winter and I was putting my trashcans out and my son opened the door and he says, do I look good in this type? Cause he was going for the first time to his new school, so he wanted to look good. And I turned around, but since I didn't know that – I didn't know the – where I was really standing and I fell down. Thanks God I had this Persian lamb coat on me so I didn't get all bruised, but my knees were bruised and my face and all that. So my first day to school I was wearing black gla – dark glasses and I look really – I can imagine, in winter, to wear dark glasses. But that's how I started at the school.

Q: And then how long did you remain a teacher?

A: 25 years in the same school. So –

Q: Did you say – did you get a graduate degree from **Middlebury**?

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: What – what did you get?

A: French.

Q: A – a master's degree?

A: Yeah, a master's degree, yeah.

Q: Yeah, uh-huh.

A: And of course they said you don't really need to spend money on German master's, because you know German better than the masters. But I – I-I si – I – I –

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too bad I didn't, because I would have gotten more money. Everybody was saying, why don't you teach in college? And I said, because it's – I've been to college, so I know how they teach. You cannot influence anybody, and if you teach younger kids in high school, you still – oh, you still can do something and help them or tell them – put them on a straight route, how important education is and all that. Once you're in college they don't care, all they do is listen to you – to your lecture and put down stuff and they repeat to you verbatim, so on.

Q: So you felt very accepted. Did you feel very Polish then, or American?

A: I think I feel very American. I –

Q: Whe-Whe-When did you get your citizenship?

A: When I was still married.

Q: Uh-huh. What was that like for you to become an American citizen?

A: Well, in the first place, it were – in – in those days the first thing you did when you got off the boat, you went to the naturalization service to ask for citizenship – I mean, you have to request this thing. And then because I was married to an American military, I didn't have to wait seven years, but I think I only had to wait five years or something like that. But then you had to prepare for all those exams and my husband and his fishing friend would stay home and help me with this thing. But one wa – my husband was a republican and this other was a democrat and they would quarrel all the time. And so when I went to this, because you have to – they ca

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– asked you to – the wa – this – the lawyer has to present you to the things at this – as a person who wants to take the examination. All during the examination they said to me, now what do you think of the americ – of the democrats and the republicans? And I said, I still wonder how on earth this country be run effectively with all these guys quarreling among themselves. And the guy, the judge says, no that's not quarreling, that's disputing. [indecipherable] they disputing or not. And I got it, but my husband never told his mother that I got that citizenship, she had to read it in the newspaper. Cause they took the picture with a – the senator from **Maryland** was **Bell**, and there was some Italian lady too who – in a small town, you know, something like that, to be – to be a citizen is a big deal, you know, not – not as in other place where you have hundred of them, you know.

Q: What did it mean to you?

A: Well, what shall I say? That I was really proud of the country and I can vote. I couldn't da – I couldn't wait til I could vote, I mean, that was my thing, cause you hear – that was **Eisenhower** at that time and they said, but you are a democrat, and I wasn't a democrat, I was really a republican at that time. And of course **Eisenhower** was my liberator, so I voted for him. But then – then when I was in school in **Frostburg**, I had to make extra money after my husband left, and I work in a kitchen. And I lived in a house where there was a restaurant down-downstairs and then we live upstairs. And so it was the easiest work for me because I didn't have to

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get dressed or anything like that. And I could leave the boy upstairs and the people from the hotel were watching him. But I didn't leave him upstairs, I – really he came with me and he was painting and drawing and sometimes he would fill the saltshakers and all that. And I only stopped working in this restaurant because they said, be very polite to the customers, but the customers always weren't – he says, and don't put the bill on the – on the table, give it to them – give it to his hand. Well, you give this to his hand and he holds your hand. He asks you for a date and all that kind of stuff. And I said, but you are married, cause you can see. And he says, well, that doesn't matter. So that's how I say, oh my gosh, I can't work like that and then study and all this. So there was the – he says, well the only other job he says, to wash dishes. And so I went to wash dishes, but my son was always showing – there's a peephole and he was showing people that his mother is working washing dishes. Well – and well, I wouldn't have stopped this work except that one day I put my chemistry notes al – on this washing machine, and when I open it, you know, the – the damp, or –

Q: The steam?

A: Huh?

Q: The steam?

A: The steam took the – took all my notes and so here I da – that was a lost day for me. So then I [indecipherable] these people would say, can't you get – you can get

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a job in college, can't you? And so then I accepted a job in a college. First I worked some kind of thing, some paperwork for a psychology department. Then I was teach – then I was – i-it was a blind girl who was taking French and I was helping her, taking notes and – and – for her and all that. And then – then I no – by that time I graduated, and I already had this job waiting for me, so anyways [indecipherable] [tape break] Well, anyhow, **Janet Levin** was – I met **Janet Levin** in **Cumberland** and before I met **Janet Levin** I knew a Jewish family, a furrier's family that I went to visit and – and I saw the Hanukkah candle and so she says, oh how do you – I said, when is Hanukkah? And she said, how do you know about Hanukah? And I said well, I come from a place that has every fra – fifth person is a Jew, so you have to know about Hanukkah. But anyhow, one day this man says, I got bad news – bad news for you, I'm losing my sight. And I said, oh you [indecipherable] your Hebrew, I could read it to you. Cause I was a lady of leisure at that time. And so here comes, I don't know, next month or something, he says hi, I've got the – I – I made a da – date with the rabbi and you can learn Hebrew because they giving – there's a new rabbi in town and he's giving cu – his wife is giving classes for beginners. And so that's how I met **Janet** because I was looking for a rabbi and this – you know, the Polish rabbi with the **harvartz**(ph) and all that kind of stuff and I didn't see anything, I just saw young men at the door of the shul. And this redhead comes to me and says, you waiting for somebody? And I say yes, for the rabbi. Oh, there he is.

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And I said, where? And she says there, there, the man at the door, shaking hands with the people. I said, that's not a rabbi. You sure he's a rabbi? I ought to know, he's my husband. That's how I met **Janet** and we become very good friends. And it – the deal ended because they left for **Israel**, the whole family left for **Israel** and – and I got – I said goodbye at the – **New York**, at the si – ship. But she gave me, as inheritance, to her friend **Linda Ford**, who still lives in **Baltimore**, and she says, now remember when there's any holidays, make sure you invite her to your house for holidays. So ever since I've been going to this **Linda Ford**. And before she was **Linda Ford**, she was **Linda Polack**(ph). And so that comes New Year's, or Easter, I mean I – I'm always there, as an inheritance. So when she introduces me to other people she says, that's my inheritance. And so that's how –

Q: And then – and then you – you said you retired after 25 years. And when was that approximately, in the late 80's?

A: It was either '89, or se – 80 – I **[indecipherable]** '88, but I heard on the television that there – there's a new office, Red Cross office that looks for translators, cause there's a new office tracing – the Holocaust an – war victims tracing office of the Red Cross and is looking for a translator. And since I was al-always a champion for the Red Cross, I was even a president of the Polish Red Cross, had a certain **[indecipherable]** junior Red Cross in my school, so I always thought very highly of

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the Red Cross, so I jumped to the Red Cross, okay. And I went there and we got a little schooling what the Red Cross is all about and all that and then we –

Q: This is the Red Cross office in **Baltimore**?

A: **Baltimore**, yeah, that's the central – this is really a central office for the tracing for Holocaust victims and – Holocaust war victims. The national searches for military and all this, but we do search for Holocaust and war victims. And I started working, but then one day, on the door of the Red Cross, we see an announcement by the Holocaust Museum, that the Holocaust Museum is looking for translators. And so **Morris Rosen** and I jumped at it and – course we didn't know how difficult it is to get to **Washington** from where I lived, and we started working. The museum wasn't open yet, so we worked, I think it's **Eighth** Street, or **E** Street, who –

Q: Tw – 20th and **L**. We'll – we'll get to that in a minute. I wanted to talk a little bit more about your Red Cross work first. Wa – just exactly what did you do at the Red Cross?

A: Well, I do – in the very beginning we would get application that f – somebody is looking for mother, father, brother, whatever it is, so there are certain forms, specially the forms – the forms were different [**indecipherable**] in every year the forms got – were changed just to – to make it easier because the – you get an application from us, and we send this to the international tracing service in **Arolsen**. And then they look in the papers and course they have all their lists, and if anybody

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can find anybody, it's supposed to be there. Because there were – but however it's difficult because before the Gestapo and the SS left, they burned most of their materials. So it's very difficult to – to really find somebody. You can never find names, for example, of – right after the war, when **Poland** lost the war, all the Jewish synagogues were burned, and po – Jewish population's registers was kept by – by the synagogues, the birth and the marriage records and all that. So once the synagogue was burned, that was it. And ben – then besides, since the Jews never lived together with the Poles, or the very few Pole – Poles knew the Jews and the Jews knew the Poles. They only knew each other in commercial situations, but not that I could go – some – somebody could swear yeah, I know this – this Jew came from this and this place, or this. So we can't really find anybody like that. Besides, what they did sometimes, they got this whole Jewish population on the side of some river or something and shot them, or whatever it was. And in the very beginning it was like that. And – course they didn't use them for work like they did later, they just got smarter [**indecipherable**] smarter in quotation marks. And so it's – so we were looking for these people, but it's very difficult to find it, especially women. But seems like men, who were then put to work, were easier to trace, whereas women and children were shot before they were even put to work or anything like that, so – so what we did, we would just write out the names and professions and where they were born and all that, and you think possible that could facilitate the finding.

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Q: So you –

A: And this ki – since that was also – we had to write this in German because we didn't want to – otherwise they would have to have somebody in **Germany** translate from – so – and then their Holocaust tracing went to **Germany** and they kind of set up special forms so that they were easy to read and now they have databa – base, so it's much easier too, to find, but of course now it's 50 years. But believe me on that, they still people who 60 or 50 years after, look for their mother or father. I say they couldn't have done that a little bit early? But maybe they thought they didn't survive, so they had giving up. And now they find out that after so many years some cousin meets another cousin and so – and it's mostly the grandchildren, or grandchildrens, who want to know where the fathers – grandfathers or grandmother died, or where they come from and all this, so –

Q: These are Jewish and non-Jewish survivors?

A: Yeah. Well now, there are no more non-Jewish survivors, but – but the families of the Jewish survivors.

Q: I – I meant for families of Jewish and non-Jewish.

A: Yes. A-And then – now it's – since the Polish slave laborers came to this age that they need some kind of documents that there was slave laborers, now we are looking for those, too. And –

Q: So you are still working for the Red Cross?

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A: Yeah.

Q: And how much time do you devote to it?

A: Ah, the Thursday and sometime I'll take home p-papers home if I don't finish, but most likely I just work on a Thursday.

Q: So wa – do you – do y –

A: What we're doing right now is in order to facilitate this with the Polish Red Cross, we develop forms that we translate the applications into Polish. So then that takes less time in **Poland**, so that's what I'm practically doing. And once they put in a base, or database, I translate it in Polish so then they can be sent to **Poland** and taken care of by the Polish Red Cross without the people knowing English. So that's my work there.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you find that rewarding work?

A: Oh yes, in the first place, here I doing something, maybe you bring some kind of closure or something, and besides, I like translating and I like Red Cross, so the all three things goes together.

Q: At the end of the war, when you were still in **Europe** and word came out of the ta – what truly happened to many of the victims, which I assume you didn't know during the war time, do you – can you describe what some of your thoughts were when you saw pictures from the camps, from **Auschwitz**?

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A: You know, I cannot say it over and over again that I could not understand how a cultured nation could come so low to kill innocent people. That – this was my – I don't know, and then there was my own guilt that I didn't do more. So –

Q: What could you have done more?

A: I don't know, I had – I could have maybe help hiding more people. Maybe – I don't know, I just still feel that I have not done enough, and I could have done, because I had this – thi-this uncle who was doing it and I could have maybe – maybe helped. I don't know, but by the time I got to all my friends – see, I was in a different part of time – town then. When I went to elementary school I went with a bunch of Jewish girls and all that. But when I moved away, and then I came back, none of them was left. So – but still I – I feel like I should have done more. It's this guilt, plus this why am I here? Why they and not I, you know, this is – I think anyone who survive all this is asking himself that question. So there – here I am, for how many years, I don't even remember how long. Anyhow **[indecipherable]** to remember, in the museum.

Q: You had gone over to **Europe** a couple of years ago for the Red Cross, to a conference?

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell a little bit about that trip?

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A: Well, to tell you the truth I don't remember very much. I went to **Arolsen**, and we went to [indecipherable] to **Volary**, because **Morris Rosen** wanted to see the graves of the – he was – he's – his sister bri – on the death march to **Volary**, or from **Volary** or from wherever it was, there were lots of girls who were – who died, and some of them – of his sister's friends were buried there and he wanted to see if their graves are taken care of. So that's when we went to **Volary** and then we went to **Munich** with the Americ – with the German Red Cross, and – and to the international tracing service and that's where I found out that I don't even exist, except after the war. And – well, because evidently the man that I worked for had my file destroyed so he wouldn't have to send me back to this camp. And so I don't exist, so – but it [indecipherable]

Q: Do you know exist in the fil – in the files? Do you know exist?

A: I still don't exist during the war. And – so, but we saw **Arolsen**, how it is organized and all that, and – and I don't think they – they have enough help.

Q: This is the center?

A: The center. The International Tracing Center. They don't have enough personnel, they don't have enough translators, they don't have any volunteers like we have. I mean, we have paid personnel, but without volunteers, you couldn't do anything, you know. And – but they don't have that stuff. Somebody who can help them with their knowledge for nothing, so to say. And so that they overworked, underpaid

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probably, but – and – so it's very hard to – for them to – and people always complained and they call this – I don't know, I – I think I've seen a – some kind of video about – they call it **Biederman's Reich**. And **Biederman** is the man who ta – who is in charge of the International Tracing Service in **Arols-sen** and now they don't do the things that they supposed to do. If they cannot wri – read the letter, they just put it away and th-they can't find it all. I don't know if this is a lie. It's very possible that somebody who worked there and thought he or she was mis – I don't know, put it abused in quotation marks, as taking revenge or what, I mean I don't – all I know that from what I have seen there is they just understaffed a-and the halls are full of those documents and they just don't have enough people to – to work there. So –

Q: S-So you are – are gi-giving one day a week in **Baltimore** and – yeah. And then you said you saw the sign about the Holocaust Museum, so you began to do what?

A: Well, so **Morris** and I said, let's go. So we came here and we started translating. And he mostly translated from Yiddish and Hebrew, and I from Polish and German. And sometimes there were some French things too, to do, but mostly – in the very beginning it was lots of those diaries, Jewish diaries. And I co – you read the Jewish diaries and m – I'm – was like he was occupied with the Gestapo files, and – but **Morris** was reading those diaries and he had to summarize them, and then lots of time I did that for him too, so – and it's – it was really heartbreaking sometimes. The

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whole work here, really is heartbreaking. Or rather it was more heartbreaking when we read this, the diaries. But you get so that you – that th – oh yeah, and then from the Red Cross, we work in **Suitland** at this archives. And in the archives we were looking in the death books and we found about 40,000 names for the Red Cross, for the tracing service, and got the little certificate from Mrs. **Dole** for – for dedicated work and all this kind of stuff. And for example, and we looked through the State department files too, and one of the rarely flu – yeah, I failed with that one. When you were poor and you didn't have a sponsor here, you couldn't get to the ameri – to the **States**. And one lady says, are you my son? You only take care of the rabbis, you don't take care of the regular people. And that was really – you only save the yeshivas and that – no, I don't – I don't know if she said yeshivas [**indecipherable**] anyhow she says rabbis or something like that. And that was heartbreaking too, I mean just showing how – how unjust this whole world is arranged. And that's – but the law has nothing to do with justice anyhow, so –

Q: Does working on records of Jews, is that any different for you than working on records of non-Jews?

A: I never work on any records for non-Jews, so I don't really know. Well, you know, I – when we work in **Suitland**, it was always Jewish records they were after. We were after getting the numbers for the tracing service of the Red Cross, so most likely we were looking for – for – for Jews. And, you know, any person who suffers

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is, really to me, is a **[indecipherable]** except that there's so much – if I was – if I were to be killed, I would be killed because I did something against the Nazis, not – cause it's true, all the Polish intelligentsia went – was killed too, but I mean, I would have to do something, whereas if I were Jewish, I was to be dead because I was Jewish, I didn't have to do anything. And so in a way it is different. But – so that's why I never say I'm a survivor, because I'm – really don't feel like one, because my s-suffering was not in the slave camps, was not like the suffering of the Polish Jews. So if somebody asked me why don't you come to the meeting or something like that and I say well, because I really don't belong there.

Q: This is the meeting of survivors?

A: Yeah. Yeah, but you survive and you suffer, and this is true, I suffered and I survived, but – but it's – my suffering was not like that of – of the others.

[indecipherable] all the same, well, in a way.

Q: What – what else is – so, I say – you've been doing the same kind of work for the museum since you started the translating?

A: Yeah, all the – except that sometimes is – the Gestapo file is sometimes is some – now right now w-we had this new Polish archivist, Mrs. **Alexandra Boretska**(ph) and she works – I do a lot of stuff for her now, to help her. And right now I think I'm working on two things. One was a finished thing about the Jews who got

[indecipherable], where they are, as you know, like where they were deported, and

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who kept the records from [indecipherable] and all that. And the other thing that I just finished now that I'm really working on the, which ghetto [indecipherable] and I was working on **Ringlebaum's**(ph) archives too, there, **onek**(ph) **shabbad**(ph). And I stood in the back, so I have thing about the Gestapo [indecipherable] from **Paris**.

Q: So when you say you're working on something, you mean translating it from that language into English?

A: Yeah [indecipherable] into English, looking at the microfiche or something and then translating it. It would be easier for me if I could have a typewriter there, and I didn't have to write by hand and somebody had to write it again on the typewriter, but unless there is a silent typewriter, I [indecipherable]. But I like my work, and I – I [indecipherable] now that I got old and sick, if I go to work, like I have to go in this rainy and snowy day, I really should be in bed, but when I come here I don't feel sick at all, because ma – my mind is occupied with what I'm doing and not with my sickness.

End of Tape Four, Side B

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Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**. This is tape number five, side **A**. And you were talking about your experiences at the th-the museum, and you said it stimulates your mind. What about emotionally? What does it mean to you when you walk into this building, in an emotional sense?

A: Well, at the beginning it was very emotional, but in the time, it's – I forget about that, wh-what this place stands for. Cause otherwise I don't think I could really work and – and be effective, if I was always thinking about the horrors and the persecution and the suffering and all that, I don't think I could work. I – I think that if I just say this is just work, that it makes it easier for me. But then if I see the people in the halls, when pick up those passports, it's – in a way it's very good that I go all the way up to the fifth floor, that I don't have to go through – I even stopped going for coffee downstairs so I don't have to see the people walking through, because it always – I – you be thinking about, I wonder for whom are they work – wal – whom do they want to find out about, and who did they – whom did they lose? And so I just take up to the fifth floor, I don't have to meet anybody, and I just can go open the door and go to work.

Q: Is there any particular part of the exhibit that you relate to?

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A: Well, of course, the first time I saw it, it was on – I don't know what floor it is, but **[indecipherable]** this will happen in from three – three down, but then the most – I don't know, emotional is when you see this Germans taking down the Polish border, what is it, border flag, o-or Polish border line that's white and red, you know, I mean, to me that was the – because I know – I – I lived through it when they came in, so thi-this was the most emotional to me, and I really didn't look through the other ones, because I just couldn't. And then of course, I still never could understand why nobody wanted to help them, and us too, to help them. I mean, that was – you see the newspapers and all this kind of stuff, and nobody really did anything. And of course, privately people did, probably, but I just can't imagine how all this could have happened, but of course it happened before, it happened with the Armenians, and it's gonna happen probably with other people, and we haven't learned anything. And – but the people dying out, I don't know, we just have to do something that people remember how cruel one man can be towards the other.

Q: Have you been through the permanent exhibit more than once?

A: Twice, because I wanted to – you know, but then I never was looking down, you know, to this – where you're not su – when – this place that they really show the tortures and all that. But then I already saw **Dora** and I know – I didn't see the people suffering thereby, so all the places where they were suffering, so – and I saw the ra – right after liberations it was a – i-it wasn't clean or anything like that. I

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mean, it wasn't like it is now that it's a museum. It – it was still the old place that – that you can – could see the bunker and the [indecipherable] and all these places where all horrible things happen. And the **appelleplatz**, and – and – and you hear the people telling about it, and you see it, too. So I really, about that, I – I knew, but then in those books and here in the documents, I meet the people.

Q: Wh-What is your relationship with the other volunteers? Both Jewish volunteers, or non-Jewish volunteers?

A: Well, I don't know if there are any no – Jewish volun – non-Jewish, I am probably the only non-Jewish, because everybody thought that I was Jewish, and one woman lost a bet with her husband, cause he worked upstairs and he swore I was Jewish. And she tol – she says, I just won a bet with my husband, I told him you were not, and – and since I always go with **Morris Rosen**, they all think either I'm his wife or his girlfriend or whoever it is. And they call us your mates, and they call us your partner in crime, and whatever.

Q: This is another volunteer.

A: Volunteer, Mr. **Rosen**, yeah. And he comes from **Baltimore**, so if we can we come together, cause it's safer, you know. Neither **Baltimore** nor **Washington** are safe places to walk through, and that's why we never come to any of those volunteers' evenings, because in the first place, cost us money. Not that we couldn't afford this, but then, just to come here for dinner, it doesn't pay, because we can't

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catch – th-the last train goes away at 10:30, and who is gonna be paying hotel for 150 dollars just for – it'd be nice to meet all the volunteers too, you know, and be in – and listen to a concert or see a movie or something like that, but you know, I guess, close your eyes and you s – re-remember what you read, you can see a movie. So –

Q: Have you gotten any special insights because of your work here? Have you learned anything since the late 80's, when you started?

A: Well, what I learned is this, that every one of our religions teaches about brotherly love and love your neighbor as yourself and we still not doing it. That's the insight that I got. And I don't know on the other hand – no, that's not maybe in the museum I didn't learn that, but I was asking myself, how would – you know, when you hear all this at – anti-Polish expressions, how we – how we have killed the Jews, and how we didn't help and all that. Nobody ever – I don't know somebody – I wrote to the paper and was published, too. Like, for example, the present te – two organizations that, where the Jewish mothers threw their children through the floor traps, somebody would pick them up, and I – I was serving on one of those – how is it, stations, so to say. If you saw a train that was coming through and has a certain markings, which meant there were children on it. Now, didn't say Jewish children or Polish children, but there were some markings on the trains that – that you knew there were children, and you had to tell somebody else that so and so train passed

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through this station. And there were – then you knew that someplace between one place and the other, there could have been a child who was dropped through the floor. And then the – somebody would see to it that the child was picked up. And this was all organized, and I think it was organized by the present pope, I think, of – he wasn't a pope then, of course. But it was all organized this way to pick up the children that were dropped, so – and it – nobody even knows about it. And it's true, there were [indecipherable] and were bad people, like in every nation you had bad people. But why should I be paying and be responsible for people who were bad? And yet, it's just because I'm saying I'm Polish, the mother says, huh oh. I mean, it happens very often. I mean, in Red Cross there was this new worker there and she says to me, ah, the Poles were so horrible to the Jews, killed them during – and she is not even Jewish. And she says – and I said, who told you stuff like that? Absolute there were people like that, but they weren't any better than the J-Jewish **O.D.** I mean, you know what **O.D.** is? **Ordnungsdienst**, so the Jewish police. I mean, it was just as cruel as the Polish police or anybody else. I mean, and you – nobody – they were more hated in the ghetto some – for example, than – than even the Polish police, cause you can always bribe the Polish police. And of course I understand the – the **Ordnungsdienst**, or the yi – Jewish police, they wanted to stay alive, so – I mean, this whole idea was that everybody who was in this situation had to – wanted to survive, and the will to survive makes you do things that – I don't know what I

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would do if it was I who had to decide, who had to fight for my life, and f – and make a – prolong it for one or two or three days. Of course, ther – you were always promised you're gonna stay alive longer. And I mean, the insight probably that I gain is that you never know what you would do in a given situation, that no matter how much I b – was taught about this forgive our trespasses, love your brother like your own, like yourself. I don't know what I would do, if I were pushed toward the wall. If my back was toward the wall, what would I do? And for God to judge people. I don't know if we have the right to do it. Like the Indians say, don't judge a person until you walk in his moccasins. And that's the truest truth there is, really.

Q: You've written three books?

A: Yeah.

Q: What prompted you to write these books?

A: Well, the first one was written by my – was – the first one that I wrote in a German – in a little German town was because my father – well, when I came to **Poland**, and you know, the Poles hated the Germans because almost every one of us lost somebody from the family. My uncle was killed because the – all the professors were killed in **Lvov** when the Nazis came. And there were other members of the family that were incarcerated, and they say her, she's crazy, saying that there are good Germans. But I say, but I've lived there and I know that there were good ones, cause if – without them we would have never survived. And so –

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Q: This is when you came back to **Poland** after the war?

A: To **Poland** to v – after the war to visit. And wherever I went it was the same story, so finally my father says, why don't you just sit down and write the book about, in quotation marks, the good Germans. And I say I understand why you think there were no good, all you saw was the Nazis, the **SS**, the Gestapo and the **Einsatztrup**(ph) and you didn't ever see – I said, the system was horrible, but there were still good Germans. Oh no, of course not. And so that's why I sit down to write the book, but you know how – I was teaching and raising a son, I didn't have that much time to write a book. But so he never read it because he died in '76, so – so he never read it. But then once I started it, somebody says no, so what, don't leave us like – don't leave us – tell us what happened. So I wrote about the displaced persons, how our life was in the camps. And then somebody says again well, what's the end? What's the ending, can – oh yeah, I remember I gave it to some Jewish couple to read and they said, well, can't you write about some happy times? And I say – ya – like in **America** and all that kind of stuff. So I said okay. So the last one is called "**America: Dreams and Reality**," and tells – this is the longest book, because of course it describes from what, '51 to '90 or 200. No, it was published in 200 [indecipherable] in '89. And the first one didn't sell well at – at all in **Poland**. And as a matter of fact, the [indecipherable] went bankrupt. But I don't think it was bankrupt on account of my book, praising – talking about good Germans, but it was

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because the guy didn't know how to – that was this time when all this new capitalists wanted to grab money and he just probably didn't have any idea how to sell books.

Q: This is the book, “**In the Shadow of Dora**,” that you're talking about?

A: Yes, “**In the Shadow of Dora**,” I cou – I –

Q: Now that – that's here in the – in the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum library.

A: Yes [indecipherable]

Q: Are the other two books here?

A: I – nobody could find. I gave them – I gave it to the – I give this in the dep – from [indecipherable] lan – land of slavery, I gave it here and it's not here, I can't find it. I don't know if I've given **America** to the – no, I don't think yet, because I only had one copy, so I don't think – and I don't think that would interest anybody, because – that might interest the displaced persons, because they went through the same stages of being – getting here and getting acquainted and all that.

Q: Now, ba – these books have been in both languages, in Polish and in English?

A: No, they all are in Polish except the one in the little German town that was published in **Germany**, because the Germans got hold of it and translated it and published without sending me the copy of the translations. So they are – and I was an idiot enough, I have – I have no contract or anything like with – with them. So finally the guy said, if they sell 1,000 and the editor, I mean the publisher says 1,000

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copies, then I get some – and the – his financial assistant said 1,500. And so I'm not gonna wait for that, okay? The fact is that I put down something so that those who come after us knows what this generation of us went through and yet somehow survived. And I think that the reason why we really survive is the 20 years of po – Polish independence, cause then we were – after the 123 years of being taken by Russians, Prussians and Austrians, in this free **Poland**, the **Pilsudski's** free **Poland**, we – it was imbued in this crowd of the old **Poland**, and I always was in this camp of this nation of a ma – kingdom or republic of free nations, you know how that if you le – stick together instead of quarrel, you can be somebody. And I always wanted **Poland** to be multi-culture and multi-religious. And I had this teacher who always – in elementary school, who always complain how dumb the Polish government is and those national democrats and all and this – and so finally – and we finally said well, can you tell us when **Poland** was really big? And – and she says, I'll tell you. And she said, when the Russian Greek – no, when the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox pre – prince said to his son, whom he sent to **Italy** to study, remember son, you are a Pole. He says, that's where **Poland** could be proud of herself. And that stuck with me so that – of course that's impossible in this situation, when all those new ethnical quarrels and all this. I mean, people somehow didn't know that you can live in peace, speaking a different language, pursuing a different religion, and – and I mean, and live in peace in one country. Somehow people just

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don't see it, you can see it now, **Africa** or **Yugoslavia**, wherever we are, you see the same old stuff, this hatred. And – but then everybody says that I am is – all cynical and only see the bad side of the – of the history and I have a friend who says, now my gosh, she finally said something good. And she sa – no, because I always see the downside of life. And I said, when you look around, there is no up side. There are the rich and there are the poor. There are the educated and uneducated. And I know it's the fault of an uneducated who drop from school and all that. And I see it's the – every religious – whether it be a rabbi or a priest or whoever the others ones, they all preach their own catechism and – but I said, but now, since we – since I see the Catholic church said we – not every – I have to – have to tell this to Mr. **Rosen**, but this – this writing in the bulletin and says something about [**indecipherable**] yeah, something about the desert through which our ancestors fr – no, it's talking aya – in the life, working through life as in a – like our spiritual forefather or faithful father – yeah, I got my faithful fathers walked through the desert, as they coming back, this Judeo-Christian idea. And – but to see that written in a bulletin, that's kind of – I mean, that's a totally different aspect as you have seen, let's say, even 20 years ago, before this pope. And I – I think that – but then you own the other – the Christian and the Jews can get together now, but how about the Arabs and the Jews? I mean, this idea of killing – going to heaven when you kill an enemy? I mean it's just so

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inhuman, the whole thought is inhuman. But maybe if we keep working at it we're gonna get better, who knows?

Q: Have you been back to **Poland** many times?

A: Yes, I have been back to **Poland** and – but I never got a reception in **Poland** like – except for my parents and families and all that, like I got in – in – in **Tel Aviv**, cause my – when I went to the wedding, to **Janet's** daughter, she already told everybody that her friend is coming and that she is from **Poland**. And I went from one store to another, on one person to another, cause they said, oh we would like to meet you cause my mother's from **Poland**, my grandmother was from **Poland**, and she would so want to hear. So I just went from one place to another, you know? It was – you know, nobody was talking about anti-Semitism, or anti – because all these people, you know, left before the war. So their life was cultural, organized, and – a – and you know, usually people that are smart remember good things. They don't go back to the horrible things, cause that just sours up your life. And it wa – it was really great, and when we started talking and we one time all thought about the same thing. Here the matzos are so small, you know, and back home the matzos were huge, you know, like for a whole family **nah**. And we talking about the **kudskis**(ph), you know, that you make for – what's that holiday that you build a shelter on the outside?

Q: A – a sukkah?

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A: Sukkahs, yeah. And – we call this **kudski**(ph), I think. But anyhow, so we talked about all these things and it was fun, it was really, really fun, those happy remembrances.

Q: Uh-huh. What – what else were your feelings in **Israel** when you got there?

A: Oh, in the first place, when I got there this guy – I was proud, you know, finally they have their own land, you know. I don't know whether I said – although I showed this guy my passport and he said oh – no, the American's passport don't mention religion, do they?

Q: Place of birth, but not religion.

A: Yeah, and anyhow, I ca – he just keeps looking at it and now there's flags, you know. And I don't know, maybe I was – ah, no. I was supposed to be picked up by **Janet**, but **Janet** messed up the arrival time. And so here I am waiting and waiting and nothing happens. And then maybe I had tears in my eyes, but anyhow, I was looking at these flags and you know that not to think about, cause I'm always this person who thinks something worse – something bad happened to you if you didn't show up. And the guy says to me, why you – he says, I exchange your dollars for the **shekel** and I put you in a taxi and you can – and you can go where you're going.

And I kind of keep on looking and I say – I don't know how, but anyhow he said – I was about to cry, I think, or something like – and I said, well I'm not crying for not meeting my friend, I'm crying cause I'm so happy seeing all this – these flags and all

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that, that you finally have your own land and you don't have to wander through. And – and that was really – that was really great, when you think about it. And then, all these Jews from **Poland** brought their Polish individuality and you have two – and you have 10 political parties like it used to be in **Poland**. They have all this idea, I'm the king and I know what's right and you don't. And I'm not listening to what you are saying [**indecipherable**] still think about, and that didn't fall from the sky, that's the Polish experience, where everybody could be a king. Even had the saying that no women on his estate and his estate wasn't bigger this – this room, is equal to the big governor, I mean that kind of stuff. And you see that in **Israel** when they start having all those political parties and all these different words. It's nothing but that they heard it. That they brought with them.

Q: Did – do you think because of your background you're – th-the way you raised your son was affected? I mean, obviously it was because of the conditions that you were in, a single mother and having to work and go to school. But because of your European background and the difficulties that you went through.

A: I wou –

Q: Did that affect how you brought him up?

A: Well, I was trying to just make sure that he gets good education. That was my main thing, my – however, since – I'm sorry that I didn't teach him Polish, when he was little he knew it, but then my husband says, I don't understand anything he's

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saying. And then I went to school and I didn't have time, and I'm very sorry for that. And I didn't imbue him with this proud Polishness that I have. And he says, well you never say – you always praise **Poland**. And I said, but I never said anything bad **[indecipherable] America**, but I'm – I'm proud of being Polish, I have a thousand year history behind me. And – of course he would have rather been born to some French woman – I mean French immigrant or English immigrant. He – for some reason he, no matter how I brought him up he still – he – he doesn't have the same nature I have. He always complains that all I do is always take care of other people instead of myself. And I say, because in real life, I mean at the end of your life, it's not what you did for yourself, it's what you did for other people. And what got to him, that's so alien. Absolutely alien, and yet, since he was brought up with, in a Jewish home, so to say, he married a Jewish girl.

Q: Wh-Why do you say he was brought up in a Jewish home?

A: Well, **[indecipherable]** Shabbas we went to a Jewish home, I mean –

Q: Oh, okay, that's your friends, yeah.

A: – yeah, with my friends. And I mean, he – he thought that all Jewish people are the same like **Janet** and **Stanley Levin**, for education and not for money and all this kind of stuff. And then he marries this girl. I don't know what he expected. And he says, you know, there's ka – all ki – they're so cluster, they're so exclusive, they're so – see with **Janet** and – and **Stanley** he was used to, you know, being included,

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and he thought that every Jewish family is like that, that they would – that if they like somebody they would sort of, yeah, greet him as their own. And he says, they're not like that at all, they're very exclusive. They don't consider you one of their own. And I-I – I don't know how – anyhow, the marriage failed because of the money, I think, she wanted to stay in a little town, and he – and I said, well, I have those two Judo-Christian grandchildren.

Q: Have you – di-did you become more religious because of your experience during the war?

A: No, becau –

Q: Or less religious? Did it affect you in any way, religiously?

A: On the contrary, I didn't. I had less religious for a simple reason that when I saw the suffering of the Jews, or I heard about it, and later I saw it – here is a nation that prays, keeps all these hundreds of commandments, prays to this God, and he lets his chosen people be chosen to the ovens. I really stopped being religious. I go to church by tradition and I know there isn't – there's got to be somebody, cause even there wasn't, we have to invent him to make sense in life. What for how, why, but when – I mean, and I'm not the only one, there are lots of Jewish people who lost their faith because of that. I mean, when you really think what is – all this – so many people – I remember this one fellow who – who got a chicken and he says – and his mother wouldn't eat it, she'd rather be hungry and skinny because it was not kosher chicken.

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I mean, here the guy goes through all this trouble to buy this chicken and his mother refuses to eat because it's not kosher. I mean, it's – I understand, walking through the desert you had to keep your hygiene so that you stay alive, cause the – not enough water and – and p-plagues and bad food could just kill a whole family, whole tribe. But I mean, in modern times? But that – that was what makes me – what made me really not believe. I just know that there's all this preachers and rabbis, they tell their own story now because they want to stay in clerical garbs. But I-I – I really – and I go to church and I look at it and I say my prayers and then I say, what a hypocrite you are. And then – but when I'm in that church, I pray, and I say this Our Father and all this. And of course – an-and the reason why I really don't see any af – saw any anti-Semitism is because you always read this first old Bible, you know the – you know the – they is – and then be – the Bible, the story from the Bible –

Q: You mean – you mean the he – the Hebrew Bible, you mean?

A: Hebrew Bible and then you read the **evangel** and the new things, you know, so there is always this connection and they always say the ceremony about this Old Testament and – yeah, that's what they call it, Old Testament and this New Testament. And so I always saw this connection, but the – in practical – in practice, this thing didn't work out. It's only now coming back that they stress all this Judeo-Christian relationship. And so, maybe it's only insurance, you know, since I don't

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know what's up there or down below, going to church is my insurance and I should – gosh, it's a sin to say stuff like that.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Beginning Tape Five, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**. This is tape number five, side **B**. Do you think you would be a different person today if you hadn't gone through the experiences that you went through as a young – young woman?

A: Well, definitely I would. In the first place I wouldn't have met so many people and learned that among the bad ones, there are good ones. And that people are all the same, no matter where they are. And you – you have to forgive the bad ones and have – thank God that you met some good ones. And basically that before I always thought that the only good people were Polish pe – I mean Poles, whether they were Mosaic or Catholic. But then when you go out in the world, you learn that people are all the same, in a way, that they are formed by their cultures. And language brings – that the characteristics, that they just have – they're influenced by their language, by their cultures, but basically when you go down to it, they're si – they're all the same, good and bad. And you-your – when you have your own children you try to make them citizens of the world so that we see that everybody is – that we all human and you're never really successful, because sometimes, I see by my own son that not all

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people are the same – or have the same value in his eyes. So I wasn't very successful, although I tried. But there's nothing that we can do but hope, and try to be better. And I tried, and sometimes I fall back and say bad things about other people. I try not to, but that's a very human thing, you blame somebody else for your own unhappiness and so – but I never, never made a difference between a Jew, or a Catholic or a German or a French, or an English if she was a good person.

Q: Because of what you went through as a – a young woman, has that affected you politic – politically?

A: Which one are you – a woman?

Q: Well, your experiences in **Poland** and in **Germany**, and so forth. Has that – do you think that's affected you politically?

A: Well, of course I would never be a communist. And I think that democracy, guarded by public schools, and education in public schools is the best way of governing. But I also know that power and greed can buy certain rights and political power, and that you have to watch out for that. Because I'm too old to do anything about it, but if – one thing I know for sure, that I always will be voting, because if you don't vote, you – you have nothing to complain about later on, if things go wrong. And sometimes you get your – you don't get **Gore**, you get **Bush**, but you have to put up with it, cause you know, four years from now he can get – he gave his – if he was good, he stays, if he wasn't, can go out. So I – I – politically – but then I

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always was sort of a – maybe not a democrat, but I was more – I always saw injustice in the world, and I just always thought that – and I think that the government is the only place really in this – that can help p-people, and – in whatever situations. And so I don't – I think I would never be one of those government haters, and no matter – but you have to watch it, you can't just let government do what they want to do if it's not right. So that's politics, that's what I am.

Q: Would you just – if someone asked you, are you Polish or American, how would you answer?

A: First I would say I'm a human, a woman and then I would say a teacher and then I would say a mother and then I would say of Polish origin. That's what I would say.

Q: Would you say you're American?

A: Oh, if – if I am abroad I am always an American. I mean, here if somebody – cause here is this business of Polish-American, Spanish-American, that kind of stuff. Now they came up with African-American. If they ever been in the **Africa** they know that there are 50 nations at least. But I am Americanized. I do keep some Polish traditions, but –

Q: Such as?

A: Ah, such was this, before Christmas eve, when you have this – they call this **vigilia**(ph), that's the vigil of Christmas and you take this white waffle and you

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break it with whoever is with you and you say forgive me and be brothers again and all this kind of stuff. I find this a very nice custom. And let's see, what else? That's about all that I really believe in when it goes for – and of course there's the language that ties me to **Poland**.

Q: What – what language do you think in?

A: I really don't know, I think ever since I have fallen, math, definitely first Polish. When it goes for counting, I count in Polish. But otherwise, I think in the language that I am speaking. But when – since I've fallen on my head, and I s-sometime – and I speak with a person who knows both languages, I'm not sure whether I can keep with – in one language. I never have that trouble with French because I know they – this – oh yeah, there's a Spanish, but I mean, that doesn't bother me. But since I never learned Italian very well and I don't know Spanish very well, I ran – really never know what you – whether I'm speaking Spanish or Italian, but – so I avoid it. But I think that I basically – I don't know. Now right now I am talking English to you, so I think in English.

Q: When you go back to **Poland**, what are your thoughts about the country now, and do you feel yourself at home when you're there?

A: Well, I haven't been in this new **Poland**, but you ni – I always knew that nobody liked what was going on there, cause you can hear all those jokes, the taxi drivers always told – tell you the jokes. And you still see this dislike of the Soviets. Well,

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not so much Soviets, like the Russians. And I speak – I – I – I really – not that I miss **Poland**, but I have love for it, for my beginnings and – on – but now on the other side I'm very – I love **America** because it gives a chance, those of us who were su – couldn't go back or didn't want to go back to **Poland**, gave us a new beginning. It's like a – it's like a promised land, in a way. And of course, not everybody's life was a paradise on the country. Some people had a very, very hard life. Not I, not that – being not excluded. But yeah, it's a country that gave us a chance to be something.

Q: Mm-hm. I notice you're wearing a pin that says teacher for the millennium.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Was that an award that you received?

A: When – no, it's – one of my students gave me, and send it from **California** and they says, make sure you wear it, and so – because I was meeting her aunt or somebody, I wore it, cause she – I knew – and then I forgot to take it off.

Q: I'd like to have you read, or – or me read this last paragraph in the book that you wrote, called, "**In the Shadow of Dora**," and see if you have any con – comments after.

A: Well, "We the ones who lived through the terror, and those who would learn of it, when the temptation of conquest and power presents itself, remember the terror. Will they remember the sacrifice of 50 million people during the conflict began by the Nazis, no matter what the revisionists say? Will they remember the Holocaust and

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the warning of the changing wheel of fortune? We learn so little from history, and repeat the same old horrible mistakes, again and again. I know only that I would not want to forget the good of the few people in **Nordhausen**, nor would I want to fail telling others about them.”

Q: That’s beautiful. Is there anything you wanted to add to that?

A: Well, no. I just hope that we never – that our children and our grandchildren will never have to suffer or see others suffer and not do anything about it. And that this whole horror was brought to me by this death of **Jan Karski**, who – who tried so bravely to na – to – to tell the world about what’s going on and nobody would listen to him. And whenever I think about har – and about how this man felt, that he failed, he – in his life, because despite all he tried, he couldn’t move anybody to do anything. On the other hand, I don’t know what he expected people to do, and what could have been done. But i-it’s just he, when I first saw him, o-on **Lehrman Miles** with us, his goodbye dinner or something, you know, and he – he was talking about how Mr. **Lehrman Miles** help him after his wife died, and then Mr. **Miles** said the same thing about him, how wonderful **Karski** was, and how a courageous man. But I know that he felt, yeah, from the talk – talking – from talking with him, he knew that he felt that he really didn’t – didn’t do – that he failed to do what he wanted to do. But then, it’s easy to judge again, without knowing. And even American Jewry didn’t do anything, but on the other hand I understand they were afraid of a

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backlash. And so this worl – life is so complicated. There's no such a thing like a easy, straight line. And everybody brings into this life his own dislikes and likes, his own ideas, and they always in conflict with somebody else's. And the wisdom is – or would be, t-to do the right thing, but how many of us think about it? Not everybody can think that clearly and long distance. Then we have our own problems, and everybody's involved in our own life and pr – solving our problems, and it's not easy to live. So that's why probably people are believing in God, because this – without knowing that – believing that there is something up there, or wherever, in space, life would be worthless. That's it.

Q: Is there any message you wanted to leave to your grandchildren?

A: My grandchildren? Love the people around you and be truthful to yourselves, especially.

Q: Well, that's a lovely note to end on. Thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: You're very welcome.

Q: This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Kristina Belfoure**.

End of Tape Five, Side B

Conclusion of Interview