

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ina Sagen Zigelman
May 29, 2015
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PREFACE

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INA SAGEN ZIGELMAN May 29, 2015

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview of Ina Zigelman. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on May 29, 2015 and it's taking place at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Ina Sagen Zigelman: It's Ina **Sagenkahn Zigelman**.

Q: Sagenkahn is your family, maiden name.

A: Right and I use the S as my middle initial.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in **Memel** which is Lithuania now and it's called **Klaipeda**.

Q: When were you born?

A: On June fourth, 1925.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family. Your parents. What were your parents' names?

A: My father was Jacob Marcus Sagenkahn and my mother was **Lotte Mendelson** Sagenkahn.

Q: How long had they been in the city that you were born in?

A: Well my father was a native to the city and my mother got there when they got married. In 1922.

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Q: How far back did your father's family go?

A: Oh god. On my grandmother's side, I don't know how far they went. On my father's side they came from **Salont** which is Lithuania which was Czarist Russia at the time. And my mother was born in **Skorov Shkudi**, which is a small town which is now on the Latvian border but when she was born it was all Czarist Russia.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I had a sister who has passed away but she also survived the war.

Q: Was she older or younger?

A: Three years older than I.

Q: Three years older. And her name?

A: Was Hannah Ruth Sagenkahn. And when she was married it was **Felman**.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father managed a store. He was a shopkeeper.

Q: What kind of store?

A: It was sort of like a semi-department store. It was the second largest store in town.

Q: What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it Jews and non-Jews? Was it a mixed neighborhood?

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A: We lived in a mixed neighborhood and our landlord was German and his son in law was the head of the Nazi party. But he was in jail. The Lithuanians -- it was illegal to be part of the Nazi or Communist party in Lithuania and they were jailed and he was in jail.

Q: You lived in a mixed neighborhood?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism when you were, we're talking about when you were very young, your early childhood, even though there were other non-Jews living there?

A: We went to German school. We went, we lived among Germans. My family had non-Jewish friends so it's --

Q: How would you describe your family? Was it middle class, upper --

A: Middle class.

Q: Did you live in an apartment or a house?

A: In an apartment. At that time everybody lived in apartments. It was a small town and there were very few people who lived in individual houses, specially in the city. My grandparents lived in a house in the country but we did not.

Q: What about extended family? Did you have --

A: Oh god yes. My father was one of, there were 13 children, not all of them lived in town and he was the first son and child number two. And --

Q: So you had many aunts and uncles and cousins?

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A: Oh yeah, I had cousins my age and uncles, not many lived in town any more. They had spread all over the world but anyway.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: German.

Q: German. Did you speak Yiddish?

A: No. My mother spoke German, I mean Russian also but not at home, but among her friends and among, with her mother and I had a Russian nanny when I was a kid so I spoke Russian when I was little. But otherwise, it was all German.

Q: How did your father and mother meet, do you know?

A: Probably -- I think my father had an aunt living in my mother's home town and they were, you know the Jewish **shadchan**.

Q: Were your parents very politically minded? Were they Zionists?

A: My mother belonged to **Weitsel, Weisel**, but I don't know about my father. I'm sure they supported the -- we had a **Keren Kayemeth** box in the house, you know the usual. And we had to learn Hebrew.

Q: Where did you learn Hebrew?

A: After school we had a Hebrew teacher. At first we went to the Jewish community building and the **hazzan** of it taught us Hebrew and when he told us a story of Genesis and I was a very polite little girl. I raised my hand and I asked who created God. He hit me over my fingers and I

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never -- refused to go back there. So we got a very nice lady Fraulein Mannheim who taught us Hebrew, modern Hebrew in the afternoons.

Q: How old were you when that happened?

A: Oh probably six or seven. He called my mother and he called my father and there was a big stink.

Q: How would you describe yourself? Were you very independent? It sounds like it.

A: Oh yeah, you know in a small town everybody knows you and especially everybody knew my father and my mother so and we couldn't do anything bad --

Q: You mean because of the store?

A: The store and the family background and all that. So everybody knew and you had to behave yourselves. You couldn't do anything bad. It was promptly reported.

Q: What was the name of your father's store?

A: It was E I Simon.

Q: Was the name of the store.

A: Yeah. It really belonged, he was part owner but it belonged to a cousin of his who lived in England.

Q: Did you mother work in the store with him?

A: Oh no.

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Q: She stayed home.

A: Right.

Q: She didn't have another job.

A: No.

Q: You said you had a nanny.

A: When I was very little, yes. But later on we had a housekeeper who lived in the house and she took care of me and I had to behave myself.

Q: Was that difficult to behave?

A: Well we had our differences.

Q: Were you very athletic?

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of sports were you interested?

A: Well at first we all learned to swim because it was near the Baltic and this was a requirement from school and then of course we played tennis and we skated in the winter. Cause it's you know it's up north and in the winter the sun goes down about 2:30, 3:00 in the afternoon and it's dark and it doesn't come up the next day until about what, 10:00 or what, so you had very long winters and we went skating. And on Sundays we could go skiing because we didn't go to school. We had to go to school six days a week.

Q: So you went on Saturday?

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A: Oh yeah but the Jewish students carried their books on Saturdays. We didn't because we weren't religious but the religious. I had a cousin who was very religious. They left their books in school on Fridays.

Q: Friday so they wouldn't have to carry?

A: Right, right.

Q: So you say you weren't religious. Did your family observe any holidays?

A: Oh yeah, Passover, Hanukah.

Q: What about Shabbat? Did they do anything?

A: No. My father worked on, you know. But my family, they were all **Kol HaAmmim** and my grandpa was very religious so for the -- they lived in a small settlement outside of town so for the high holidays they came to town and they stayed with my aunt, not the -- we were not kosher.

Q: So they stayed with your aunt?

A: With my aunt. And I remembered, my grandfather belonged to a very old **shul**. It was called the Polish shul. I don't know why. My mother didn't go there. The women were completely separate from the men. They had holes in the wall and my mother went to the more, the what is it, reformed synagogue and the ladies were on top in the balcony. And we used to run back and forth between the two to see who had was through and how far had they come. I remember my grandfather getting up and ____ he wore white knitted socks which my grandmother had knit for him. He was very-- and he had white beard. He was very strict but he was also a nice man.

Q: And his name was?

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A: **Shmul**, Samuel, Samuel **Sve** Sagenkahn.

Q: What kind of hobbies did you have or did you have any?

A: Well we all had to learn to knit in the German school. Knit and crochet and all that good stuff. Painting.

Q: Did you like to read?

A: Oh god yes. That was my salvation.

Q: Any favorite books when you were a child that you remember?

A: I don't know. I read everything I could. My sister had been very ill and at that time before antibiotics and all that she wound up in a hospital for almost five months. She had measles. And it went to her ears and she was operated on, middle ear on both ears. Anyway and when she came out of it, she was behind in school. So they hired a tutor for her and I was supposed to be in the same room and be quiet and mind my own business. So I learned to read before she did and when I came to school I could read and nobody knew what was and I couldn't understand what was the big idea. What was the difference? It's written. I read it.

Q: You went to a public school?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was taught in German and you spoke German?

A: In German, right.

Q: Were there any sense of anti-Semitism in the early grades?

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A: I didn't know anything about it.

Q: Ok. How many years did you go to your first school?

A: Four years and then you took an exam for the **lytsao**.

Q: And you went to a different school?

A: Yeah.

Q: What kind, can you describe that?

A: Oh. It was a, well it was a private school. You had, they were known as Augusta Victoria schools all over Germany. They were sponsored by the Kaiser when years ago, she was very much for education. And so they had schools, high schools for girls all over and this was part of the set up.

Q: That's where you started?

A: That's where I started.

Q: When you say private, your parents had to pay for it?

A: Oh yeah, yeah had to pay for it.

Q: How many years were you in that school?

A: Until the Nazis threw me out. For almost three years.

Q: So that was seven years of schooling that you had?

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A: Right and then we went to Lithuania and I finished high school there.

Q: Let's start talking about when things started to change. Cause up til then it sounds like you had a happy childhood.

A: Right.

Q: Freedom to play with whomever you wanted to?

A: Right.

Q: When did conditions start to change? Do you remember?

A: In the, probably in the 30s, 33, 34 when Hitler came in.

Q: Came into power?

A: Right.

Q: So in 33 you were a little girl of about eight.

A: Right, well we still, we knew you know there was something going on and we had relatives in Germany and my father, my parents traveled and they came back and I remember, my father had gone to Czechoslovakia cause his good friend had to flee from Germany. First to Austria, then to Czechoslovakia and this must have been in 1938 I assume. And he brought back books that had been written about the concentration camps. Nobody but me read it. I even started to read **Mein Kampf** and I couldn't understand why we were so dumb and not believe it because you know the people oh, forget it. Just another idiot.

Q: Did you listen to Hitler's speeches on the radio at all?

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A: Not really, not if I had, maybe my parents did. I didn't.

Q: Was that a particularly, when you were eight, nine and ten, was it particularly frightening for you?

A: No, no, we had an incident when I was still in the grammar school. We used to get a little magazine. Our teacher subscribed for us. It was called Hansel and Gretel and every month, it had a picture inside you know for a story which you could take out and we had a frame. You could put it in a frame. So one day we got a picture of Hitler in it.

Q: Hitler was in the magazine?

A: Yes, for the month. So he was of course discarded by us and I was called to the Lithuanian secret police with my mother. They wanted to know about the teacher. Was she a Nazi? Did she teach you about Hitler and all that? And she did not. She was a very nice lady. I still remember her name. She was a very nice teacher and a very nice lady.

Q: What was her name?

A: Fraulein **Kutzev**. And I told them what I knew. She was sent to another school in the provinces. She became the teacher of one of my cousins. And there's a long story I'll tell you about afterwards. But anyway the magazine of course was discontinued and the picture thrown out and that was, I found out about Hitler. He was a bad man over there, you know. And kids didn't worry much about it. But then we had a lot of relatives come and visit us in 1938. My mother had a sister.

Q: Hitler came in power in 33.

A: 33, yeah.

Q: And then between 33 and 38.

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A: It took, you know for me I was a kid then. It didn't mean anything.

Q: So your life wasn't affected directly.

A: No, except some of the relatives left Germany, came home to Memel cause we spoke German in Memel so it would be easier and some of my friends, my parents friends emigrated and they started the whole thing you have to go to United States.

Q: But life kind of went on between 33 and 38.

A: Right. It wasn't an ____ moment up to a point.

Q: Were there any restrictions?

A: No, not at that time. It was all Lithuanian so there was plenty of Lithuanian anti-Semitism but we didn't feel it where we lived. And one of our neighbors was the, he had a governor, the Lithuanian governor and he was a vice governor. He was our neighbor, Dr. **Ozu**. He was a very nice man. He played with his dogs. He didn't have any children. And Mrs. Ozu became a very good friend of my mother. And I remember she came, they moved out into the country and had a beautiful home with a gorgeous garden and she came in her Volkswagen, the early Volkswagen and picked us up. For a coffee klatch or whatever.

Q: Now comes 1938 and you are 13 years old.

A: Right.

Q: And what was the first change then?

A: The first change of that when Hitler reared his ugly head and he occupied Czechoslovakia, remember and he demanded to get Memel back. My, the province which had been part of the

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Kaiser's Reich until the First World War and then the League of Nations created the three states, the Baltic states and Lithuania did not have a harbor. They had a – you look at the map – they had access to the Baltic but they did not have a harbor. And Memel my home town had a harbor. So they occupied it. At first it was occupied by the French for one year. They were holding it. Then when Lithuania had an army so all 16 men marched in and occupied Lithuania and it was under a mandate that the Lithuanian government was all restricted and the like army and police, all that was Lithuanian. The telephone which belongs to the state in that country, in Europe, everything is owned by the state, had to be bilingual. All the streets were bilingual and Lithuanian had to be taught in the schools like they teach Spanish in our schools. And they, and anyway Hitler demanded that Memel he beat back. And so he occupied it in March of 1938 and we left.

Q: So that's when your parents –

A: We left, my father left before that because it wasn't safe for a man. You know it started already.

Q: Did anything happen to him directly at that time, before that?

A: No, he just sold the business and the lady who bought it owned the largest department store in town. And she thought that my father would manage the store for her after she bought it. And he told her no and he left.

Q: Where did he go?

A: To Lithuania.

Q: Where?

A: To **Kaunas. Kovno.** And my sister was in school in Latvia and I and my mother were at home. And we were supposed to go to the United States and all the silver and china, whatever

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had been packed in crates to be shipped to the United States and we had, we didn't have visas. We had affidavits. You had to have an affidavit and the closest American consulate was in Kaunas, in Kovno, Lithuania.

Q: So that's why your father went to Kovno?

A: Right and that's why we went there because our papers were there which was a mistake. We should have gone to Sweden. We had a ferry going to Sweden every week but anyway.

Q: What was it like for you to leave your home town at the age of 13?

A: Well you know as a kid a big excitement.

Q: It wasn't upsetting to you to leave?

A: For me, personally, no. I thought it was a big event.

Q: So you and your mother –

A: We left.

Q: Go join your father in Kovno. And then?

A: And then we, at that time there was a terrible shortage, housing shortage. My parents arranged two rooms from Jacob **Gens** who later became the head of the Vilna ghetto and he was married to a Lithuanian lady and they had a daughter, **Ada**, my age. And they had a very elegant apartment way up on top of town. And we had two rooms and I think the ladies shared the kitchen or their cook cooked for us. I don't know how it worked. But anyway, and Ada and I we, although we were the same age, we had very little in common. She went to a French school and I didn't go to school at all. And then when we realized we had to wait for our quota system and all that I wanted to go to school. As little as I wanted to go before, now I wanted to go. The

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few friends I still had were there and they were going to school. So the nearest – I did not have enough Hebrew to go to a Hebrew high school. I didn't want to go to a Lithuanian one. I didn't have enough French for the French high school so the only thing left was Yiddish. **Sholom Aleichem**. So I had to learn Yiddish and I had to catch up with maths. They were ahead of me in math so anyway I went to Sholom. I had to pass an exam in Lithuanian and math and all that which was run by the department of education. And I passed the exam and I started school.

Q: Did you talk this over with your parents at age 13 what was happening, the fact that you had to leave your home, come to Kovno?

A: No, it was taken as a given. We didn't discuss it.

Q: Did your parents seem disturbed about this new chapter?

A: My mother probably. My father you know. I don't know.

Q: Who were the people, the relatives in the United States who gave you affidavits? Were they –

A: These were cousins of my mother's, on my mother's side. My grandmother's brother. My grandmother Mendelson's brother. The name of the **Rabinovitz** had come to the United States as a young man. He was a watchmaker or he learned it here and became a jeweler and a very wealthy man in Paterson, New Jersey. And his children all grown and we met one of the sons. He had come and it's a long story. He fell in love with one of my aunts but they couldn't get married. They were first cousins and blah, blah, blah. Anyway and he sent us papers to come to the United States.

Q: He was the one to send you papers?

A: Right and his mother was still alive and she was still living in Paterson in a big old house and we were supposed to live there. You know you had to guarantee it and in the guarantee, I was supposed to go to Paterson high school, whatever the name of it was. And that was it.

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Q: So you're now in Kovno and then you started to go to the Sholom Aleichem school. Was it a disturbing, that time, that year in your life?

A: No it was a big and you know. The school was coeducational. We had boys and we were stars of the school because all the boys liked the girls who came from my part of, from Germany. And there were some from Germany. Was one girl from France and we didn't dress like the other girls and we were sports minded. No big deal.

Q: And then the next change?

A: The next change was the Russians invaded the three Baltic states and the American, the consulate in the Baltic states were closed. They only permitted one embassy in Moscow. They closed all the consulates. And the American consulate called us and they said come and get your papers. We have your papers. But my father being a true German, when the Russians came we had to give up our passport. We gave up our passports. So here we had come and get your visas, we had no passports. And they said well the visas will be waiting for you in Moscow. And come. So come.

Q: So what happened?

A: Well we had to wait and my mother was fluent in Russian, spent her days in -- the Russians to convince them to let us go. And then finally they said ok. If the Americans send us a notice that they have your passport officially. You know in Russia everything has to go. And they said we all --

Q: But you're still in Kovno?

A: Yeah and we send you all the papers already. And I -- no, no, they want. So they said ok. Oh and we had tickets to go on the Trans-Siberian express from Moscow to **Vladivostok**. From

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Vladivostok by ferry to **Kobe** Japan. From Kobe Japan on the Japanese freighter which took about 15 passengers to go to San Francisco. So –

Q: But that didn't work out?

A: They finally said that an Americans either call them or send them a letter again. They said to my mother come on Monday and pick up your visas. Well on Sunday Hitler invaded the whole area and that was the end of that.

Q: So now you're –

A: Now we are in Kovno and the Germans have invaded and you know about the pogroms on men. They killed my uncle, my cousins and they simply lined them up. By that time we already had a small apartment. We had moved out of Gens and Gens had moved to Vilnius because he was part of the government and that's another history. The Poles had invaded Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital after World War I and they were in constant, at war, the Poles and the Lithuanians. When the Russians occupied the Baltic states, they returned Vilnius, the capital to Lithuania so all the government officials and everyone moved to Vilnius. Anyway and we had a small apartment and my sister came from Latvia and she was working in the Jewish hospital. She was a nurse in training. And what else? And I went to school. And then the, when the Germans came, before the Germans came, they gave the Lithuanians two days' time to do their dirty work. They lined up the Jewish men and killed them. They raped many girls but they shot them afterwards so there wouldn't be anything left over. And my father was hidden in our apartment and that was on the fourth floor. It was high up and we had a French neighbor who was married to a Jewish man who had come from France because the Germans had come to France. They were safe in Lithuania. And so then. And when they were looking for girls, she hid us. And when they were looking for men. The janitor, an old Russian. His name was **Abramovich**. And he was a – my mother and – we were always taught to be polite. And so on. Some of our Jewish neighbors you know they were **swarash**, they were very nasty to their servants or whatever. But we were always taught to be polite and all of that. So when they came looking for men and they were on the steps, stairs to go up, he said oh don't bother. There are some old French or Germans

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living up there. But then, they rounded up all the men. It was an apartment in front on **Lisisa** lane and there were houses in the back like a horseshoe. They lined up all Jewish people living in there. Lined up the men and they shot them at night. The following day they came with the Red Cross flying. They knew where they had done that horrible deed and they picked up the bodies. But one of the people they shot was a young boy **Lizer** was his name. I don't know what his last name is anymore. He had fall down and had put his arm around. They shot through his arm, and he came afterwards, he came up. He had a crush on me and I don't know. We went to the same school. He came up and he was bleeding and my father bandaged his arm and they put – he was in a state of shock, understandably. And we hid him there and then the whole thing quieted down. He went back to his mother and his little brother who were living downstairs. And I don't know his last name and I don't know what ever became of him. And my father made me clean the four floors of steps which were, they're stone steps and there were blood drops and with a wet towel I had to wipe it all down.

Q: How did that change you? You were a young teenager.

A: Well it, it changes you. And then of course the Germans came in and it's funny the older generations thought oh now the Germans are here. There will be order. They remembered the Germans from World War I. My father did not say anything but of course he didn't believe it. And we were hidden in the basement, when they bombed Kovno, Kaunas.

Q: You were hidden in your apartment basement?

A: And my father made us put, I don't know where he got it, bags of sand all around the windows, there were low windows and all that. And we hid in that basement. And they brought and I remember a woman who had been hit by shrapnel or something. She was bleeding and I think she lost a leg and her husband and a small boy and somehow somebody called an ambulance. I don't know. And they came and they took her to the hospital. And my sister was working in the hospital. She couldn't come home cause there was an emergency. And she told us later that the lady had died. She had bled to death.

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Q: So you go down into the basement you say.

A: The one night. The second night we didn't go and my father made us fill up everything with water, bathtubs everything, pots, pans. Of course he had to put strips of paper on the windows. If the windows shattered they will not, you know and in Europe at that time they didn't have screens. They didn't have it. But anyway we were hidden in that little apartment on top there and friends of my parents had come.

Q: To stay with you?

A: Yeah. They had come, I had loaned a knapsack, a rucksack from them. I was supposed to go on a camping trip and mine wasn't big enough. And they came from Vienna and they had a big one. Then they were **Bishetz**, Mr. and Mrs. Bishetz and they came to pick up their, and they got stuck because there was shooting and bombing and all that and they couldn't -- so the four -- my parents there and I, the five of us were hidden in that little apartment on --

Q: What street was it on?

A: On **Lisis**. Oh I know every, it still exists.

Q: What number?

A: Oh I don't remember but anyway it was not far from the opera house, the park and all that. And the main post office was near us and the high school, the main high school was across the street from us and they were shooting. There was a synagogue in back of us. The synagogue still exists. I saw it. It was known as the Blue Synagogue. I don't know why. It was painted blue, but it's still standing. And they were shooting at the synagogue and we were across from, so anyway and then it quieted down and Mrs. Bishetz and the knapsack, rucksack and went home.

Q: And then what happened?

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A: Well then the Germans came in of course and then they had an order. We all had to be in the ghetto by July 15th. Oh first we had to wear the yellow star on our left breast.

Q: And what did that mean to you and how did you respond?

A: We didn't wear it my sister and I.

Q: Because?

A: We didn't. The hell with them.

Q: Really, so you didn't –

A: We didn't. We are not supposed, we were supposed to wear a yellow star and walk in the gutter. We were not supposed to use the sidewalk. And so we didn't.

Q: This is 1940, 41?

A: 41.

Q: 41, so you went outside without the yellow star?

A: Yeah and we were trying to find food. The only thing available was bread and dried cod. That's all. And I remember standing in line for bread and getting my bread and the Germans came and they took us, the people in line, one of – cause my girlfriend and I and other people we had to bury a dead horse. And in the heat I can still get sick. But I came home and I had my breasts but then I heard my –

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Q: Did your parents go out in the street?

A: No. My mother did on occasions.

Q: Did she wear the yellow star?

A: Oh yeah. Then the order came we had to be in the ghetto by the 15th of August. And my mother went. My father was hidden all the time. He didn't leave the place. And my mother went and she found this place, little place in the ghetto and I don't know how or why or what. And then we – oh and before that we had to turn in our radios and anything that was ele – you know. So I dismantled ours and some friends. I dismantled the -- what was it, the electric –

Q: The tubes?

A: No, an electric iron and a percolator and something else. And I took it apart and took out the innards and screwed it back in. I was very good at – oh and bicycles. We had to turn in our bicycles so a friend and I, we took some of the spokes out of the wheels. We didn't turn you know, one here and one there. It looked perfect, but it wasn't.

Q: So you're giving them all damaged goods is what you're –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: It sounds like you were a very independent young woman.

A: I didn't forget about – I didn't realize that now, afterwards you get scared. At that time we were young.

Q: Again, this is something you spoke about with your mother, the conditions changing and –

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A: Oh no, my mother was in no state to speak with. She was – and you take a lady and you take her out of her environment and all that. She was in a state of shock. She became assertive at times. It was very tough. So –

Q: So then you move into the ghetto.

A: Right.

Q: Can you describe that?

A: Yeah. This was duplex. Each contained one room.

Q: We're talking about August 41?

A: Yeah. Each of the duplexes contained one room, a narrow thing which was called a kitchen and it had a built in stove which you had to heat with water, whatever, for cooking. When you cooked there you also heated the room, the whole wall. And then water of course it was no indoor plumbing. There was a well outside and outhouses, two outhouses. One for each unit. And the four of us lived there. And it had a screened in porch and a friend of the family. In fact she had gone to school with my sister, had nowhere to go so we put her in that screened in porch. We put in a bed. We had a chair or two, two chairs and a table there. We took that out and put a bed in for **Getta** and Getta, her name was Getta **Arnovitz**. She is not alive. But anyway, we were worried about her in the winter. I mean we had this little stove or whatever. In the summer it was bad. You couldn't cook because it heated up the room. But in the winter, and the four of us in that little room. So anyway, she stayed there and we, whatever we had blankets or whatever we put on top of her. She froze her nose. Her nose was frozen. But anyway she stayed with us.

Q: What did you do during the day?

A: What did we do during the day. First of all, all the able bodied people had to go and work at the airport. In **Aleksot** which was –

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Q: You're 16 years old now?

A: Yeah and the father of my best friend was made the registrar in the ghetto. He was the one who issued birth certificate, death certificate. And he gave me certificate. I was only 13. And I –

Q: So you wouldn't have to work?

A: Right.

Q: And his name?

A: Rudolf **Lochsonov**, Dr. Rudolf Lochsonov. I have mentioned him in some of the books I have. So now I was 13. So my mother stayed home and I went to work for her. That was –

Q: Did you look older or look younger?

A: I looked like a little kid.

Q: But you were able to go and work for her?

A: Right. They don't, didn't care. They cared about numbers. And she stayed home.

Q: She stayed home. What kind of work did you do for her. I mean –

A: Well we were shoveling dirt and plumb here. And we had to level or load bricks and then you name it, we did it. And we had to walk there. It's a long walk because I went back there six years ago, seven years, I was in better condition. I couldn't walk. And up the mountain and work at the airport for 12, 14 hours. And we were given soup, some thin soup and a piece of bread for lunch. We had lunch because our guards had to have lunch. Who cares about us?

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Q: So these were other women you were working with?

A: Yeah, women, men –

Q: It was men and women.

A: Yeah both, usually. And we had guards. One in front and one in back. And there were units of 50 or a hundred people in each unit as guards.

Q: Did you see anything painful to watch like beatings and things like –

A: Yes, it was the Russian soldiers, prisoners of war. We worked on one side. There was a railroad track and they were on the other side and they were practically they were starving them to death. They were falling and they had to carry the dead ones and they were falling and we couldn't do anything about it. There was a fence and the railroad and our guards and their guards and their guards were little, can I call them little rock noses. Little 16 year old snuff. And I remember seeing one of them eating an apple and he threw the core of the apple into some excrement and while ten men was trying to get at that little piece of – they just, they kill them but once the tide turned, it changed. But afterwards, that same Aleksot victim was where they kept the Russian prisoners of war. Then they decentralized the ghetto in 19 whatever. We were sent there. We lived there.

Q: In Aleksot?

A: In Aleksot and it was known as the **Fundlager** [ph], which is prisoner of war camp. And the Russians weren't there, of course weren't there anymore. But they decentralized the ghetto. They were afraid it was after the Warsaw uprising and all that and they were starting to lose the war in Russia so they decentralized the ghetto. And since my father still worked in Aleksot at the airport, we were all sent there to live at that camp. And at that time we were already under the jurisdiction of **Stutthof**, had said Stutt and they sent in SS guards from Stutthof to guard us. And

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not only that, they sent female prisoners from Stutthof to clean the barracks of the SS guards and we still had the gallows from the Russian prisoners of war in the yards. They had to line up every morning and all that stuff. And of course food was, food was always an issue, always. In the ghetto and all the time.

Q: How did you get food?

A: How did we get food? Well first of all when we first moved in there our little condo, the fences and all that disappeared. We needed firewood. But there was still a garden. There were still a few vegetables growing in the – so we used that. My mother was very good. She used lots of water and lots of – and we had that and we had bread. And then whatever we could. My father was very good at exchanging clothes with the Lithuanian and getting bacon and whatever. So.

Q: I was going to ask you what you were wearing, you had enough clothes to stay –

A: Oh yeah we had enough clothes and we had enough lice to keep us warm. The sanitation conditions were very poor. When we were living in the ghetto we could still wash. I mean you could take a sponge bath and at one time we had a German in charge of the ghetto and he didn't want to go to the Russian front, poor thing. So he opened up the ghetto to, he let, the ghetto was along the river. I forgot the name of the river. So he opened up part of the ghetto. We could go swimming. And he permitted games in the afternoon, soccer. And we had concerts. We had very fine musicians in the ghetto and so we had concerts. And my girlfriend Tamara the whole summer started, was a fine singer. She sang some arias and so we could go swimming so we had that. But otherwise it was very tough.

Q: Were you with many other girls and boys your age?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you all talk about what was happening to your world?

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A: Well of course. And I remember that period, that summer. I got terribly sunburned. I was swimming with some friends and I got a cramp in my leg and I reached, tried to reach bottom and I panicked and this friend pulled me out. And I just lay down on the sand and I was so sunburned. And I bend my legs, I was bleeding. So I was flat on my tummy and this friend who later became something in the movie industry, he brought, he had a phonograph and some records and we listened to Ella Fitzgerald, some other American.

Q: You listened to Ella Fitzgerald.

A: Some records.

Q: I was just wondering if the teenagers, if you all talked about this kind of –

A: And also I was involved in the underground. Some of my friends went to the forest. One in particular was decorated by the Russians. He lives now in Israel if he's still alive, for bombing a train. Or two.

Q: Tell me about your resistance, what you did.

A: What we did. We first of all we were not supposed to have any schools or education or anything like that. So we taught little kids to read and write.

Q: Where did you do this and how did you do it?

A: In the ghetto, after work or you know the guards needed their rest so we didn't have to work on Sundays most of the time. So on Sundays or at night.

Q: You held classes?

A: Well and we had, I had neighbors in the back, some. They had little children, a little girl and a little boy so I taught them myself. And then –

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Q: How to read and write you mean?

A: Yeah in Yiddish you know. And then we were taught first aid, the girls in the hospital, in the Jewish hospital in the operating room. We went there, one by one. And we were taught how to hold the rifle but fortunately the rifle we had was one that's used in arcades at **Seveno**. It was useless. But the young people started to get together. They were not going to go, enough is enough. And the older people especially the religious people. You had to be very careful what you said because their motto was **Es lekshen zein ei gud** [ph]. It will be good. Or it's god's will or whatever. God didn't you know. If the old story if man was praying and living in a concentration camp they said how can you pray to God. And he said I am praying, thanking God I am not one of them. So I –

Q: Did you steal anything?

A: Oh yeah. At one time, when I worked at the airport, I was put in the **Beklidenskammer** which is quartermaster which issued uniforms to the German air force. And –

Q: So these are German uniforms?

A: German uniforms and also to the -- our foremen. There was organized the **Tzion** Tote which still exists in Germany which were in charge of building the airport. And their foremen were put in some uniforms. They were horrible, but anyway, they were worse than the Luftwaffe, than the Germans, these foremen. Anyway, and they hired, they had, hired. They had Jewish tailor and one Jewish tailor and a few Lithuanian tailors and one Russian and they took two Russian women from **Vitebsk** and me and another woman and we had to darn their socks. We got the washed, disinfected socks and you had these little burn holes where they had been shot. You had to cut around it and then darn it. So I stole the wool for it. And the pilots, the German pilots in the **Beklidenskammer**, they had very warm angora socks. Cause it was very cold up in the planes. And they wore, they had special boots with fur linings and they had these angora. I stole a few. Angora socks. I stole the insignia of their uniform to give to my friends.

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Q: To use in the resistance?

A: Right.

Q: So they could fake like they were –

A: You know they had b –

Q: Where did you get the bravery to do this?

A: I didn't have any bravery. I just didn't, I hated their guts. And I didn't care. You come to a point in life where you don't, you don't care anymore but you also want to leave something behind that you were not a willing sheep.

Q: How aware were you of what was happening outside of Kovno?

A: Very little, except Mira was still in the ghetto. I'm sure Dr. Lochsonov Rudolph, they had the radio somewhere so we knew what was going on. We were not told. We didn't know who had a radio. We were better off not to know in case you were caught or whatever. But we knew there was a radio and they were listening and they were outside. Some people went out of the ghetto and they met and they came back. And some of my friends went to the forest, became partisan and I almost went too. But I made a mistake of telling my mother. And she became hysterical so it wasn't safe.

Q: You couldn't leave her?

A: No, I, not leaving her. I could have left her in a heartbeat. It's she wasn't safe. She would have gone off and told someone. My mother and I were not on very good terms which is understandable so.

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Q: She was what, a woman in her late 30s or early 40s?

A: 40s, yeah.

Q: How aware were you of the mass killings in the forest of Jews and the **Einsatzgruppen** and –

A: Well they had their killing. In Kovno they had up on the seventh fort. They had selections. The biggest was on the –

Q: You were there?

A: Yeah, October 28th and we were sent, We were lucky, let's put it that way. We were of an age group, both parents and my sister they could use as workers. And they were selecting people.

Q: So they selected you for work?

A: Yeah.

Q: But other people were taken, I thought it was Ninth Fort?

A: Ninth. They shot a man and killed him. We didn't know it at the time.

Q: You weren't aware that –

A: No, at the time but we found out very soon.

Q: So you were losing friends and –

A: Friends and family. My aunt and uncle and cousins.

Q: Were taken up to the Ninth Fort?

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A: Yeah, because they refused to leave his parents. You know they wanted to separate them from, and very good friend of mine. Again mothers and grandmothers. There was **Dagmar** Hirschberg. And her brother worked for the State Department here. He was in the United States, but he has since died. I just heard from his widow.

Q: What does that do to a young teenager when those terrible tragedies happened?

A: You had a terrible want to live and on the other hand, you know your life becomes not meaningless but practically worthless. You don't care. You take chances which you would not otherwise.

Q: And you saw dead bodies?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: After a while did you get used to seeing dead bodies?

A: No, you never get used to that. And you see people getting beat. My father was beaten. He lost his eye.

Q: Were you there when it happened?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why did he get beaten?

A: When they, when we were already in this Aleksot then they had the children. They took the children from the ghetto. They had a children **Aktion**. They took all the children and they came to the camp and they took the children. And they knew exactly how many they had. We hid one.

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I hid one and my god, I wish I could remember his name. He was about seven years old. Rubin, I don't know. But anyway and so my father protested it. And he got beaten.

Q: He came to your –

A: He came to, he told the German, the SS when they come you know when he took the child – they took away, the all the able bodied people, the parents and all that. And the children were in camp and they came and got the kids. And they came back and there was one, they knew there was one child. We had him hidden. And my father protested. And so he was beat. He lost his left eye.

Q: That must have made your mother even more --

A: Oh my mother was out of it already. She was – so anyway, what do you do? Nothing.

Q: You were still, even after that you still were doing resistance work?

A: Oh yeah. One good friend, **Abrasha** Levine. He was, he survived the war but I don't know if he's still alive. His father was the head of the Jewish ghetto police. And he came in. We were already in that camp, Aleksot. They organized a concert one Sunday or anything to be in contact with us. And he brought me some blue and black dye and the idea was the man there already put into striped uniforms from SS at that time. When they de, well anyway. They, the man they put in the prison guard of the Stutthof and we had SS guards. The women, they took away all our clothes but one outfit, but we were still in civilian clothes. And we knew that we were going to be deported. This was known somehow. And they decentralized the ghetto and they were going to send the people to – and many people in the ghetto had **malenas**, they had hideouts. I remember helping with that. But when we were still in the ghetto. But anyway Abrasha brought me some clothes dye and the idea was to dye the man's underwear black or blue so if they ran away they were not in striped clothes and they could somehow get away. So I did it and I was, some of the women could have killed me because I hadn't cleaned the wash basin afterward.

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And my father said that he had a blue body long afterwards. But of course it didn't work. So that was my contribution at that time. There wasn't much you could do.

Q: But you were still very brave to work in the resistance.

A: No you didn't know if you were brave or what you did was that you felt you had to do.

Q: How was your health at this time?

A: My health was pretty good.

Q: How aware were you of what was happening to Jews in other countries. Again –

A: We didn't know. We know, we knew about the Vilna ghetto because there was contact and we knew about what had happened in the like my mother's home town Shkudi. They had taken all the Jewish people including her brother and sister and their husbands and wives and put them in the synagogue, set the synagogue on fire and then they tried to escape they simply shot them. So we knew about that. And I went back there to witnessing. They have a marker.

Q: You're in the ghetto and you're working in the resistance.

A: And now I'm up in Aleksot.

Q: You stayed there til, how did you hear about or did you hear about D-Day? Did you know about D-Day in June –

A: Oh I was already liberated by the Russians then. I was –

Q: June of 44?

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A: Yeah we were, my group of women were liberated on January 23rd and put to work again by the Russians.

Q: Are you talking about 45 or?

A: 44. The war was over in 44.

Q: In parts of, not completely, not completely. End of World War II officially was –

A: 40, 45. We were liberated on January 23rd 1945.

Q: You were liberated in 45. That's what I'm saying. D Day was earlier, when they came to France.

A: We didn't, we just saw when we were in Stutthof for one month we saw the planes overhead way up high and we, they used aluminum strips to foil the radar or whatever the Germans had and we had, so we didn't know why they were falling from the sky. Silver strips of aluminum.

Q: What was that for?

A: It was to deflect the German radar system or whatever. They dropped it and we didn't know what it was.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ina Zigelman and this is track number two. And you were talking about Aleksot and what you were doing there. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about. You had talked about your resistance and so forth.

Ina Sagen Zigelman: There was no resistance any more.

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Q: And being aware of some of the other tragedies that were taking place in other locations?

A: Mm hm. When we were in Stutthof. We were there for about a month. There was the time of the Hitler assassination. And we were in the barracks together with a bunch of nuns and Gypsies and the nuns got, had a newspaper, a German newspaper which they gave me and we could read between the lines. You learned to read between the lines what was going on. That's what we found out about Hitler. The attempt –

Q: About the attempt.

A: Yes and the Gypsies for some obscure reason, they left in their colorful costumes and we had to line up every day for a count. Out of our barracks. And we had to line up. The Jewish women in the – if you imagine an L. Jewish women were the long part of the L. The Gypsies and nuns were the short end and behind the Gypsies and nuns were the fence, an electric fence and then the path for the SS to go through. Another fence and the men behind that fence. So when the Germans came to count us every day, they started with the Gypsies and nuns, the small end. And then they came to the Jews. The Gypsy women for some obscure reason I don't know why, maybe. It was a signal, started dancing behind the Germans. Maybe a signal for their men. I don't know. But I looked. There was this beautiful August day. The sun was shining. It was gorgeous. The planes were overhead. I mean we could see dots and here the stupid Gypsy dancing and it looked so incongruous and I looked and smiled. At just that moment the SS passed by me and he hit me. How dare you smile. And I fell down and the women helped me up because if you stayed on the floor, they would have continued it with their boots. But I have never forgotten that beautiful day, the sun shining and this Gypsy dancing.

Q: You were 19 years old.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you feel very old?

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A: No, I had no feelings.

Q: You had no feelings?

A: You didn't have time for feelings. But I remember sitting, I shared my barracks, my bed whatever it was with a, the daughter of a cousin of my father's. Margot **Bushstein**. She was so bright and she said those idiots she said. Didn't they read Mein Kampf and I said I read it a little bit. And she says just a little of it. I read the whole thing. And she was giving me a lecture. My parents, those idiots sitting and reading. She is not alive any more.

Q: You're there and as you said you're in Stutthof in the summer of 44.

A: Right.

Q: And then?

A: We were selected for work so we --oh and before that --

Q: So then where did you go? When they selected you --

A: The first of all they asked for people who knew German to fill up, you know Germans you have to be precise. To fill out names and all that, the whole questionnaire on the day before. So I volunteered and I filled it out. And at the end of the day, he looked at it. He said, that idiot or bitch or whatever, fill this out and I looked at it and I said it's me. He says you didn't complete it and he slapped my face and I said what do you mean I didn't complete it. You know I, I was mad. He says it says **beshodung** [ph]. Shocked. Whatever you were imprisoned for. **Ferbrechen** [ph]. What is your, Ferbrechen. What have you done? I said nothing. He said you are a Jew. So I had to fill out everything and ferbrechen, Jude. Jude, Jude, Jude. But they gave us numbers. And I and my sister and my mother had a continuous numbers so we had to sew

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them. The Gypsies lent us needles and thread. We had to sew it. We had to take out, off our striped clothing. We were given civilian clothes. We had to sew on this on our sleeves.

Q: Sew the numbers on your sleeve?

A: Right. And we were each given a **Kofkische** which is a German issue mess kit. Each soldier was given that. We were given a mess kit, but our mess kits didn't have any tops. The German soldiers had tops so they could drink it or use it as a cup and we were given a wooden spoon and we were put, divided into groups of a few hundred each. And we were put on a ship, a very fancy ferry boat on the Danzig. It's near the, there's a bay there. And were put on that ship and taken to **Elbing** which is a harbor there. And they did not want us in Elbing. And in Elbing there were people working on ships. It's a big huge harbor and they were yelling at us. Who are you? Who are you? And they were not prisoners but they were working from different countries of the world. The Germans had them working on the ships. Anyway from there we were taken to another place and we had to walk through a forest. And my mother became hysterical. She was, she knew it that they were going to shoot us in this forest. So I had to quiet her down. Anyway we came to this village which was named **Truntz** and they put us – they had tents lined up. Ten tents in each row and ten women in a tent. And the tent was divided for four people. You couldn't stand up in it. You can't barely sit up in it. So we slept six, six and four this way. And it was terribly hot in those tents. We had straw underneath us and we had to go and dig trenches, anti-aircraft ditches for them. And the summer was raining and the winter was coming. And we were still in those god-forsaken tents. The lice were multiplying by the minute and the, at one time we worked near some Polish workers. They were not imprisoned but they were you know, they didn't have any guards or anything. And one of them who was their foreman, he called me **Malutka**, which means little one in Polish. They always thought I was a little kid, which was fine with me. Up to a point. When they wanted children, I was not a kid so anyway he brought me the newspaper and a big sandwich made out of bacon and sausage and bread. I mean it was huge. A starbuck, whatever and he had rolled it into a newspaper. Of course it was German but you could read between the lines. So he brought me that for oh god, three or four days. Then everywhere in the neighborhood there he was. And of course I took it back to my mother who had health for a few days. And then we had an incident with one of our guards. He was a young

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guy from Danzig, Gdansk. And he was terrible. He was, couldn't talk to him or anything. He was hitting us left and right until one day we had Frau Finn. She was a lady from Kovno who had a tremendous memory. She, I don't know if she taught or of history. So while we were supposedly digging the ditch, the minute the guard's back was turned, we stood and when the guard turned it was **Yalov** and it was started. Have you heard the term? It was started by a religious man when we were working at the airport. Whenever he saw a guard coming he said Yalov ben **Yovid**. He comes and goes. The moon. So the guards became Yalovs. So he was terrible and Frau Finn was teaching us and we had to sit on, he had to sit down and eat his meal and we could rest up. And she was talking and she was talking about Oscar Wilde and she was quoting him. And she said something like you can never be too careful about the enemies or friends. I don't know what the saying is any more. And this guy heard it. And he came and put down his dish and came over. We thought uh oh he's going to kill her or whatever. He said where did this come from or whatever? She says it's well it's Oscar Wilde. It turned out that was his favorite author. And from then on he was like a sheep. He brought her food, he gave her his food. And then once he worked, we were working near some Polish women. They just devastated him. He probably was of Polish origin. Or what. They just let him have it and he disappeared. But that was Oscar Wilde. And then we had one of the guards was – they had said he was a mailman or something in Danzig at one time.

Q: Did you speak Polish?

A: No. But it's close to Russian. At that time I still knew Russian. So he – oh you know when it was – got very cold and we had a blanket and we were issued coats. And my coat was a Lithuanian army coat. They had taken you know whole slews of the armies they had conquered and I wish I had kept one of the shiny buttons of it. So and one time somebody called me the little lieutenant but I was – but anyway, this guard. I had cut off the bottom of my blanket and made myself a pair of gloves without mittens, without thumbs and I had a string to tie it together. And my string came off. I mean I couldn't tie it with the other hand so he came over and tied it for me. And so one night I had to go to the bathroom. I got, crawled out of the tent and all the women are yelling at me because if one moved the others had to move. We were so tightly knit. And tight in there and I crawled out and there was this guard and he says where are you going?

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And I said well where do you think? To the latrines. And he says well if it's little you can do it here. I won't watch and I thought to hell with you. Nobody's going to tell me when and how to go and I went off to the latrines. And I came back and I crawled into the tent and our tent collapsed and everybody was yelling at me. He had thrown a whole bread onto the tent. That's what made the tent collapse.

Q: He threw the bread cause he wanted you to have food?

A: Yeah, he was giving us food. He couldn't give it to you like that. He threw the whole loaf. So anyway.

Q: Now it's the fall of 44 and –

A: Yes, and the winter is coming.

Q: The winter comes, yeah.

A: And we had a horrible head of our camp, an SS officer whatever. His name was Kafka. I remember it because of Kafka the author. And he was terrible. Oh god, he was hitting you left and right and in between. He went home for Christmas vacation.

Q: Christmas 44?

A: Yeah and he never came back which was a blessing and the Russians, they're overrunning the whole area and they had issued orders that we were supposed to be taken deeper into Germany. You know everybody, the guard the whatever, the German army had to wait behind. The Jews had priority, out. So they, the second in command, pulled up the tent. I mean we were in tents. The guards lived in a house. And they chopped off the feet of their bunk beds below and they loaded their luggage on it, put strings on it and we were supposed to pull it, push it. My mother couldn't walk any more. And I put her on top of it. And they issued us jam, once a week we got a teaspoon of jam and I had this jam that came in a little, like a little pail. I had that empty jam pail

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and her wooden spoon and I put her on top of it and she was very happy, like a kid with a lollipop and the guard came and said she can't sit on that. I said if she cannot sit on there we won't be able to walk very fast. Or run very fast. He says who says when you are running. And I said well I didn't say anything but he left her there. On top of it.

Q: So this was you, your mother, your father.

A: No, no my father, men they were separate. The men were in the hub. We were separated in Stutthof. The men were sent on to Dachau and the women were kept in Stutthof.

Q: So your father was sent on to Dachau?

A: Right.

Q: And your sister?

A: Was with me and my mother. And –

Q: So then you start to leave?

A: We had to leave this tent. We had to leave it because the Russians were coming. And we were told just **Eba de Vixel** [ph], just over the **Vistula** the river Vistula. And we came at night to **Torun**. We need a map. And the Torun, the city there was water and _____ running all over. I said what's going on. There were some nuns coming. They are crossing a bridge. I said what's going on and they said we have just been bombed and this water is from the water facility whatever and they said where are you going? The Russians are coming any minute now. And I said well I don't know where we are going. See our guards. She said, yeah. So we were walking and walking and walking and finally our SS head said ask somebody you know like a man. They never ask for directions. Where is a **stalag** which was a prisoner of war camp? Where is it and they said it's in the opposite direction. So we had to turn around and _____. We came there in the middle of the night. They put us in the barracks which hadn't been finished yet. The windows

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were missing and the doors were missing. And we got in there. And they gave us bread and something. One of our women died there. I can't recall her name. Her daughter stayed with us **Ira**. And the following morning, it was a beautiful sunny winter day in January now. They made us walk and the highway was lined on both sides with prisoners of war. Most of them were British, old RAF. They had been there for a year. Some of them were Russians. And as we walked, they said who are you? What are you? I mean this bunch of raggedy lousy women. And I suddenly remembered my English. I told them –

Q: You knew English?

A: Yeah I had, we had to learn English because we were going to the United States so we had a private tutor and my parents went to Berlitz, so I knew English. Who are you? And I told them and they started throwing the remnants of their Red Cross packages. Prunes and raisins and chocolate and cigarettes and I had never smoked in my life but my two chums Sara **Starwalsky**. I don't know if she must be alive. And Minnie **Pinchuk** were smokers. And they gave me a cigarette and I said I can't smoke. You have to smoke it and somehow we got matches and we lit up and were sitting and smoking and the guards came and the prisoners of war are nearby. They didn't want to, they couldn't be too rough. And I smoked that cigarette to – I thought I was going to get sick. I was hungry. I smoked some of it and then I gave it to the girls. So anyway but we had priority. We had to go first. The others had to wait. So as we are walking and I remember I'm in pretty much in front. There are some German soldiers walking in the opposite direction. And I remember one of our guards say, they said where are you taking this rubble. And they said oh just over the r – **Liksel** – to the bridge over there and they – the guard said, the other one said, I hope you can swim. He said why? He says the bridge is no more. I never found out if the Germans had bombed it or the Russians because then we were walking. We were strafed by Russian planes. From the air, they couldn't see it's a bunch of people walking. So we had to run into the forest and hide. Many girls disappeared then and there. But I couldn't go.

Q: So you and your mother and your sister went into the forest and then what?

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A: There was a camp that had been used for Polish women who had worked near us at Truntz on those digging jobs. And it was called, their tents were made out of plywood in the round and they had a little potbellied stove in the middle and they were called finished tents and the SS put us and we all went into one tent because it was, the fire was going. It was warm in there. And that night the SS guards disappeared. And here we were free. We didn't know what was going on. The following day a bunch of SS they're called **Vlasov**. There was a Polish general Vlasov – a German. No a Russian general, Vlasov who went over to the German side. And they had lots of Ukrainian, our dear friends the Ukrainians were in that battalion. They were known as the Vlasovs. They were very, very terrible. They had come. They were sappers and they had been told to look for a bunch of Jewish women and blow them up. And they were very tired, the poor guys. And they asked a woman, who are you, what are you? Fortunately she didn't answer him in Yiddish. But she understood Russian and German. And she told them oh just workers here, blah, blah. And they said we are so tired. Can we lay down here and sleep and they lay down near the stove and went to sleep and took off the next day. And that same day at night, the Russians started to come in and we had -- our liberator was a Russian Jew on a white horse. Remember **Meshea** on something white? He was, there was a little the hill you know they don't have much hills there. And he was up on the hill. And all the women were screaming and yelling and he was shooting in the air. He didn't know what was going on. Until finally someone could convince him and he came down. He was a Jew from Kiev. He had lost his whole family. And he said don't worry. He said go to, what was, **Alexandrov** which isn't far from here and from there you can go home.

Q: So that's where you were liberated?

A: That's how we were liberated, by the white Meshea on a horse.

Q: What did you feel? Do you remember how you felt then? Or what it meant or –

A: Well it meant that we would be rid of the lice and the Germans and all that but at that moment, all we thought about – we hadn't eaten in a long time. We had had some beer. There was, there was some kind of pub or something across the road. And some women had seen this

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barrel of beer and rolled it over and somehow we all had a sip of beer. We were celebrating. And he told us to go to Alexandrov and it's not far from here. Sure it's not far from here. Just go there and from there you can go home. Ok.

Q: So you went?

A: We went but when we got there, there was no, the Germans had destroyed the railroad. There was nothing and there were, I felt so sorry for them. We slept there on the bare floor of the railroad station and the Polish women were there and they had a huge kettle of soup. They were told there were 50 women coming. It was the Red Cross of Poland and of course there wasn't enough food. But anyway, the next morning some of my friends and I went to the village nearby. We were not going to steal anything. We went up. But if somebody offered us food we were going to take it. And we went and the people were very nice. They were Polish. And they gave us some bread or, as I walked back a little boy came and pulled and he said my grandmother wants to see you, in Polish. And I thought, I understood enough Russian and I said well so I went and there was this old lady. Old, she was probably much younger, in a bed, a huge feather bed, nice and warm and clean and she says to me in Polish, you are a Jewish daughter. And I said yes. She says oh, she crossed herself thank god. The horror is over. And she ordered the little boy to give me some food. And all that. And we both cried. Even though she didn't speak, she knew a few words in Yiddish, in Polish. And I didn't speak her language. We understood each other very well. And she embraced me and I thought she is very courageous with all my lice. And then we walked back and they said go to **Chehorchunek** which is a famous resort in Poland. And the Russians had made an assembly point in Chehorchunek for all the liberated prisoners. And when we got there, they had food. They had cleaned these sort of German army coats but they were clean. They had a bath house, a delousing stations and all that and we stayed there. And we met the prisoners of war. We had met before who had given us their Red Cross packages. And some of them took my friends and me under their wing. And they took us out, the Germans buried their food, their potatoes and all that for the winter. They call **Metten**. They dig deep ditches, line it with straw and put the stuff in the straw and that's how they had their food for – so these soldiers, they were, one was from New Zealand. They took us. They had a little homemade sled. They took, there was Sara Starwalsky, Minnie Pinchuk. I can't remember her –

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myself. They took us and we liberated the food and we took it back and we lived – and my mother and I had a room in a very elegant hotel. Of course and plumbing and electricity didn't work so our bathroom was the outdoor balcony. And we had a little potbellied stove. As long as I could procure stuff to burn in there and we could bake our potatoes. The Russians had a huge soup kitchen but nobody wanted to go. The food was very good. But when we went there you had to stay and peel potatoes. You had to work.

Q: Had you gotten your period at all?

A: No.

Q: During all this –

A: Nothing.

Q: During all those years?

A: No that came back the summer, next summer and the funny thing is the German provided 1200, we were 1200 women when we left Stutthof. We were 800 there, 800 when we were liberated. They provided us with one dozen sanitary napkins. So our doctor she had long been retired. She was an old lady but, what was her name – **Hasia**. The nurse took care of us. She, if you had a, a sore throat she gave you one of those things. And the German women didn't relish that. Look at these savages. They don't even know what this is used for. But we informed them. We met some of these German women. I'll have to tell you about it afterwards. But anyway we were liberated. The allied soldiers were sent back. The war was still going on through Iran. Among our liberated women was an artist. Her name was **Loria**. There are many of her paintings even in your museum here. Esther Loria. She had come to Europe to visit relatives. She got stuck. She was a British subject at then Palestine so the liberated soldiers, Australian, took Esther under her wing. She had the foresight to make a list of the women who had been liberated with her. And they went to the village and got her clothes, including a hat. Well no lady can be without a hat. And she went with them back to Palestine. There are many of

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her paintings of the ghetto and so on. Esther Loria and one of the soldiers came back and said to me, write to your relatives if you remember their address or whatever. He says I promise you the Russians will never see it. I will eat it before they will get it.

Q: Write to your relatives in the United States?

A: Yeah. What do you do? I didn't have a pencil. I didn't own a piece of paper. I went into that hotel, up in the attic and they had old, there were old forms of you know statements of whatever, but there was a blank side so on it I wrote to my mother's cousin who had visited us in I think it was one of her letters but any – that's neither here nor there. And she always wrote to him and I had to take the mail to the post office. So I remembered his address somewhat. So I wrote Dear Julius, my sister mother and I are alive. We don't know about the rest of the family. And wrote, across the whole thing I wrote SOS. I folded it up like remember how you fold up little notes in school and on it I wrote his name Julius **Zerinsky**. Something 48th street, New York. At that time they didn't have zip codes or anything. Folded it up and gave it my New Zealand friend. Julius got it. Return address was State Department Washington, DC. Now he knew we were alive but he didn't know anything about the rest of the family. I don't know what happened to the note. I hope my mother didn't destroy it. But any way. I have to look through her stuff. That was and the Russians of course, after we had rested for a month or so, they put us to work. The Germans had fled and had left their cattle behind. And in Russia they had destroyed everything. People were living in a hole in the ground and we were supposed to take care of the cattle. So they divided us into groups and we were ten, ten Jewish women, two Russian women and a Russian prisoner of war who had been a prisoner of war a very short time. And they took us back from Chehorchunek to Alexandrov where we went first, the railroads were restored. And they put us on trains, supply trains. It was snowing. It was cold on top of – we sat on top of logs. You name it. And they took us into Germany. They were still fighting hand to hand and we came to **Schneider neiw** [ph] which was a big crossover. Anyway, we came to **Frankfurt an der Oder** which later became East Germany but anyway we came there. And we were sent to a village to take care of the cattle. So I had a few assignments with sheep, with oxen, horses.

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Q: Was your mother able to work?

A: My mother had somewhat recovered and she became a cook. She cooked. She was a very good cook. And the funny part is that one time I had to guide some oxen but we always had a Russian soldier with us because you couldn't even trust your own Russian soldier. They might come and steal an oxen, barbecue it whatever. And so he was, I was sitting there and eating my bacon and my bread. I was so lucky to have it. I had had a shower and I'm sitting and eating it and he looked at me. He came from Kazakhstan or somewhere and he said, what kind of a Jewish daughter are you? Eating **tref**. And I said oh I'm very happy to have. He says, I gave my bacon to my German – he was living here the German cow taking care of it. He says when I go back home, I'll take your mother. She's a pretty good cook. I'll take your sister. She might be good at med. But what am I going to do with you? So anyway.

Q: You were there taking care of the animals for how long?

A: God. I don't know. At that time, Roosevelt died.

Q: That's April 45.

A: Yeah because we had, we were close to the Russian general staff, **Zhukov**. Cause I saw Zhukov. And at one time they brought some soldiers to entertain the staff. And we saw the dancing and whatever. We had a small plane land in the back of wherever we stayed at the time. Was a big meadow. And he landed every morning and he delivered the mail to the general staff and he always gave us papers, newspapers. One day he had brought them, there was a black border and was a picture of Roosevelt and he had died.

Q: Did Roosevelt mean anything to you?

A: Of course. I mean he was the president.

Q: I mean was it devastating to hear that he died?

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A: No.

Q: Didn't bother you?

A: No. I didn't who, how far you know. We were far from every day events.

Q: What about your father?

A: He was in Dachau all this time. He was liberated actually, he was – they were evacuating, evacuating. They were clearing Dachau and they had, on the death march, deeper into the mountains. My father couldn't make it any more. He lay down by the road and they put his head and played dead. They poked at him and he didn't move and then they left. He and the husband of a young cousin of my father's. I don't know how they were related to us. They got up and went into a barn nearby. And the dogs alerted the farmer and he came out with a rifle and he said if you damned Jews or whatever. He didn't know if they were Jews. They were prisoners. If you don't get out of here I'll call. So they got up. My father could barely walk and they trudged on. And they came to the monastery, Saint **Ottilien** in Bavaria. They rang the bell. The nuns took them in. They cleaned up my father and put him to bed. Saint Ottilien also had a hospital so ____ but my father was not in the hospital. And they kept him, took care of him until the Americans liberated them in March I think or April. And he was moved to another hospital which had been a hotel before in Bavaria. **Feldafing**, that's where we found him.

Q: How did you get to Feldafing? What happened? To go back to your story?

A: We were under the Russians and they sent us to another stuff to do something. One of the most idiotic things was they had us plant potatoes in fields, day and night. They had to leave – this area was to be taken over by the Poles again. And they had to leave the area by August 15th and they had to leave the fields planted. This was you'll call it, these were rotten potatoes. They were frozen before. They were rotten. You picked them up. It was mush and they made us plant the fields. And there was this soldier on a horse watching us. And I don't know. He said are we

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planters or prisoner. He doesn't -- da, da. You are prisoners. And we said this will never grow. He said who gives a shit. Excuse me. We have an order to plant. We plant. And from that point you were sent to another part and this was assembly point again. (Ouch, my knee if falling asleep. Better to get up.) And my mother worked there again as a cook. And I was a field worker and my sister did something in the hospital whatever. And they had orders to clear this area, give it back to the Poles. And we had to clear this area by August 15th. And we were supposed to round up all the cattle and drive it on foot to Russia where our guards were going to guard the cattle. They didn't give a damn about us. They were going to go on a little horse. They were riding their horses or they had wagons with their supplies. But we were supposed to be on foot. And my mother was a cook. And she had to go across the highway to a house which was -- somebody is putting a notice on, they are getting tired. She had to get water from there and they were Polish people _____ or somebody. They were going to take over the area, the Poles were coming in. And they were the forerunners, the head whatever. And they were moving into that house which was still standing and my mother started to talk to them. And they said what are you doing here? Jewish people in **Lodz**. And we didn't know. And so he said -- they said we will help you get out of here. So we slid out. At night, went across.

Q: You and your sister and your mother?

A: Yeah. Into that house and they had tea and bread and jam waiting for us. They took us to the train the next day and they told us don't speak German. Don't speak Yiddish on the train. They'll throw you off the train. And they paid for our tickets to Torun, I think. One of the cities close by. And they said go to the Red Cross. They will help you from there. We went to the Red Cross and got tickets. Oh and they gave us money. And I spent my money on a Polish sausage. My mother just said -- I said I'm hungry. Here I am sharing it with you. But we need the money. We don't know what will happen. I had my sausage. And we came to Lodz. We found the mother of my, a cousin of my mother's from **Libero**. And her two daughters. She had three daughters. Two had survived the war. And they shared an apartment with somebody else and they took us in. We slept there on the floor. And now the story -- I mean how do you get out of here? And the Zionist organization at that time was organizing Aliyah to Palestine. And my future husband at the time, that's another story. He had a company that started the remodeling bombed out houses

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and all that. He got sick and tired of Poland. Donated all his money to the Zionist organization so the people who couldn't afford it or whatever. And that's how come we went. They had ten people, a group of ten people. My sister, my mother and I, my future husband and three couples. And they told us that we were Greeks returning home. This was Europe. Everything was going back and forth and nobody had papers or anything. Don't speak Polish. Don't speak Russian. Don't speak anything. Don't understand. You are Greek, you are Greeks going home and the name of **Safro** or something. My last name was Safro, I remember. And we went slowly from Poland and across the border to Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia to the Russian, first the Russian occupied of Austria and then the Americans occupied Vienna. And I found somebody said he had seen my father. And I didn't believe him and he said well when did you see him and he said well after liberation but he was still about a month before liberation. I didn't believe him because the last time I had seen my father I think he had had a slight heart attack. So anyway and they said he is in Bavaria, the German, the American occupied zone. And so we made our way slowly back to Bavaria and I remember, I left my mother, my sister in I can't think right now. But anyway my husband and I went on to look for my father and we came to **Foehernwald** which was a DP camp but they said that most of the people in there were people pretending to be DP. And it was, there was still American guards around there. (Where is my tissue?) And I said how do we get out of here? He says well just come to the office and they will give you a permit to leave the camp. So I got – they only had one left so I told my husband and he wasn't my husband then. I said you just wait at the gate and or at the fence. I'll go out and I'll back cause there was no name or date or anything on it. And just and I'll go and I gave it to him. And I went onto the train and no husband, he was gone. Well, he's gone. I'm going. So I went to Munich and the Red Cross headquarters was in Munich in the **Alte** Museum, the big famous museum. And I went in there and I told them I'm looking for – your father, he was here just now. He's alive. But he didn't know that all three of us were alive. When the Red Cross issued, they put down my sister, two names, daughters. He only put down one. They thought two is good enough. And the head of something jumbled up my sister's and my first name so he didn't know. He knew one child was alive, but he didn't know which one. And I said where is he? And they said he is in Feldafing and he's on his way back there. If you hurry up you'll catch the same train. These are trains which run very often. They were commuter trains practically. So I walked down the stairways of this – and Munich was in shambles. It was completely bombed all over. And here is

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this jeep, **Kontz** or **sunhalt** and out jumps **Frock** who was our landlord in Kovno in an American uniform. He says Welcome, what are you doing here? And I told him. He says hop in. And he told, he was working as an interpreter for the American army. And he took me over the rumble. It was the first and last time I ever rode in a jeep. He took me to the train. I just made it, got on it. At that time you didn't pay for it. You didn't have any tickets. Everybody was going everywhere and I got on the train and was looking for my father. This man I had never met before. He said are you with **Landcom**. I said yes. He says your father is on the train. I said so I was told. Where is he? He says just sit. The train will stop for just a short while there and then you get out and you wait for him. He's on the train, I swear. So I got out and I sat and I waited and waited and I waited. And people got off. The train took off. No papa. And suddenly way up at the end is this old man, all bunched, hunched over, wearing this old I think it was a British uniform or whatever. And a cane and that was my father. And so my husband came. He had missed the train or whatever and then we got my sister. And my mother came and my sister worked in the hospital and my father was living in the hospital. And my mother and my husband and I got a room in one of the very fancy villas. The Germans – **Feldafing** was near Lake **Starnberg** which was a fancy resort. They were also building a school, an exclusive school for their children there. Anyway at the – I got a job at the administration as a file clerk and an interpreter. At that time I still spoke Yiddish and Russian and some Lithuanian and German. So and my husband started to work there. They were organizing a school. I mean the kids some of the children, teenagers who had survived. They were wild. They were completely out of hand. And I worked. There were two ladies from the United States, two from France. One from Sweden and I. And one fine day in the fall we were – the ladies were smoking a lot. I used, I was paid in cigarettes and chocolates. I used it for my English teacher. Whatever. And we were sitting on the desks because the floors weren't finished yet. Bavaria was the German Siberia. And it was cold and the ladies, we were all sitting on the desks. And they were smoking. Suddenly they all jumped off and here walks this military man. It was Eisenhower. He shook every, where are you from. How are you? Blah, blah, blah. And he left. I didn't know Eisenhower from a hole in the head. (laughs) So I had met Zhukov. Well not officially. I had seen him. I had met Eisenhower in person. I missed Eleanor Roosevelt by an hour. That's another story and so anyway and we didn't like it there you know. The DP camp itself. I heard such horror stories from there. It was terrible. People were out of hand, especially there was so

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much going on. Raping and you name it. It was the wild, wild west. But we didn't live there but my husband had to go there at night. They had to do a count because there was so much black market going on with the supplies and it was terrible. And we didn't want to live there. My father had a friend who had helped him a lot in Dachau who was a German socialist who was one of the early inhabitants of Dachau. And when my father got there he was one of eldest or whatever. He helped him with food and light job and his name was Edward **Mauer**. And he came from **Siegberg** which is near Frankfurt am Main and he told my father to come. He had an apartment for us. And he was in charge of the distribution of ___ supplies and all that good stuff. He was completely legally blind but his teenaged son was a driver and his wife had been Jewish but she had died and the son was raised by his mother and they were all the old socialists of Germany before Nazi Hitler. So we lived there in Siegberg and then we all started to get back to the United States. So we had to go – they found our old papers and all that good stuff. We had to go for a physical. And I have to tell you a funny story. We were examined by and there was this young doctor we had to go to an army post. That's where we missed Eleanor Roosevelt who had been there an hour before inspecting it. And this guy, this young doctor said I had a pimple on my face. He says what's that and I said in English, oh I tested my English, oh it's nothing, it's a pickle, in German. A pimple. He laughed so hard. I think he let us pass. If he is alive, the girl with a pickle on her face. So and we came to the United States. There were two ships. They were these old. They were not old. They were built especially for railroad to transport by Henry J. Kaiser. They were really big tubs and there were two of them. And ours was one landed here in New York on Friday and ours came on Saturday.

Q: What was the name of the ship?

A: SS Marine Perch.

Q: Marine?

A: Marine Perch.

Q: Perch.

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A: I looked it up in the New York Times and the arrival it's listed there. And we were surrounded by journalists and pictures taken and all that big, big fuss.

Q: When did you dock in the United States?

A: On the 24th, May 24th.

Q: In 1946?

A: Yes. I celebrate my 21st birthday in New York. New York, New York.

Q: Tell me what it was like to go back a little bit, to see your father when you saw him walking toward you?

A: Well it was really, it was a shock and a joy, both. And he shared a room with an Italian prisoner of war. Luigi. A young kid who had been in the Mussolini's army but then the Italians went over to the Allies at one time and he was part of the Allied army, but he was injured. And he and – my father didn't speak Italian. Luigi didn't speak anything but Italian. My father spoke some French and Lithuanian but the two were great friends. And when they saw me, when I came and my father – that's my daughter. Oh Luigi. They had hidden a bottle of wine. They were going to celebrate and they opened and the wine was vinegar.

Q: What about when your mother and father –

A: Yeah well it was.

Q: Were there many tears?

A: Unh hunh. I'm sure there were and I'm sure they were not both. My mother was, she was recovering herself. She was – but she was a big burden. She could, at first she couldn't

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understand our circumstances. Why did my father – you know my father would provide. Why didn't he do that? Why didn't he – and you can do it. You know you cannot. Anyway that's changing the subject.

Q: Now you are, you dock in New York and –

A: We stayed with my aunt. One of my –

Q: What was it like to dock in New York?

A: Oh well there is the Statue of Liberty.

Q: You saw the Statue of Liberty?

A: Yeah and I remember there was a big sign 7 Up. Only your 7's are different than our 7's and I thought 7 Yup, what does the word, it mean?

Q: What did the Statue of Liberty mean?

A: Oh that was, oh yeah that was great. And then we –

Q: Who met you at the dock?

A: Oh god, everybody and his cousin.

Q: Family.

A: Yeah my father had a sister who lived there on Riverside Drive. We stayed with her for about two weeks or so. And then we got an apartment in a fleabag hotel. Hotel **Luana** on Broadway across from Schraft's. If you ever have been to New York and my parents had lived with other cousins. My mother had cousins in Connecticut. So my parents and my husband and I. My sister

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got a job as a nanny. Somebody. She didn't want to go back to nursing school. So the four of us shared this apartment on Hotel Luana. And my husband –

Q: When did you get married?

A: We got married in Feldafing. In October 44

Q: 45.

A: 45. Yeah in 46 we were here.

Q: What was the wedding like?

A: Nothing. We went to justice of the peace. We signed our papers and because we were DPs we didn't have to wait for six days. We post the banns. They didn't do that and that was it. And I think somebody brought a can of pineapple juice. It was no big deal, it was no big deal for us either but my parents are old fashioned so we did it.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ina Zigelman. This is track number 3. You are now in New York and how long did you stay there?

Ina Sagen Zigelman: I stayed there for til the end of July. My husband left earlier. He found cousins in Detroit so and he didn't like New York so it has changed since. I have gone back. He did not like it at all. It was dirty. It was noisy. I remember walking and stepping down was green light. I could do it and this cab driver came over and said you damn whatever. And I said you idiot. I didn't say it but I thought here I survived World War II and you want to kill me. Things like that. But my husband and I, we had a map and we spoke English more or less. And we explored New York. We went to the Statue of Liberty and we went all over and to the beaches,

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the Rockaway beaches and stuff like that and this cousin Julius to whom I sent the note he did not like it because he was going to be in charge of us. And so I don't know what he said and I said don't worry. We have a map. He's laughing. How dare you. Anyway we left New York. At first my husband went to Detroit. And I followed him. In the meantime he had, my husband had a job in New York. He was an engineer and he got a job watching something in a factory of the processing something. He had to watch the boiler at night. And I got a job in a, they were manufacturing gloves and I and sewing are not on good terms but I had to sew thumbs and when they looked at my thumbs, they decided they could do without and they gave me a job. I had to use a tool and check all the fingers, see if they were sewn. It was on Bleecker Street in New York and I had to take the subway. And I got – the Italians put their food out on the sidewalk in the mornings and this is summer now. July. When you walk back at night, the fish and everything and smelling and I used to get car sick on the subway. But anyway, I survived it and I'm here to talk about it, Ms. Schwartz. And my husband went to Detroit. And I was there July, yeah because I remember the Fourth of July which didn't mean anything to me. And there was a lot of commotion in this hotel. It was probably where the ladies took their gentlemen at night. And we had a flat roof looking out from our living room and it was full of corsets and bras and condoms, you name it. It was there. So they had been celebrating the Fourth of July. And in New York, I went back and my husband too. We went back. There was a special classes for foreign speaking you know if you didn't speak English ____ and it was in one, in the main library in New York. And the teacher's name was Miss Campbell. I still remember her. And she wanted me to come. She was in charge of employees or something for one of the, I think it's **Bronfman**. I remember they were not a brewery and she wanted me to go there and she wanted me to get a job there. She was in charge of it, but I never went because I went to Detroit.

Q: When did you move to Detroit?

A: In the end of July probably. My husband was there already and he had cousins there.

Q: How long did you live in Detroit?

A: We left on Halloween. What is it, November?

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Q: October 31st.

A: Yeah. So.

Q: How long did you live in Detroit?

A: That's just from July through –

Q: Oh just a couple of months?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then where did you go?

A: Then we went to California. We were saving our money and the idea was do we stay here and buy winter clothes or do we go to California. We went to California.

Q: And you've been in California ever since?

A: Ever since.

Q: And your husband worked as an engineer?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you have children?

A: I have two sons. One you see here. Michael the oldest and I have a younger one, Charlie. And they are all here. There are two sons, three grandsons. One couldn't come. He teaches math in an American school in El, in Ecuador. And who else is here. My daughter in law, her sister and

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her husband. And three of my grandkids. And a grandchild of my sister's, one of my sister's grandkids.

Q: Can we now talk a little bit about some of your thoughts and feelings? Do you think you lost your childhood? I mean here you were living under such –

A: I lost, my husband always said I was never a teenager.

Q: But you lost a part of your childhood.

A: I won't be a teenager and I used to do something stupid.

Q: And you never got it back obviously.

A: No, you don't get it back and your friends, your good friends you know people talk about the reunion or whatever. Forget about it. There were 50 kids who graduated from my high school. That's another thing. The Russians made us graduate early because under the Russians education was free. So the schools were overloaded. We were on double shifts. And I would have had two more years to do before I graduated from high school. I was 16. But the Russians made us accelerated program so we had to graduate early to make room.

Q: That was the end of your education.

A: There, yes.

Q: Did you get more education in this country?

A: Yeah.

Q: What, where?

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A: Oh just on and off. I'm not very, I don't, I start something and I don't finish it.

Q: So you took other courses in California?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Did you ever work?

A: I worked in a department store for a while. And then I worked there when my kids went back to school.

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany?

A: I have gone back there.

Q: You have?

A: Yes.

Q: What are your thoughts?

A: I cannot stand the ones my age or older. I see them in uniform and you know I'll be cordial to them but I don't discuss the past or anything. The young people I have no objections to whatsoever. Talk to them. They have been exchange students in my home town. Arroyo Grande and nothing. They don't bother me. I still read German, doesn't bother me.

Q: Are you more comfortable with other survivors, people from Europe than you are with American, native Americans?

A: No, no. Some of them, I mean. My father used to call it **Bruchvald**. They're all interested in money, money, money. And I don't know. I really have not thought about it. I haven't been in

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contact with many. Some friends you know and when I went back to Israel I met many of my old friends, many. But no that's why you know I just came out of my shell lately. I haven't done anything about it.

Q: When your children were growing up did you tell them about your childhood?

A: Just very little and did not they teach them any German. Somebody said why don't you teach them. Why? I made sure they're doing enough.

Q: Are there any sights or smells or sounds today that trigger –

A: Yes, continuously.

Q: Such as?

A: Your life is like, your mind is like there is a continuous movie going on in there. You never lose it, day or night, it's there and just a smell or a thought of something or some word or thought will trigger a whole memory.

Q: Such as, can you give an example?

A: Such as.

Q: What about a plane going overhead? Does that –

A: Doesn't any. I just I had to fly by Luft--, I call it Luftwaffe, Lufthansa. I was going back to Lithuania and the only way, people that went there was Lufthansa, Luftwaffe. And I was thinking I'm flying overhead now. I used to be on the – you know things like that.

Q: So you have gone back to Lithuania.

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A: Oh yeah. I took a tour with originated right here in Washington, DC. It was something going back to the shtetl and many people went to their you know wherever their grandparents came from and so on. I have a distant cousin who is a Sagenkahn who is an American. I mean his father came here, I don't know who was a cousin of my grandfather and he never changed his name. My parents changed their name because they got tired of how do you spell it? And they just kept Sagen, S-A-G-E-N. They left the Kahn. And he came to Israel and he was researching the family and whatever and when I went to Israel I said please talk to him. He is such a – you know what a **gneda** is in Yiddish. A pede –

Q: Pedantic?

A: Yeah, he's such a pain in the --. Please call him. He lives in Pennsylvania and talk to him. You can give him all the stories you remember. I said ok. I'll go so I called Irving and he said oh I am so sorry. I have just gone to Lithuania to the shtetl whatever and I said well I'll miss you and I said, his daughter lived across from Philadelphia, New Jersey. I'll give you her telephone number and you call her. And I called her and she came, she had triplets. These are triplets. I want to hug them. But she had a nanny with her. So anyway so I was in contact with them and every once in a while he sent me letters of the family. So when I went on a trip again, he told me you want to come and I said yeah. I'm packed.

Q: What was it like to go back?

A: It was very tough going back to my grandparents' house because it is such, you know what a **hobgen** is. It's a ruin. It used to be, to me, it was this fun house where we grandkids could have fun. It was a big house, about six bedrooms or whatever. There are 13 children, can you imagine it. So anyway I went back there. They had made an apartment house out of I don't know what. And to see it in such disrepair and so sad and pitiful. And there was this old lady standing at the door. I wanted to go in and I thought maybe I'll see my grandpa's den that he always had a mezuzah hanging on the door. And the braided candle for Sabbath hanging on the, **Havdalah** and he had this roll top desk and I remember grandpa sitting there. And I wanted to go in and I thought maybe there's a mezuzah on the door. She stood there. She wouldn't let me in. And she

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was so angry. She was so ferocious. She thought I wanted the house back and the interpreter told her. I don't speak Lithuanian any more. She told her no, no, no. she just wants to look. And I thought oh to hell with it. It probably looks like the outside.

Q: What are your thoughts about Israel today?

A: I don't care for their policy. I think there should be two states. Because the way they are going and I was there. The first time I went; my husband was still alive. He was appalled specially my husband. He says that's no way. They are just doing what they learned from the Germans. He was really upset. And my family, the Sagenkahns were very ardent Zionists and they were involved and my uncle Max was a famous physician. He was a doctor of the state, head of state and went with them there wherever they went on official. He was a doctor for **Kollek**, and he worked in the Hadassah hospital in Tel Aviv and everybody knew Max, my uncle Max.

Q: Were you active at all in the civil rights movement here. I mean you were deprived of your civil rights?

A: Right.

Q: Did that make you more sensitive?

A: Yes, I was very appalled at the beginning. I didn't realize about the – I remember we were in New York and we were living with my aunt up on Riverside Drive. We had to, I had to take my parents back to my aunt, we were somewhere. She said now make sure you take 116th next or whatever and if not, I didn't walk enough and we wound up in Harlem and there are steps going up to Morning Heights whatever it is. And we went up the steps and I told my aunt. She almost fainted. She says you can't. I said what do you mean? I say they're people. Oh no, you don't do that. I didn't like that.

Q: How did you feel about the Eichmann trial?

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A: I felt that it was too little too late. But I don't like that Mr. Bibi. You know what a beebe is a Lithuanian. I found it out the hard way. I was taking care of one of my little cousins, Peter. In Kovno and I had to study for my entrance exam and I had Peter in a stroller and I took him to the grave of the unknown soldier because they had soldiers marching, you know changing of the guard and I thought it would interest him. And he looked for a little while and he hopped out of his stroller and he couldn't say his name was Peter. And he couldn't say Peter. He called himself beebe, booby is a little boy in Germany. And so I ran, I looked up from my books and there was Peter off. I said beebe come back here in German. This woman at that time, lady's dress was, had some veils, the whole bit and she walked by him and she shook her head. She said such a nice young dressed young lady using such a horrible language and I said what's the matter. And so she didn't like my German. Whatever and so when I went to high school I found that beebe is a Lithuanian slang for a condom. So our beebe

I personally I thought there should be a two state. They will never have peace and they will never have --

Q: Have you been back to the Kovno ghetto area?

A: Yeah.

Q: What thoughts went through your mind when you were back there?

A: It's, it didn't bother me anymore but it's just the thought of all the people who had left there and lived with me and they bombed some of the -- you know it's not the way it was. I went back to the fort, with all the --

Q: The Ninth Fort?

A: I couldn't stand it. I just sat outside and looked. I walked in there and the picture in there of a very good friend of mine but he is still alive. I mean he was still alive at the time. I don't know why they had his picture. He was teaching math in Chicago, the institute of something or other.

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So anyway but it just to see people you knew. I just walked in, took a glance and walked out. The same with **Ponary**, the forest and what we don't know, I mean there were thousands of Russians who were killed there and are buried there. Not the Jews. And you have the monument to the Russians. And what I was angry about. We were going there and I told our tour guide could we stop and buy some flowers. I wanted to buy lots of flowers as you know, there was nothing. Those American dollars could have bought the whole bus load full of them. She said sure, sure, sure but we didn't. She never stopped. And she said oh I'm so sorry. I forgot. That's the one thing I remember.

Q: Is this a Lithuanian guide?

A: No, it was a Jewish lady.

Q: Oh it was a Jewish lady?

A: So that's what I remember what I'm angry about.

Q: And your thoughts in Vilna? Anything?

A: Vilna, my husband went to school and went to college in Vilna. And he had lived. Then it was Poland and he was, you know the Poles occupied Vilna. They're our enemy. And he wanted to travel from Lithuania to Poland you had to go through Germany and from Germany to Poland. Cause you couldn't tell the Lithuanians that you were going to Poland. No, anyway it's, the hotel we stayed in was in the Jewish ghetto. They took this old house and it was very elegant. On the inside was built by Swedes and they used all the native, I'm always interested in artsy craftsy things. Used all the native weavings and stuff for bedspreads and curtains and whatever. And was very tactful and very elegant. They even had an elevator if anybody needs. But it was very beautiful and when we got there, because this was a Jewish group, the only member of the Lithuanian parliament greeted us. It was Shabbat and we had gefilte fish and also dinner with him. It was very nice.

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Q: You've been back to Lithuania once? Or more than once?

A: I went back to, once I went back to Vilna only but that was not, I didn't see much then. That was another story. I went there was an excursion or whatever on the Baltic, of the Baltic and I thought I could get to my home town, but I couldn't. And this ship was a Russian cruise ship, home town Odessa or Ukraine. It was shortly after the breakup of the Soviet Union. They still flew the old Russian flag. Most of the passengers were Germans which was very unpleasant but this was a group, we were a group of 18 Americans and these were mostly educators from the United States. And one of them was my friend and she said you want to go. And I said I'll go. So I went. And the German, I can do without. And we went. We saw the three Baltic states and we went first to Latvia, Estonia and then we went to Russia, to St. Petersburg. And then on the way back we stopped on some Swedish, Danish islands, Swedish islands. I don't remember. But we stopped in Poland in Gdansk and I hired a cab driver to take me to Stutthof and I went to Stutthof and nothing. I mean they had a big Mogen David, Star of David and they have a cross. And they have a one or two barracks left. And it's nothing that I remember. And I had this fantasy. I was going to Stutthof. I was going to go through the archives. Maybe find my diary or whatever or pictures of – forget it. So anyway, and this cab driver spoke German because it's Danzig. They all speak German. They used to, the old people. And this American, we had several Jewish people with us. And they didn't say anything and I said do you mind going there. And this gentile couple said we don't want you to go there by yourself. We'll go with you. So I sat with the cab driver in front and we were speaking. And he says why do you want to go there. and I said well personal reasons and blah, blah. So he shut up. We got there. The guard, there's a guard that's all, a fence around it and guarded. He was locking up the place for the day. And we give him five dollars and everything. And I went through it. And it didn't mean – it wasn't it. And we came back and this one Jewish lady said, well did you have a good time. And I said yes, I had a marvelous time. I could have slogged but I didn't.

Q: Do you get reparations?

A: My parents did. I was a minor. So I get, I think I got \$2000 once or so. And my husband was not in the camps so he didn't get any. He survived the war as a Pole.

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Q: False ID?

A: Yeah. He worked as a Polish – that's an interesting story. Much better than mine. He worked with the, he was an electrical engineer and the part of Poland where he was, you know the Germans and the Russians after Stalin Hitler Pact, they divided Poland and this part of Poland came under the Russians. The Russians found out he was an engineer. They made him teach at night and do something else. And they told him he had to do something else. And he said no, he wouldn't do it. And they said when we tell you to do and he said no I don't. And they said well you bowed to the Polish authorities, you will bow to us. Well anyway, they sent him on a labor camp. To near the border. To, I don't know to dig ditches or whatever. And he, they were, for one month, I think. And he, they would have sent him to Siberia, no doubt. But anyway he, the month was up. And he went to the river to take a bath and while he was there, they bombed the barracks, the Germans so he escaped that. He came home and the Germans occupied this little town.

Q: Where was he from?

A: **Snadova**. It's not far from Bialystok. And they had a power station but they had no one to run it and so the Poles said we have an engineer here. So the Germans took him in there and he helped the underground. They built the radios and he supplied them with gasoline, whatever it was. So one day they came and they said, at that time, the Jewish people were not in the ghetto but they lived you know never lived together. They said they're taking away all the Jewish people. You better go and hide. And he hid in the forest and his whole family was lost. And they, he lived in the forest and every once in a while he went to the village. He got food and took a bath or whatever. And they said we have a guy who is in the underground and we have, we need him here. But the Germans are rounding our people and they were sending them to Germany to work as farm laborers. Would you do it for us? And he said sure. So the Pole went. They had to be examined. He couldn't do it. He was a Jew. Examined and got his papers and he, at a bend in the road when the train slowed down, the Pole jumped off and gave him the papers and he jumped on. In Germany they were taking pictures of the people so he has an ID. And his

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name was Julian Ludwig **Novitsky**, means newcomer in Polish. And his birthdate was Christmas, a year older than he was. He was born in July. His birthdate was December 24th and he was put to work as a farm laborer and didn't know a thing. And it was very tough. I mean it was even tough as a Pole so he realized he wasn't, his Polish was too educated and whatever. So he finally wound up in East Prussia with a farmer who was an anti-Nazi but not overtly. And he was given to a Nazi. My husband was given to a Nazi to train him how to use a scythe, and how to use a, span a horse and whatever because he was so dumb. He was known as the dumbest Ludwig. And then he was given to this Mr. **Huget** who treated him very nicely. He had a room upstairs. They knitted him socks and mittens and made sure his clothes were clean and he was fed. And he lived there. And I said how did you find out what's going on. He said in the outhouse they tore up the newspaper and hung it up so he could read it. And they could never understand why he spent so much time in the outhouse. But anyway he was there and the Russians came and they arrested all the men including him. They raped all the women. And then they -- he spoke Russian. That's another story why he spoke Russian. But anyway, and they said well you can go home or whatever. So he first went back to the place and he found all the women there. Old Mrs. Huget and her neighbors and they were all in a state of shock and old Mr. Huget was in Russian, anyway, in east Russia. And he went back to Poland and he found one step brother. His mother had remarried an older family and he found him. And the Jewish people. Everything was, and then he realized and he was in a state of shock. And he decided to go to a town that it wasn't safe to live. They had pogroms on Polish people, on Jewish people. And he taught, he had a gun and he taught his brother how to use a gun. Well the brother was killed for the gun. And he went -- Warsaw was completely destroyed. He went to Lodz and he and another man started a company. They were remodeling, bought bombed out houses and stuff. ____ And he just wanted to get out of Poland. It was just a giant cemetery.

Q: When your children were the age that you were during the war, did that bring back memories of your wartime experience when your boys were that age?

A: No.

Q: Your lives were different --

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A: Completely different and they were boys.

Q: Do you think about your experiences a lot?

A: Some, now I do. And as I get older that's what. I never talked about you know. But when my husband died very suddenly and I was less –

Q: When was that?

A: 26 years ago. And he was exposed to nuclear stuff whatever. And he had lung cancer. He had never smoked in his life and it was such a rare form. It was diagnosed in January and on April first he was dead. He was nobody's fool but he died on April first but anyway, I found myself completely alone for the first time in my life. My mother was dead. My sister was dead. My father was dead a long time ago. And I had moved, I decided, I had to get out of this house. I expected my husband to open the door and say what's for dinner or whatever. And so I sold my house very quickly and moved to Arroyo Grande. We lived in Santa Barbara. And my husband retired. And I moved to Arroyo Grande where my oldest son is. And I had nothing to do so I somehow I had a few notes here and there. I decided and I wrote my story. And there are many mistakes in it, as I look back now both – but I didn't care. Got it out of my system, partially.

Q: That's important for your grandchildren.

A: So this whole thing started. Nana is turning 90.

Q: Do you think the world has learned anything from the Holocaust?

A: No, look what's going on. Look how many people are being killed right now as we are sitting here and talking. And we were together with Gypsies. Was anything done about the Gypsies? No, I don't know. I'm worried about Israel. Terribly worried about Israel. I remember the, my Zionist, my, we were **Bar Kochba** – we used to go. All that good stuff and my uncles and aunts

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who were so involved and one aunt, **Sily**, my father's youngest sister, she and her husband, he came from Bonn Germany. They were **Halutzim** and they came to Israel and he had had polio as a child. He limped very badly and they were such ardent Zionists. And they worked so hard here. He worked on the railroads and you name it. He was really a fabulous artist. When he retired he did some sculptures and stuff. And I visit them. They were living on a kibbutz. They were retired. And at that time, the children of kibbutzim could take in their parents when they retired to live on the kibbutz. They had a beautiful home in **Herzelia** which was a prefab from Sweden which they had. And they had of course an open house to all the grandchildren, whoever needed a home could live there. And they had retired and lived in that little room in the kibbutz. And I went and stayed with them. I had a marvelous time. I wanted to know what is it like to live on a kibbutz. And this was near the Gaza border. And every day people from Gaza came there and helped on the kibbutz and we sat and ate together for lunch and whatever. And everybody knew each other and everybody. The only complainer was there was a Russian Jew. The Russian Jew had to work for one year to learn the language. And this guy was riding a tractor, mowing the lawn or you know where do you come from? I said to him in Russian, where do you come from? He said to me where do you come from? I told him. He said what are you doing here? Why are you not there? What are you doing? That was terrible. Blah, blah, blah, blah. And I said you don't know how lucky you are and shut up. That time I still knew more Russian.

Q: Is there anything else you wanted to add?

A: No I am spoken, I have talked too much. I haven't talked so much and poor you, how are your ears.

Q: Have you talked to school groups or things like that?

A: I was asked and I declined. I was a volunteer in the school system for one year, didn't like it because my kids always wanted to learn. These kids did not. They saw me coming. Oh we have to go to the computer. But anyway this friend of one of my daughter in laws was in charge of the volunteers for the school system where I live in Arroyo Grande. Had an office in the high school.

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And she asked me and I said no. I am not a very gregarious person and I don't know. It's just too much. It brings up memories.

Q: Do you feel very American or –

A: I don't know. I feel human.

Q: Feel human.

A: More American than anything else.

Q: Lithuanian or –

A: No, I am 13 years old, I've lived here more. I mean 90. I've lived here for over 70 years. So.

Q: You don't feel European in any sense? Did your experience make you less religious? I know you weren't very –

A: Even worse than before.

Q: Even less?

A: Even less religious. Not at all.

Q: Have you been to the Holocaust Museum to see the exhibits?

A: I have been to the **Yad Vashem** in Israel and I haven't been to this one. I avoided it. I'm sorry to say.

Q: No, that's understandable.

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A: And so now we decided to go here. Everybody's going tomorrow. They have to.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Thank you. I'm sorry your ears –

Q: For doing the interview. This concludes the interview of Ina Zigelman.

(end)