Marie Winkelman, December 30, 1987.

Q: This is Fern Niven talking from the home of Marie Winkelman on Bird Key in Sarasota, Florida.

Mrs. Winkelman is a Holocaust survivor who has kindly consented to be interviewed for the records which the National Council of Jewish Women are compiling of Holocaust survivors.

Mrs. Winkelman, as I explained to you before we started the interview we'd like to know something about your early life. How many children were in your family, what did you parents do for a living, how much education did you have, how religious was your family, and also starting out with where did you come from. Where were you born?

A: Well, I was born in a small town. The name of it was Wloclawek in Poland, it's about 100 miles from Warsaw, the capital of Poland. I had a brother whose five years younger than I was. My parents were well off, not rich, but comfortable. Um, what else would I say about it.

Q: What kind of business did your father have?

A: Well, he was …had a business that was a combination of textiles and ah…had about twelve people working for him. My mother didn't work, we had a maid. I had a woman who was taking care of me.

Q: A governess?

A: Sort of a governess, and ah, I was a teenager. I was thirteen going on fourteen and eh, really nothing spectacular about my childhood occurred except that it was a nice family, and, well we were very comfortable.

Q: Did you have a religious family? Did they observe Friday night Sabbath traditions, or…

A: Well, not really. My grandparents were…they were not religious, but they observed the holidays. My parents since they were much younger, they were assimilated, I mean on, eh, on holidays they used to go to the synagogue, but it wasn't like a traditional…what should I say…that we weren't very religious. They spoke Polish very well. We didn't speak Jewish at home.

Q: Did you have any formal religious training?

A: No.

Q: Like children go to Sunday school?

A: No. No. It was my parents spoke Jewish and they did speak only when they didn't want us to understand, but actually we spoke Polish and ah, well we just…my parents felt that ah, since we are in Poland we should speak Polish, eh, very well without inflection, language inflection.

Q: As you were growing up, during your childhood, do you remember any anti-Semitic events occurring—either in the community or to yourself personally?

A: Yes, yes. We personally, I, as I said, my parents for some reasons they wanted me to be, eh, what should I say, as I should be comfortable in the Polish society. I should grow up with the eh, feelings that I'm no different in any Polish children so I could be educated, go to the university, and never have any problems and so on. But, ah, unfortunately, they were wrong because they send me to a school where there were no Jewish children, I think I was only one, no, there was another one in my class. And this was a few years before the war and, eh all my teachers were terribly anti-Semitic, and I could feel it every minute of, of my life.

Q: What about your classmates?

A: Well, I had some friends but not all of them were my friends, you know, children could be very, ah, destructive.

Q: You say your teachers were anti-Semitic. Was this based on remarks they made?

A: Well, you could feel, you could feel it, I mean, I was a nice childe and I didn't feel they felt that way, you know. They just disliked me, and, ah, whenever I made a mistake, they made sure to let me know about it. So, I felt very insecure to such point that after awhile I was crying a lot and I told my parents that I am not going to that school anymore. And finally a year before the war, then my marks were bad, too. They send me to a, eh, a Jewish gymnasium, it was partly Hebrew, which is on very high level, was very high level.

Q: In the same town?

A: Yes, yeah, it was quite expensive, it was a private school. Maryknoll, and, uh, I felt so much better, I like, like I was reborn. And I was an excellent student. And I loved my teachers, they were very, very highly educated and intelligent, had many friends and my parents realized that they made a great mistake. And also in the business, eh, area you could see the anti-Semitism, you know…there were boards holding the Jewish businesses, and uh, well that's how, how much we would feel of anti-Semitism in that town, but I understand in Warsaw and the big cities it was terrible. Like my husband used to tell me, he was much older than I was and he was attending the university in Warsaw, that he wasn't able to attend the exams, had had to go to the professors and, and ah, pass his exams privately. They also were told that the Jews, the Jews were told that they have to sit on the left side of the room.

Q: That doesn't make much sense, does it? But then a lot of things don't make sense. You started to say something earlier as we were talking about your life was fairly normal until you were about thirteen or fourteen.

A: Mmmhuh.

Q: What year was that, and what happened then?

A: Well, it was 1939 when the war broke out, and the fall of 1938.

Q: And Hitler invaded Poland?

A: Yes. And, eh, that's how the whole mess started.

Q: Was there much political talk in your home. Did your parents talk about what had happened in Germany and Hitler coming to power?

A: They were very polite…politically oriented, both of my parents.

Q: Do you remember anything that they may have said about that, about Hitler and Germany?

A: Well, we knew what was going on, not to any extent, we didn't even know later on what is happening, but…

Q: You were saying that your parents knew about Hitler but that you said there wasn't that much talk about it.

A: Well, they were talking all the time. I mean, that was the most important things that would happen to us at the time.

Q: But before Hitler invaded Poland, was there a sense of this was going to happen or was it a surprise to you, to them?

A: Well, we knew that, eh, we knew about the war, but we didn't know the consequences. As a matter of fact, at the times when I was so disgusted with my school, I was wishing that something drastically would happen and change my life.

Q: But not what did happen

A: That's how little did I know what's waiting.

Q: Can you tell me how your life did change from the time Germany invaded Poland?

A: Well that's a big order. Let me just tell you a few words about the first few months of what happened in my town because later on we moved to Warsaw and that's a whole different story.

At the beginning, my first shock of my life, when the Germans occupied Poland, it was at my favorite uncle who lived in my parent's house. My grandma, eh, my grandparents I mean, my grandmother died a few years before the war but my grandfather died a year before the war, so on the anniversary of his death, he and, and nine other men for a minyan.

Q: Mmmhuh, a minyan is ten people that you need for a religious prayer service.

A: Right. And they were praying on this day and the Germans, I don't know how they found out, but two Germans came by on motorcycles and entered the house and killed them all, except one. The one man was supposed to go out and dig the grave in their backyard and put them all into the grave. This was the greatest shock because the war just started! It was about five days after the Germans occupied Poland. As a matter of fact, the big book about my home town and the book starts with that event of my uncle and the ten of them. And when they came and told us about it, of course my mother got absolutely hysterical and my father and I was absolutely devastated. It was the first experience. Well, my mother begged the authority to, to be allowed to get the bodies out from the common grave and have it, have them buried in the cemetery.

Well, then they went where progressive , I can't even, able to think about it. The next thing we had an order from the Germans that all the Jews, as of that day, are not allowed to walk on the sidewalk, and carriages with horses, and cars, few cars. And, I felt so humiliated and my mother said to me, "Don't feel that way. The Germans should be ashamed. It's not your fault." And a few days later another thing happened. They burned the two synagogues. Gorgeous synagogues built in the seventeenth century. In just few hours, they had gone. And the had the nerve to ask the Jewish committee to come and to sign that this was done by the Jews. So things like this were happening so often and then they arrested my father and my uncle, another uncle, and they were in the prison for a few days. And then they started to deport people, we didn't know where.

Q: You mentioned a minute ago the Jewish committee. Who were the people on the Jewish committee?

A: The citizens.

Q: Not people sympathetic to the Germans?

A: Sympathetic…nobody was sympathetic to the Germans as far as…

Q: Well, within the camps there were some Jews that were, you know, to save themselves…

A: Not at this point, no. This was the beginning…

Q: I mean at this point you were still in your little town?

A: Yeah, well, eh, after a few months, eh maybe a few weeks after, I don't remember, my parents decided that they're going to move to Warsaw. They had some family there and, well, it wasn't easy to part with your beautiful apartment and the furniture and everything you had and, but they made the decisions that something terrible was happening and we better leave before they will deport us someplace.

Q: You felt that it would be safer in Warsaw?

A: Yes, everybody was trying to get to Warsaw because Poland was, eh, sort of divided. It was German and German Reich-like, and Warsaw was still not independent but partially, autonomy.

Q: I see. Up until the time you left for Warsaw, were you allowed to continue in school or did they close down the schools – or Jewish school? Were you allowed…was the school allowed to remain open?

A: In Wloclawek, in the town? Not only did they close the schools they arrested all the teachers and send them out, probably executed them. It's no question of schools at that time. This was a matter of life and death. Nobody had the luxury of going to school anymore.

Q: So your whole lives were immediately put into turmoil?

A: Yes. Well we arrived in Warsaw, and we lived with our cousins who have very nice big apartment and they let us have one room, we were four of us, supporting ourselves except the jewelry, and any valuables, articles we had with us, we were able to take it with us.

Q: How did you get from your small village to Warsaw? Did you take a train?

A: Yeah, we went by train.

Q: Then you could not take things with you such as your furniture?

A: No. So Warsaw was, eh, was very difficult. We were not hungry but we we were, we had very little food to eat. And, eh, the life in Warsaw was, at the beginning, was, eh, was, I mean not bad, we could still walk on the street and, and there were even coffee shops and theaters and movie houses, and, eh, I started

going to school, which were not the regular school, but, eh, courses. But as the time went by, the Germans decided to make, eh, this part of Warsaw a ghetto, and we were about half a million people in that ghetto. And they built walls around us. And it's, eh, was getting bad, worse.

Q: Did you have to share that apartment with more people than your own family eventually?

A: No. We were with that family for a long time and…

Q: Did they move more people into the apartment? You said it was a large apartment.

A: No. Nobody, nobody interfered at anything, any of our life in the Warsaw ghetto but people just didn't have any jobs, and no income so more and more people were getting hungry. And, eh, more and more people are dying on the street. And it was terrible to watch that. I remember, while I was only fifteen at that time, maybe sixteen, I was very much involved in the social work of the ghetto. The refugees were coming from all the small towns without no means of supporting, and no families to help, and they were poor people, they didn't have jewelry like we did so they didn't have any beginning so when they came to the ghetto already the first few days were bad. So, we've had some kid of committees in Warsaw ghetto who tried to put them in houses or lofts or all kind of places.

Q: Just to put a roof over their heads.

A: Yes. And we young children were gathering the food from our parents, collecting whatever we could, vegetables, grains, and we were cooking for them once a day and that was their only meal – once a day. But, of course, was time we didn't have any more food for them, they would just die in their beds, so that was a horrible period. And as time was going by, I mean, people were dying and schools were closed, closing, and, eh, no more coffee shops, or no more stores, and everything was dying out and half a million people were in a very small area, you could hardly walk on the streets – there were so many.

Q: As I understand from what you're saying, this was literally a wall with gates, so that at night you were locked into the ghetto? Is that right?

A: No. You were not allowed to go out, ever. The Germans were patrolling…

Q: Not even to work. Not even for any reason?

A: We don't have…we didn't have any work. We were isolated from the rest of the Polish community, like…

Q: Sounds like a really desperate kind of life…

A: Was horrible. The economy was based on people who had money because there were rich people in Poland, Jews. They had money and the people who didn't have money. So the people who didn't have money, they starved and died. The rich people were getting poorer and poorer. That's what it was, it was the exchange of the material between the people and, as far as the food, people were smuggling through the walls from the Polish side for the money the people had accumulated from before the war. But, eh, well, this was until '43, '42. When, eh, the final solution came into effect, eh, that was the real horror.

Q: Up until then had there been any knowledge of the concentration camps?

A: No.

Q: They existed before that.

A: We knew about labor camps, that people go to work and they get minimal of food but they do get it and they work and they hope for the end of the war. But we didn't know anything about liquidations or gas chambers, or anything like that. And, as a matter of fact, I knew few families who were very poor, they were close to starvation and they volunteered, they went to the labor camp because they felt at least they would have some bread.

Q: Anything would be better than nothing.

A: Right. Well, they didn't know that there are not such things like labor camps. Well, the Germans built few factories in the ghettos. They were manufacturing, eh, the uniforms for the Russian front and many people were employed there. As a matter of fact, it was compulsory to be employed at a certain point. And eh, I think it was 1942 when they decided to liquidate the Warsaw ghetto. Well, it's a long story, I think. How this technique was put into life. You ask me questions.

Q: What was the technique? What process did they follow to bring about this liquidation? Was there a pattern to how they selected people?

A: Not really. At the beginning they, they formed a police force among the Jewish men and they told them that every day they have to submit, that's each policeman, hundred people to a certain center and in exchange they will get a document where they would be protected from going to concentration camps of whatever and their families. Well, the policemen who were working as policemen, I mean function of a policeman, resigned but some of…quite many stayed in their post and were rounding up people.

Q: Mostly men or men and women?

A: No. Men only. Well they discovered after a very short time, maybe few weeks only, that that didn't prevent the Germans to take them too, and their families. So, they had to get away with that – get away is not the right expression. Do away.

Well, the next thing was, eh, that the Germans just started to take people from houses and take them to the concentration camp. They were trains established at a certain part of the ghetto and they were rounding them up and telling the women to be on one side and the men on the other side, and they were taking them to the concentration camp.

Q: Is that the way they told them, or where did they tell them they were taking them?

A: Well, they told, they didn't tell, they didn't have to tell them anything.

Q: Well, no, I realize they didn't have to but I've heard people say they said, "Take a small suitcase and enough food for one day and you're going to a labor camp," or they would make up some fictitious thing.

A: Probably. I really don't know because I wasn't there. I was still a very young girl. It, everything happened so, so fast from all sides, it, so it was really difficult to understand what is going on – what is the politics – what is the technique of that.

At that time I remember I was involved in eh, the underground of the Warsaw ghetto. My friends were my age and a little older, mostly were older, decided that they are whatever is going to happen, and they didn't know what's going to happen afterward we'll have to get organized and we'll have to do something drastic so we had few meetings and we were discussing how to go about it. But it was really, eh, wasn't, didn't make much sense because we didn't have any, any basis to go on. We didn't have any, any material and the instructions and the money, anything to work with, and then the weapons, nothing to work with.

So I remember one of the meetings one of our ladies decided such if the worst comes to worse, what we have to do is put one of the factories on fire – burn it down, because quite many Germans were in that factory and also the whole administration was German and also would stop the production of uniforms and would show them that, that we really care what is going on and we're not going to let them do whatever they want. We knew that it was a suicidal thing, but I mean just to, we'd, the rather try to do, we'd, we rather try to do it for ourselves than anything else. And, but it was a very tra-traumatic thing to do, I was very much against it.

Q: So did they do this?

A: No, because my parents, at that time, were employed there. And my friends and my uncles. I said I just can't do it. I mean it's beautiful that I am going to destroy the factory and the Germans but I'm going to destroy my family and they tried to explain that very little do we know about it. That they are going to be destroyed anyway. So what's the difference? But you can buy things like that, you know, you can just be sure that all you predict is going to happen.

Q: And you can't deliberately shorten your family's lives.

A: Right. So this movement didn't have, eh, much appeal. But what happened later on to this movement, they trained themselves, they were determined, and they became fighters and I don't know how much you know about it, but they were able to go through the canals through underground – to sewers.

Q: I've read this book. Mila 18, by Leon Uris. How accurate a representation is it?

A: Very accurate. Very accurate. Of course, they were killed at the entrances – at the exits – most of them. But some of them escaped into the woods and were, were able to fight for a while.

Q: They put up a tremendous resistance.

A: Well, there was a different group which stayed in the Warsaw ghetto. And they were so fantastic that they would, they were able to manufacture their own bombs.

Q: Yes, I remember.

A: And it's unbelievable that they could resist the German army, well not an army, but I mean some kind of a units for three weeks in Warsaw ghetto. But this was after the liquidation of Warsaw ghetto.

Q: How did this affect you, the liquidation? Not you – your family – all of you?

A: Yea, well, eh, I have, had friends, or a friend I would say, he was my boyfriends, but, I mean, he was eighteen – I was sixteen or seventeen and his family was able to leave the ghetto and go to the Polish side. And he asked if I would, if I would be willing to do it, if I would go and I said, "I can't leave my family and I will go there and not know what is going to happen to them." And my parents, eh, once they heard about it, they were very anxious that I should go and begged me to do it, that once I go maybe it's a possibility that they could be saved in some way. So, my friend came through the roofs from the Polish side, through the wall, and I went. It's an opening – every house has an opening, like a chimney, and he took me away from then and from the ghetto.

Q: And what year was this?

A: Forty…January, '43

Q: Go ahead.

A: And he took me to his brother and sister and his broth…his sister-in-law where I stayed and he lived in a different place and he promised that he would try to get my parents out. At that time, we were able to contact a Polish family who were willing to take my parents for money. And, eh, a few weeks later, he was going to take my parents out for the same way he took me out. But a day before the people, the Polish people, changed their minds and he couldn't do it because was no place to take them.

Q: They became afraid for themselves.

A: Right. Well, a few months later.

Q: Where were you staying?

A: Well, as the beginning I stayed with his family. Then, for some reason, the Polish people found out about it, so they had to run to a different village and I stayed behind. Actually, I was on my own. I was seventeen, not much money, completely isolated. The only thing I had is that my friend, his brother, was able to give me false papers because without it papers which would hold , you were not able to survive, I mean somebody would ask you, you about your identity and you'd can't show the card, I mean, you could be arrested.

Q: There must have been a brisk business in manufacturing false identity papers.

A: Of course, in the business was an underground organization. So, I was trying to survive and eh, the way I was going from one villa to another asking if I could rent a room and, eh, after a day or two, after searching, I found one place and I had my, my history was, of course, all was fabricated, under a different name and a different, my history was different, and I had to remember everything, not to make a mistake. And I lived in one place for a few months until they realized that something is wrong and they didn't want to give it, give me up to the Gestapo, but they just told me to divulge. So that had to repeat so many times I, in the two years, I think I lived in about seven places. And so, there were many, many instances which I could write a book what was happening during this time.

Q: These were always with Polish people?

A: With Polish people.

Q: Not Jewish people?
A: Jewish people?

Q: Non-Jewish people.

A: Yes. And, eh, we had few instances with the Germans coming over and, eh, looking for Jews.

Q: What happened to your brother during this time?

A: Well, after I left Warsaw ghetto, I understand the rest of the people were taken out to the concentration camp. And they called me only once, maybe two days before such so many people are being taken away, that they expect any day that they will go, too. But they didn't know exactly what's going to happen in there because nobody came back to tell anybody. So, we were hoping that we'll survive somehow. But, I never saw them again.

Q: It's a very painful memory.

(A few minutes of this interview was intentionally not recorded.)

Q: At the point of which I've turned the tape over, what were we saying? I asked you what you had said what you did during the day that you taught children and you made cigarettes. And then you said, and then I said, did you eat your meals with the family?

A: Sometimes. Yes, sometimes. Well, and then the war was over and, eh, my…

Q: Well, what do you remember about the war being over. How did you learn about it? How did people act when they learned the war was over?

A: Well, they were screaming and yelling and the, everybody was so joyful on the streets.

Q: And the Germans left right away?

A: Well, they were leaving, they were – last few days, I mean that wasn't important.

Q: Were you aware that the war was coming to an end because the Germans started to leave?

A: Well, just one day we knew that, well, I don't know if you know the history of, of the war during the, in Warsaw, that we had an uprising in Warsaw, that the Russian were on the other side of the river and the Polish people have an uprising in Warsaw.

Q: Were you proud of that?

A: No, because I wasn't in Warsaw, I was in the outskirts of Warsaw. I failed to say about my friend who helped me survive, that he was in the underground. Once he rescued me he, he felt he's not able to go ahead with his life and just save his life without helping the cause so he went after he brought me over, to his family, he went back to the Warsaw ghetto and joined the fighters, the Jewish fighters. And every few days he would come and say hello to me, give me the report how was the fight going in the Warsaw ghetto.

Q: It must have been very difficult for him to go back and forth that way.

A: Well, it wasn't a question of being difficult. It was a question of life and death, that something he had to do.

Q: I understand that, but I mean to come out of the ghetto -- and to tell you about it – and then to back in again.

A: Well, it was, I don't know exactly how he did it, but with what was the contact with his family and me and the fighters, and on one day he even brought ammunition into our room that we should keep it for safekeeping a few days. It was his only place to, to come. Well, after a few weeks we lost the contact with him. He never came back. But his friend came and he told me that his in the woods and probably was killed. He asked mi if I wanted to join the Partisans in the woods and I said, of course, I can't stay here. I don't have anybody to talk, to share. Nothing, I mean you can't live like this. And I was ready to join him. He told me to be ready. He will pick me up in three days. I should take on the essentials with me and he would take me to join the partisans who left, the fighters who left the Warsaw ghetto. But he never came.

Q: So you have to assume that he didn't survive either.

A: Yeah, well, I'm jumping from one to another because I just, too many things.

Q: There are too many things going through your head, of course.

A: Well, let's go back to the end of the war. The family of my friend were wonderful people. They live right now in Sweden. They took care of me. He was a professors before the war and he tried to get me an apartment in Warsaw and all his friends were also professors so he was so nice to establish a, a sort of help in my education and they were sitting with my for many hours.

Q: This is after the war?

A: After the war

Q: And this is where now?

A: In Warsaw.

Q: In Warsaw. You stayed in Warsaw.

A: Yeah. And they were trying to help me with my education, which I lost for so many years, to prepare me for the last two years in school and, eh, I attended school and then I was able to apply the university in Warsaw.

Q: How did you feel about staying in Warsaw after all that had happened?

A: Well, the whole thing was a shock because I was, I think nineteen when the war ended with no family, not one person. The only friends I had were the friends of my, the family of my friend, but I was so eager to go on with my life and to learn to study, that somehow I met my future husband.

end of Side A

Side B

Q: Where did you meet him?

A: Ehh, it's a story in itself, too.

Q: Well, it's up to you if you would like to say.

A: Yes. A important story. As I said, I was born in Wloclawek, a small town, and after the war – about half a year after the war – after I established myself a little bit, I was dying to go to that town and see if anything's was there which reminds me of my childhood. Maybe somebody survived – they would go there and I would meet them. So, I did go and there were five Jews – they form a committee and I introduced myself and they said, "Nobody is alive from your family, but, we have a letter from a Polish family that a child survived. Your aunt's baby." And I knew the baby because she had this child in the Warsaw ghetto. And I saw this child from she was only a few months old and I know they left – they lived among the Polish people, and probably they got killed by the Germans, or by the Polish people, and the child was put into the park, with the name of the parents and the place where they were born. I found that later…

Q: In the park?

A: Huh?

Q: In the park?

A: Yeah.

Q: You mean like, like leaving someone on a doorstep?

A: Right.

Q: They would just leave the baby in the park?

A: Right. Yeah.

Q: Okay – just want to make sure I understood.

A: Yeah. And I found about the story later on when I contacted this family. How very . When I came to this Wloclawek, this town, they gave me this letter from a family telling me – asking – anybody, if they know if anybody survived from this family. So right away I know that's my, my aunt, my mother's sister, and I know the child, so, I decided to go back and look up the family and look up the child. I met my husband there because he also was from the same town and he also came from Warsaw to see if anybody survived from his family, and we met, and I told him about the child and he helped me to locate it.

Q: How remarkable a coincidence that was.

A: Yes. And, ah, well we were married later on. As far as the child I – I met the people and they were lovely couple, old couple. And I tried to explain to them that they should give up the child, that the child should go to Israel. I was thinking about adopting it, but my husband wasn't very anxious. At that time I – we were not married even and I was not even twenty and we had plans to immigrate from Poland, so, the best thing for – would be for the child to send it to Israel to a kibbutz.

Well, the people didn't want to give up the child, because they were – they didn't Have any of their own and they loved that little baby, but they were very decent and understanding, understanding, and I was able to raise money for them from the Jewish organization and they were paid very well.

Q: And the child did go to Israel?

A: Yes. The child went to Israel through the organization. Well, I was taking care of the child but in the meantime we married and a small, modest apartment an the child stay with us a little bit until the child was able to immigrate – that was the famous oxodus – ah –exodus to Israel…and this is my only surviving family.

Q: Do you maintain contact with…

You didn't say. Is the child a boy or a girl?

A: She's a girl.

Q: Do you maintain contact with…

A: They were the closest family of mine. She, she grew up to a fantastic person. We helped them…we help her to educate herself. I mean, not so much, eh, in material sense as encouraging her. She left the kibbutz. She met a wonderful man who is a professor at Technion presently. She made her doctor degree. They have lovely children, two children, as a matter of fact. They live in the United States. Now he's teaching in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He's one of the greatest professors in Ann Arbor, in the engineering department.

Q: So you get to see them more often than if they were in Israel?

A: He was just here a few weeks ago. But they are great Israeli patriots so they -- she is in Israel right now. They don't intend to stay in United States, but, ah, he's wanted so much by the universities.

Q: And, how did you come to this country?

A: Well, we married in Poland and, and my husband's family was in the United States so we, we were able through Sweden to come to United States. We waited for the visa in Sweden for about five years.

Q: Well, that's a long time.

A: Yes. And then we went to Canada. We waited in Canada for another year, two years. And then we came to United States.

Q: What was it like after such a long wait to come here? I mean, was it like the realization of a dream or were you angry and frustrated with having to wait so long and has it measure up to what you expected of it?

A: Do you talk of the United States?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, in a way it was like coming to a heaven, and, the freedom, and New York being cosmopolitan city where you felt at home – was wonderful – was wonderful. I got a lot of experience working in an office in Sweden and in Canada. I didn't have any difficulties in getting, getting a very good job in New York after being a few weeks in this country.

Q: Did you learn to speak English while you were still in Poland, or Sweden?

A: Yes.

Q: You told me before we started taping about a professor you had had who said that the important thing about the whole experience was how it had affected you as a person. Do you want to talk about that as it applies to yourself?

A: Well, it's very difficult to speak about all this kind of things without being prepared because I, I really have to put things in certain perspectives of order because it's a combination of my emotions and the reality.

Well, what I was saying that, um the reality is one thing and the changes, but psychology is something else because it really affects us in so many ways and we see each other in different light. It depends on, on the changes. And sometimes you don't recognize yourself because you don't think that you – you don't expect yourself to react in certain ways.

Q: Can you give an example?

A: Well, that's – that's very general. Well, I would rather you ask me questions, I wouldn't know what to answer.

Q: Well, I'm not sure what question to ask you to elicit that kind of an answer, but you say you find yourself reacting in unexpected ways and I'm asking if you can, you know, pinpoint that as to something that, that happened?

A: Well…

Q: To which you reacted differently?

A: Well, what I'm trying to say is the values of life. You would think that a person who goes through that kind of horrors and experiences is resigned to certain things, or – or have a certain goals. But it's not necessarily so. I'm surprisingly so – that I – I adapt so easily to new environments and new situations.

Q: Well, you had to do a tremendous amount of adapting during the war years, and afterwards moving from Poland to Sweden, to Canada, to the United States – that's a lot of adapting.

A: Yeah. And that's what I'm going to say – that life, somehow – it's a very philosophical discussion – but life somehow is so strong, that you could be so trivial about things, that what happened is -- it's really in your past – you don't forget it – but it's like on a different level and I sometimes I'm blaming myself for it. How come I'm so interested in, in other things now?

Q: Well, because you have to keep living. You can't live in the past.

A: Yes, but, eh, sometimes it comes to a point if you – you –you live a completely different life, like a completely different, different, person. And my husband sometimes asks me, "Aren't you affected by it constantly? You are so normal!"

Q: That's a great compliment.

A: I know. But I think maybe, I don't know, I'm strong, but, eh, I'm catching myself on that. I'm really – I can, I can cope with everything like – like that past didn't never existed.

Q: Well, I think you should feel very proud of yourself. I have asked you a lot of questions but am going to make the comment that even though I've asked you a lot of questions there may be something I haven't asked you that you would like to include in this recording. There may not be, but sometimes I overlook something?

A: Like a golden torch or something?

Q: Or some event that I many not have touched on or something that you may have thought of after you passed that point in chronology.

A: Well, as I said, it's such a broad area that you can't cover it in a short interview.

Q: That's true.

A: Well, it's just, it's spots, and it's very vivid in my mind. I can see the separate scenes, but eh, but to put it all together and, and analyze it, it's more than having an interview.

Q: Yes, I'm sure that it is. But meanwhile, I want to thank you for sharing with us all that you have shared.

A: Thank you. You're very welcome.

Q: It will be put to good use and it will be a permanent record here in Sarasota for the use of people who want to do further research as well as being shared in classrooms. Thank you very much.

A: You're very welcome.