

Interview with Mrs. Hinda Kibort  
By David Zarkin  
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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League  
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

- Q: This is the JCRC-ADL Holocaust History Project by David Zarkin at Hinda Kibort's home in Minneapolis on June 16, 1983. Please tell me your complete name, including your Jewish name if it is different
- A: My full name is Hinda Kibort. The Jewish name is the same.
- Q: When and where were you born?
- A: I was born in Kovno, Lithuania, on April 4, 1921.
- Q: What were your parents', grandparents' and great-grandparents' names and where were they born?
- A: My parents were both born in Latvia. And my grandparents' names were Leib Danzig and Rachel Danzig. The other grandparents were deceased, so I really didn't know them, but their family name was Berman.
- Q: And do you know where your great-grandparents were born?
- A: I imagine they're all from the same area which, at that time, was part of the Russian Czarist empire.
- Q: And your parents' names?
- A: My father was Charles Danziger and my mother was Ganya Berman Danziger.
- Q: What kind of work did your parents do?
- A: My father was a designer. He worked in a big shoe factory and he was a shoe designer.
- Q: What languages were spoken at your home?
- A: As my parents came from Riga, they spoke fluently not only Yiddish, but also Russian and German. And as it happened, in Lithuania when I was growing up, we spoke German as children; and then later on we switched more to Yiddish but

I grew up almost tri-lingual, because as soon as I started school, or I had interaction on the outside, I also learned to speak Lithuanian.

Q: Speaking of school, did you receive any formal Jewish education? Can you describe it?

A: Up until the year 1933, I attended school in a German private school in Lithuania. But at that time, there was no formal Jewish education except for one hour of religion studies during the week which included some biblical story time, or some other studies that were geared to children. But after 1933, I entered a Hebrew high school. All the subjects were taught in Hebrew, and simultaneously we had to learn also Lithuanian, so this was almost like a bi-lingual school. And there, of course, we studied intensively Jewish history, Chumash, which means the Torah. We read directly from the Torah -- from the five books of Moses. And there, of course, I received a total Jewish background.

Q: What events were you aware of from the mid 1930's to 1941?

A: In 1933, I was still in a German school, and my teachers were mostly imports from Germany. At that time they were either recalled or wanted to go back into Hitler Germany. There was a lot of tension starting from January, 1933, on, and by April the Jewish parents who had children in that school boycotted the school and all five of us who were in that same class were taken out, and there was a choice to be made by the parents whether we should finish our education in the public or private school. All these five parents opted for a private school. We had an excellent Hebrew school in Lithuania, in my second hometown of Siauliai. And as we stopped going to school about April -- spring break -- we had intensive training in the Hebrew subjects, and in fall we started the next grade, fully aware that we would have a little harder time, but then we continued with all the subjects being taught in Hebrew. It was a secular school. It was not a religious school. And as you asked before, religious subjects were taught as part of Jewish history.

Q: Was your family secular or religious in practice?

A: I have not really known too many families in Lithuania that were so totally assimilated as to not have any religious ties to the Jewish community. I know of very few, maybe only a couple of households, for instance, that didn't keep kosher, that did not have any Jewish traditions in their home about holidays and so on. The only Jewish faith that I was familiar with was the orthodox line, because we did not have any reform Jews in Lithuania as well as in other eastern European countries, I'm sure, and the conservative movement was totally unknown to us, so everybody really was orthodox and we lived by orthodox tradition. My father was not particularly religious, even though we did not do on the outside, for instance, things that are not done on the Shabbat. He would never smoke outside or offend any other Jew by doing something that is not "proper." But at home we were a little more lax. We never rode on Shabbat, but then on the

other hand, there was no public transportation in that town of 45,000 or so. Wherever anybody wanted to go, we always had to go on foot anyway. Our standard of living was such that there were only two, three private cars in the whole town that we knew of. Horse and buggy transportation was the thing of the day, so it was really not very hard to keep all these rules.

Q: How about communications? Were there newspapers? Radios?

A: We had marvelous Jewish educational materials all around. We had newspapers, the Zionist-leaning and then also the Yiddish newspapers that were more leftist, that did not espouse any Zionist ideas in their writing. We had several papers, really. We did not have our own Yiddish radio station. That was, I think, fairly new.

Q: Did you know about "news?" About things that were happening in Europe?

A: We knew, of course. We had radios, we had the papers, and we were very involved politically --the Jewish community -- because even in the Hebrew high school that I attended, we were very familiar with all the Zionist factions at the time, and there were really many fights, even among us kids. Our principal was more of the Paole Zion, the leftist group. There were some who were Revisionists, which were the Jabotinsky group, the one that Begin's government is now, you know, more Rightist. And we had, really, quite a few heated arguments among ourselves, and so on. We were quite aware of things like that. We also had many books and circulation library. We had also, aside from this Jewish school that I attended -- that Hebrew high school -- we had another religious, more religious, middle school. We had a middle school in Yiddish -- not in Hebrew. We had a theater group. There were quite a few Jewish activities aside from regular cultural activities.

Q: Did you and your family have any contact with gentiles?

A: Not as close friends -- as we would say today that you invite somebody to your house, or you're very close with them. I did as a child when I attended the German school. And my mother was quite friendly with the parents of the girlfriend that I was very close with -- that was a German girl. Also, some of the teachers used to come to the house. Mother was friendly with them. But as a rule, the Jews were not very much a part of the general society in Lithuania. We were so little assimilated that I know maybe of only two homes where Lithuanian was spoken within the family. Usually people spoke Yiddish. And if they tended to speak another language, it was either Russian or German, but never Lithuanian. We were totally not integrated. It was very much unlike in western Europe.

Q Before the outbreak of the war, did you have any encounters with anti-Semitism?

- A: Yes, of course. I was only eleven years old when I was taken out of that particular school and at that time, we had already heard all these slogans, and all these things the way they happened even in Germany -- about the Jews and about "you so-and-so and such-and-such" and you were not allowed to participate in sports activities in that school at the time. Of course we were aware of what was happening.
- Q: Let's go back to you were taken out of school. Were all the Jewish children taken out of that school?
- A: As far as I know, in my class there were the five of us, and all the parents decided that on the same time, after spring break, that that will be it. We will not be exposed to this kind of thing. And of course they totally boycotted. We knew what was going on in Germany.
- Q: What kind of things were going on in the school?
- A: For instance you started to hear the same slogans as they started to do in Germany about "race relations." We knew that we are sort of always being pushed aside. The students were not discouraged. The ones that are anti-Semite normally were not discouraged, not to hurt somebody's feelings and stuff like this. We could feel that! And as I said, during school there were some activities and so on. And most, of course, it was the parents' idea that we should not support the German school. That was very logical. Also we had people who came from Germany in the '30s. There were several who had either family ties or otherwise tried to escape out of Germany and landed in Lithuania. So we knew more than that. I had a girlfriend who came from Berlin, and when I was in tenth grade, she joined the same Hebrew high school. And from her, of course, we knew what was happening in Germany on a direct basis.
- Q: What were the kind of things that she related to you?
- A: I know that they were quite wealthy. They had had, I think, a wholesale fur business in Berlin. The father's business was taken away. She did not elaborate. I really don't know the circumstances -- the way he died -- but I know they came without the father. They were three daughters and the mother. She told us how they had to leave their apartment and they had to give up the business and how hard it was, and they finally found that they could leave because they had cousins in Lithuania. Then they came to live in Lithuania, and the mother reestablished herself with her family, but the father did not come from Germany.
- Q: Did you have relatives living outside your community?
- A: Only in Latvia. And those family members I barely knew. I only visited there a couple of times -- into Latvia -- because travel was very expensive for us, and my parents had their priorities. My father lived in a salary and we all attended private

schools. There were three children in our family. And it was very expensive to travel even though both countries were very small. For instance, a visa cost so much per person. You had to pay for all these things aside from the passport and stuff. Up till the age of fifteen, children could travel on the parent's passport and visa, so up until the age of fifteen, I was twice with my family in Latvia -- in Riga. Otherwise, I just didn't know them unless they came and visited sometimes in Lithuania.

Q: Do you know what became of them?

A: I know exactly. I refigured before. There were 28 people in the immediate family -- aside from my mother -- that was lost because of Hitler -- who were killed. Both my grandparents, uncles and aunts and first cousins, they did not survive. I have only one uncle who is still alive. He came out of the Soviet Union several years ago and he lives now in Israel. He had lost a wife and two very beautiful children. He has remarried after the war, and there is one daughter who is with him now in Israel, and his second wife and his new daughter whom I don't even know yet, because they got here after our last visit to Israel. And I have one cousin alive who is now in Florida.

Q: What age were you at the outbreak of the war?

A: I was nineteen.

Q: And how did you receive news of the war?

A: (Sighs) May I go back a little bit? Because it was not directly that we got the Germans into Lithuania in 1941, but we had an interim year that sealed our fate even harsher than it normally would have been, because in 1939, after Hitler and Stalin signed the non-aggression pact, I think the Russians were so lulled into security. They tore a part of Poland into their orbit, and parts are still, you know, under the Soviet rule. And I think that by 1940 -- in summer, 1940 -- they felt still so secure, that they decided to come over and take over the whole three Baltic states, because they wanted more outlet to the Baltic sea. They had only Leningrad on the northern part. And just very suddenly in June, 1940 the Russians marched into Lithuania. It was a revolution, a bloodless revolution in the country. The Lithuanian government was overthrown. There was a total change in the regime. I had just graduated the year before. I was in my first year at the University, and I remember that immediately our education changed. The whole system changed. They converted high schools into ten-year high schools to advance so many graduates. I don't know why they did that. At the university, they imported many Russian professors specifically to teach the history of Communism and of the Bolshevik party. The government was taken over within a week or so. Our president at that time escaped to the United States. He later died here in the '50s. And the government was taken over by a wholly prepared ministry, secretaries of the different departments, who actually came in from the

Soviet Union all ready. They were Lithuanian. Of course the military brass was arrested. It was sort of an upside-down affair, for the ones that were on the bottom came out on the top -- in the social status. There were immediately some "undesirable elements", like all the landowners and all the military people and all the industrialists, as big or as small as they were and Jews, who were mostly in business -- but also in my hometown we had this great, big shoe factory, and the owner was a Jew who lived in the United States most of the year, but he employed very many Jewish workers, so in Siauliai we had quite a Jewish proletariat as such. One of the interesting things was also --and as a very young person with very liberal views, and as a Jew, who had been persecuted already at the time -- it was a very interesting feeling when we went to see how they opened the prisons, and they let all these arrested Communists out of the prison, because under the Lithuanians, the Communist party was forbidden, and any activities were punishable. So I remember standing there with other people, and some who had family members there, and Jews and non-Jews came with bouquets of flowers and they were sort of welcomed back into society, and so on.

The thing is that they brought in many functionaries from the Soviet Union, and also picked up all these Jewish workers and other workers and drew them into organizational work. They established unions. They established all kinds of things that we didn't have before. And quite a few Jews were active within the government. This was to our disadvantage later on, because when the Germans came in a year later, they were welcomed as the liberators. And according even to the Germans -- and they didn't need any much encouragement -- the Lithuanians too, felt that all their troubles came because of the Jews. So the treatment was very harsh. I only want to mention that my first experience with people being sent in freight cars out of their homes in the middle of the night was under the Soviets. When I went to the University, I was away from home. I was in the city of Vilnius, Vilna. The town is only maybe half-an-hour away from the Soviet border -- and I remember the girlfriend that I roomed with, her parents were taken out in early June, in the middle of the night, the parents and one sister that she had.

Q: June of what year?

A: 1941. Just a week before the Germans came in, actually. This went on for a whole year, all these selections and all these "undesirable elements" who were being shipped out, but the actual shipping out, not arrests, but really removal of these people from Lithuania went on the last couple of weeks before the Germans came in, which was June, 1941.

And then I saw people on trains. We went out in the afternoon, my friend and I and other students, and here were trains for miles and miles on so many tracks. And everybody asked for some warm clothing. They knew they were being shipped someplace into Siberia, they didn't know where. The next day the trains were gone. It was by pure chance that my girlfriend, when she asked me to go

back home to our hometown to check and see what could be rescued for her of family things that were left behind, that I happened to be in Siauliai at home when the war started, because school had let out and I had decided to work during the summer and didn't want to go home right away, but I did it for my friend and it was lucky because I was home. My brother who attended the University in Kovno came back too, because school had let out. So our family, including my little sister who was then in the tenth grade, was together on that particular Sunday. I believe it was June 16, 1941. And the Germans marched in. It was just very simple. It was about three hours by truck from the German border that we lived. And we could see wounded coming, and trucks going, and a lot of motion and noise and bombardments. It came very suddenly. And this is how the war started for us -- not until 1941. But the harsh treatment, this disadvantage that we had, was revealed right away when the Germans came in, because the Lithuanians cooperated, not only freely, but so willingly. There were times later on that I actually went for help to Germans against the Lithuanians.

Q: Maybe you want to talk about that.

A: Well, I could. (Sigh) When the Germans came in, within a week, they had taken over. There were a few days in the very beginning where our whole family tried to leave the city, but as I said, we didn't have any transportation. So we had to do it on foot, and it was just like you see in all the documentaries, with the little bag, whatever you had, a change of clothing and stuff, just walking along highways, and jumping into ditches because the German planes were strafing, coming down very low, and people were killed on the roads, and all this whole terror in the beginning during the war. But we did not go very far, because the German tanks overtook us very fast. And the next day we returned home. We found everything still the way it was. We lived in an apartment, and at that time we were grateful that the whole family, at least, was together, even though both my brother and I didn't have any clothing or any possessions, because we left it all in our respective dorms or rooms where we lived. We just came home for the weekend!

And the Germans had this policy that was all over. Whenever they took over a country, whenever they came into a new place, after the Wehrmacht (the army) left, the SS came in right away. And they were in charge of mopping-up operations, including the "Jewish question." So when the SS came in, their policy was to first of all, disrupt the Jewish community life. And for that, all the men were arrested about July 1, within a couple of weeks after they came in. And they established all the offices, the Gestapo, and the district commissariat, the military government and all these offices. They arrested all the Jewish men. They came in the middle of the night, and they came with the Lithuanians, who knew exactly where people lived. They arrested my father. And it became very dangerous from day-to-day to be outside. We had to wear our yellow stars. We had to walk in the gutters. We were not allowed on the sidewalks. Everybody could command us to do whatever they wanted on the street, whether they knew us or not.

There were such outrageous humiliations. For instance they would make you hop around in the middle of the street, or made you lie down and step on you, or they spit on you, or they tore at beards of some more devout men who wore beards and stuff like that. And there was always an audience around to laugh. All these kinds of things went on, and it was real dangerous to be outside. And there was an official status that was given us under the name of "untermenschen" -- sub-humans, So we really had no recourse to any law, to any government protection or anything like that. When my father was arrested, I found out very soon after that there was only one way, unless one had an awful lot of money for bribes. I don't know any other means where people had access to the Gestapo or to any German officers, that they could free somebody. The main thing that I heard, though, was that if somebody was absolutely necessary to run a business, that this person was requested to be returned out of jail. For instance, let's say there was a Jewish owner of a string or a rope factory, or something like this, I remember, and they couldn't run it without him, because he was the one knowledgeable person in the place, so he really was released. When I found that out, I tried to get my father out. I went to that factory, which was being taken over at that time already by the German military, and the director of this factory was a Lithuanian. They put a Lithuanian in. I went to his office and I introduced myself, and he really harassed me terribly, because I said I wanted to ask if my father could be released for these and these reasons, and he said, "How do I know that you are the daughter?" And I said, "I have a passport to prove it" -- we carried internal passports in Europe for I.D. -- so then he said, "How do I know that this is a valid passport?" And I said, "This is a Soviet passport." Well that's all I had to say, because then he said, this he doesn't recognize. I could feel that he was just being very difficult. Then I said -- I hadn't been used to being a non-human at the time yet -- "Do I as a Jew don't have any rights to be treated like a human being?" And he said, "Jews are not human beings." It went on into this kind of a conversation. He got very mad and he jumped up and he threw over a carafe of water. There was a lot of noise, and he bodily kicked me out of the room. He kicked me! He grabbed me by the neck and he threw me out, and he told whoever it was in the hall not to ever let me in again and so on. I thought at the time that my father was doomed. I came home. My mother sat in the room with several friends whose husbands had been arrested, too. And I said, "I am going to denounce that man. I'm going to denounce the police. I mean, he had no right to behave like that!" I had not realized the whole situation. So I went out and wanted to go directly to the Germans. I am fluent, and not only fluent, but I speak like a German with no accent. So I ended up in front of the military government offices. There were a couple of soldiers on the street, and I just went up to them, and I said I would like to talk to somebody about this Lithuanian, the way he treated me and so on. They said, "Well you have to go to the Lithuanian police with that." So I said, "No way," because, you know, they would arrest me, on top of everything else. So he said, in German, "Little Fraulein, maybe we can help you." Just out of the blue. And one of them took me -- a few houses further on was the Gestapo, and in my mind, I didn't even know what I was doing -- but I



went with him there. He said, "This girl has to be let in, because she comes from the military government, so just let her in." There were several Jews outside waiting in line and they had some kind of slips to show that they had an appointment to see the head of the Gestapo. I really didn't know who was in charge with the prisons, or who was in charge of my father's release, but anyway, I waited. I waited till about four o'clock and the guard changed and nobody let me in, and I didn't have a slip. So when the guard was walking forth and back by the door -- it must have been late in the afternoon, around five o'clock already -- I sort of went and opened the door and went in. Right away this guard comes with a rifle. I looked inside -- it was like a split-level entry hall -- and above, a few steps inside, there stood a stocky man with grey hair. I heard the people address him as "Herr Commandant." This was the title that I knew was on letters when people wrote for their husbands to be released and so on, that they addressed it to Herr Commandant. I didn't know that it was something with the Gestapo at the time. So I heard that he was called that, so I said, "Herr Commandant, may I have a few minutes?" And he heard I spoke German and he told the guard, "Just let's hear what it's all about." He said, 'You know, I'm very busy and I'm leaving town and I have no time to see you.' I actually begged for five minutes. Then he looked at me, and he said, "Okay, come on." I went into an office, and here I felt that I had an opportunity to say more than about this Lithuanian, because if he is the commandant, I better talk about my dad in general. I told him what it was all about, that I went to that factory, and how I was mistreated. This man sat there and he looked at me and said, "Why do you cry? Don't cry, you're so young and your life is in front of you. You have so much ahead of you. And you know something? Your father will be released.

I had a piece of paper with me that I had sort of written on as a petition, that I carried around, I thought, in case I can present it to somebody. He said, "Do you have some petition here that I could sign?" And I said yes. I gave him the paper, he left the room for a few minutes, and later on I sort of analyzed what happened. Apparently he went to check some records, because everybody kept records, and I think he must have found that my father was still there, because within the first few days after all these arrests, about several hundred a day were taken out and shot. Outside of town they had big trenches. You never knew from one day to another who was killed already. So when he came back into the office, he wrote with a red pen that I will never forget, "Danziger ist Zulassen." That means, "Danziger is to be released." And he said, 'Go home and tell your mother that your father is coming.' I thanked him profusely. He said, "Don't thank me. I did it only because you spoke so nicely to me," or something like that. I ran in one breath and I came home, and I just shouted that Papa is coming home tomorrow! You should have seen all these women. They put me on a chair, and one brought me water, and one stroked me. They thought I was out of my mind, that something happened to me. They were so afraid when I ran out of the house originally. And my father came home the next day. This man, this commandant of the Gestapo, his name was Krause. He really and truly went to Riga the next day, and under his auspices, I believe the week after, 30,000 Jews were killed, and

among them almost my whole family. All my relatives who lived in Riga, and they're all dead. My grandparents, my uncles and aunts, all their spouses, and all my first cousins, many cousins of my parents. In all there was a big involved family there on both sides who has not survived. So sometimes when I am asked if there wasn't even one German who did me a good deed or something, or have I ever encountered one who was a "good" person, I always cite this as an example. The same German, the same Gestapo head who released my father, on the other hand killed a whole family. I have learned during all these years later on in being a prisoner, that some Germans felt very proprietary towards the Jews that worked for this particular group, for him. And they would be called, "Mein Juden -- my Jews." So sometimes if somebody would want to call you away, another guard would come and say, "Come with me and do something else there" -- lets say on the airport or on trenches or whatever you were working -- he would say, "This is my Jew, you cannot have him. He has to work here with me," He felt very proprietary towards that particular Jew. I think this is what came about with the SS too, because I had maybe a personal contact with him at that moment, and maybe he felt lenient. My father was released, but on the other hand, just the next day, we had the thing in Latvia.

Q: So did your life change economically and socially, then, after the outbreak of the war?

A: Absolutely. We in Lithuania -- I'm sure, maybe, even in other countries -- for us the change was very fast, because we did not have the period like the German Jews had from '33 till the war broke out in '39 for some adjustments, even though terrible, but step by step adjustments. That we didn't have. For us it was, one day we were human, the next day we're sub-human, and that was that.

Q: Were you contained in a ghetto?

A: Yes, in September of that year, all the Jews had to leave their homes, apartments, all dwellings, and we were enclosed in a ghetto. So many thousands had already been killed, most of the men who were arrested had not returned, and also others in the towns around, so we had an influx of some who had escaped from shootings, from massacres, some who had packed up and sort of traveled, maybe they had a horse and buggy some place in a small town and had come into town, so I think that eventually we had a couple of thousand Jews in the Achaulen ghetto.

Q: In what year was that, month and year?

A: That was by September, 1941.

Q: How do you spell that?

A: I have to qualify here. In Lithuanian the town is called Siauliai. In Russian it is Shavlee. And in German it is Stetchaulen. But because we were in the ghetto under the Germans, it sort of comes smoother if I would say the Ghetto Achaulen. By the way, in Yiddish, it's called Siauvil -- altogether different.

Q: You were in the ghetto. And what was your knowledge of the outside world? Other ghettos? Mass killings or concentration camps at this time?

A: Our life in the ghetto had a certain routine. There were things we had to do. The slogan in general was -- as later we found out in the concentration camp on top of the gate "Arbeit Macht Frei." "Work will set you free." Which was, of course, very ironic. They wanted us to believe that as long as we could work -- that we were strong and useful to the economy -- that we would survive. If you're not useful, that was it. So in the ghetto everybody had to go to work except children under the age of twelve and elderly, in the very beginning, who stayed in because they actually couldn't just walk so far or work so hard, and so on. We were forbidden certain things; newspapers, radio and this kind of stuff was really forbidden, as well as cultural activities. In our ghetto we didn't have any -- officially -- but people brought in many books, and they were circulated, and in different languages. We had plenty to read. We also had a couple of radios. I know of one that was a sort of clandestine radio and we could hear the BBC very easily by short-wave. We knew exactly what was happening.

Also there were many groups who worked on the outside, outside the ghetto. We had to line up in the morning and under guard be walking to some place of work and then come back late at night. And on the outside we heard from the Germans. We could pick it up. Without even asking, we could overhear. It wasn't that we were not aware. We were very much aware of what was going on with the war, and with the war it was very bad for us, because the Germans proceeded very fast. They had very little resistance in the beginning, especially '41, the winter of '41-'42, they progressed very deep into the Soviet Union. We had no school in the ghetto, but there were people who stayed on, and some who were older and didn't go out to work, who still tried to keep the kids together when the rest went out to work. In the ghetto we did not live in barracks. We lived families together, but sometimes two families to a room, but at least we were not separated. So there were little huts, little homes, and sometimes two or three families would share a room and a kitchen or something like this together.

Q: Was there work in the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto, later on -- during the winter of '41 and even in '42 -- they established some kind of workshops where they made earmuffs for the army, for instance, or did alterations. Sewing rooms in the ghetto. But mostly people went out to work in the morning, and then they came back at night, with guards.

Q: Was there any talk among people there -- your family or you and your friends -- about possibly trying to escape from the ghetto or anything like that?

A: As far as I know, not really. There were a few who escaped. Most of them were caught. There was no way that we had contact with the outside. You cannot escape, you cannot survive as a human being without any contact. You need food, or shelter, or something, and that could not be had.

Q: So then what were people saying in the ghetto, and what did they expect to happen?

A: (Sighs) We did not know what will happen in the long run. We only knew that we had to survive, and that was the only hope that we had from the very beginning, was that the war should not last too long, and that we, eventually, should be liberated. We did not know about the concentration camps. We actually did not know. We could not make plans, let's say, for a month in advance. You asked if people didn't escape. We did not know what would happen, but we heard from some who escaped that they were caught, for instance. We had no contact with the outside as far as friends who came to help, who came to do things. There were, eventually, established some black marketing things, where we could exchange on the outside for clothing or jewelry or whatever people had that the Lithuanians wanted, that we could exchange for food. But this was extremely dangerous, because every time a column came back from work, we were all searched. And they looked into bags, and they looked into the pockets. By 1943, the searches were even more frequent, and it got harder and harder to bring anything in, even though, in general, in the ghetto there were some who had, let's say, food supplies brought in en masse. You could buy it in the ghetto already. There were some who risked their lives, maybe, as a business proposition, and did this, but in general, if an individual wanted to bring something in it was very dangerous. And as I said, by 1943, with the fall of Stalingrad, when the Germans started to feel they were beaten back, when the war turned, we could feel a terrible tension in the ghetto, even from the guards, or from the Germans that we worked with on the outside. And there was one case in June of '43 where a baker had left in the morning for work and had come back and they found some bread and a few cigarettes in his pocket, and he was hanged publicly. It was on a Sunday. There was a little orchard within the ghetto, this public place. And the commissar, whose name was Gewecke, closed off the ghetto on a Sunday and Jews within the ghetto had to build a gallows and a Jew had to hang him, and we were all driven out by the guards and we had to stand around and watch this man being hanged. There were several people who had access to this Gewecke, including my now-husband, who worked in a shop under the auspices of this "commissar." There were several Jews who worked there, and he knew him personally, because he had to hang drapes at his house. He was called sometimes even for personal reasons to the house of this man. Certain delegations of the ghetto -- the ghetto-head, the leader of the ghetto -- and all kinds of other officers that worked in the ghetto -- Jews -- went to ask for his life,

to spare his life and so on, and he said no! He wanted to make a showcase out of it. And I want you to know that in 1969, this man was brought to trial in Germany at one of the Nazi trials, and my husband was contacted to come as a witness. And we went. I went with him. There was a trial in Lubeck. And in that trial, no witness could prove that under his auspices, or his orders, all these diverse Jews were killed in the beginning and through the years in Lithuania, because that was his office, his orders. But he was tried because he did not rescind the order for this particular Jewish baker -- it was in his power to let him live, and he did not do it -- for this he got four years of hard labor.

Q: What were the dates and circumstances of your deportation from the ghetto? How did that come about?

A: So in 1943, when we felt all this tension going on, we knew that something horrible is going to happen in the ghetto, that this was already sort of in the air. And on November 5, 1943, our ghetto was enclosed. The SS had brought in, not the regular SS that was there all the time, but some Romanian and Ukrainian SS. This was a policy. If there was some kind of massacre or something going on, they usually did not let the native SS work with this population, but they took, for instance, Lithuanian SS, who cooperated with them willingly, and brought them into Poland, because I have talked later to Polish former prisoners, and they said, "Oh, we had Lithuanian guards," whereas we had these Romanian and Ukrainian guards in Lithuania. So on that particular day, the ghetto was closed off very early in the morning and we were told that everybody has to go out to work. Our family was at that time, all five of us, employed in a factory where my father worked, and that was adjacent to the ghetto. We could see through the window what was happening. And this was the day where they took everybody out who stayed in the ghetto. When we came back after work, we were a totally childless society! All the children were taken away. All the elderly were taken out. There were only a few who escaped or had maybe wandered off and were not found in one or the other huts. That was a tremendous, traumatic experience for everybody in the ghetto. We turned to things, like, different séances were performed. People looked for answers. Everybody's faith was absolutely shattered! You can imagine parents coming home to nothing. There were a couple of kids that I know of whose parents probably had the presence of mind to either drug them or do something that the kids were totally asleep and were not crying out during all these searches, and they had survived. And I know that a few were taken out later to some Lithuanian families or were given -- I don't know what the procedure was at the time -- and they gave them there for safety. I know of one particular one, because after the war, a friend of mine who came back from the Soviet Union, had found her little niece whose parents -- her sister and brother-in-law -- had perished. So she got that little girl back. When I escaped with a group of ten through this underground work that we did, I took that little child with me and got her out of the Soviet Union. But there were very few! And in Lithuania we really had a very hard time with relations on the outside.

Q: So now what happened then with the deportation?

A: After that the population, of course, was much smaller in our ghetto, and it was made smaller. The barbed wire was changed around, and we were very much afraid that we will not be able to live, to be liberated by the Russians, who were already advancing at that time. The day when we came back after work, and found that the ghetto was totally empty -- when all these people started to look for some omens and turned to the heaven, literally, to look for some signs -- we heard for the first time the word Auschwitz. And we didn't know what it was. So much so that there was a rumor in the ghetto that these children and also some of the leadership in the ghetto that were taken out that day were taken to Switzerland. That was our hope, because in German, Switzerland is called "Die Schweiz." When we heard "Auschwitz." We didn't know that name, we translated it sort-of as if somebody misunderstood the word "Schweitz." We had hoped that all these trains that day were going into Switzerland and maybe these children would be taken as hostages, because we heard different rumors constantly. Of course it turned out that they were taken to Auschwitz, which we found out after the war. That was really the first exposure of people being taken out, and we just didn't know if we would ever see them again.

After November, '43, the Russians really started to proceed west. And by June, July, they were pretty close to the Baltic already, and the Germans were being beaten back. We even heard sometimes, from very far away, that there is something advancing, some cannon fire or something in the air. We really hoped that they will not have enough transportation, because we knew that they had a hard time with trains and all this. But to our misfortune, in the middle of July, on the 16<sup>th</sup>, I believe, in 1944, there were trains assembled in our railroad station. The ghetto was closed off. Everybody could take only whatever they could carry, even some food we were told to take along for a couple of days, and we were put on the train, and we were taken to the camp of Stutthof. So the whole ghetto of Achaulen ended up in Stutthof to begin with, and there was the first time that our family was separated -- all the families -- because the men were taken to one side of the camp and the women to another. I suppose that the procedure of being checked in was similar in all the camps. Records were kept meticulously in the camps by the Germans.

After my father and brother were taken away from us, my mother and sister stayed together. It was a very traumatic checking-in process. We had to undress. We came to a building where we had to proceed, let's say, like from one room to the next. I have some slides of it I use when I present something on World War II or on camps -- a reel of slides that our family took in 1974 when we were in Germany. We took our children sort of on a pilgrimage to show them where we were in Germany, and also the camp of Dachau that is now a museum. My husband was in Dachau as well as my father, my brother. All these men that were separated from us, most of them were later taken to Dachau. So that's where we took our kids. On the slides there is one of the barracks in the death camp part of

the camp, and I can relate to it, because we went through the same procedure except that, for us, the next room was a shower room instead of a gas chamber. But I want to explain further. The first room that we got into -- (sigh) -- there were guards around, men and women, SS guards. In the middle was a table, and there was an SS man in a white coat. We came in batches of several women. We had to take our clothes off before we went in, and we were totally naked. My mother and sister, of course, we held on together. I cannot even describe now the feeling, how you feel in a situation like this. We were searched. Totally from our hair, they went through our hair, they made us stand spread-eagle. I also want to mention that before we left the ghetto, in our family, we cut out little pictures from snapshots, so every one of us would have the faces of the rest of the family members, and that was just put in a tiny little piece of paper, and we kept it all the time. When we had to stand spread-eagle like this, and spread out our fingers and all these things, even we lost our little photographs. They looked through the hair, they looked into the mouth, they looked in the ear, and then we had to lie down. They looked into every orifice of the body, right in front of everybody. Perhaps not knowing from one second to another what will happen, and because we were so in total shock, we did live through it. Then from this room we were rushed -- everything went very fast -- we were rushed through a room that said above the door, "Schauerbad," which means "shower room." As I said, in the slides of when we went through Dachau, we saw that these were gas chambers, but for us, when we went through, there was really water trickling through the ceiling. It wasn't a real "bathroom" or something, but there were little openings in the ceiling and water was coming through. The shower was very superficial.

"Schauerbad. " I learned later, was always on top of the gas chambers, because you can imagine if a train with all these wretched people, tired and hungry and living among dead for the last few days in the trains, when they came and they were promised a bath and food on the other side of the room or some barracks or something, they were eager to go into the rooms, and that was the purpose of it. So over every gas chamber you will find it says, "Schauerbad." We, in our ignorance of course, we didn't know what it was, but for us luckily it was a shower room.

And afterwards we came to the next room and there were piles of clothing, of rags really, on the floor. It wasn't even dignified enough that some guard or some worker or some supervisor would issue you something to wear. You had to grab it. One got a skirt and a blouse and a dress and this and that. We had to exchange among ourselves. The same thing with the shoes that were lined up outside of those barracks. Some had big men's shoes as long as size 14 and some little high-heeled pumps or something that was absolutely unusable, and I ended up with a pair like that, with brown suede pumps with high heels. It took me hours to find a rock that I could break off the heels with, so at least I could walk, because this marching was forever, and you had to stand in lines, and you had to really stand on roll calls all the time, and so on.

So anyway, after this, we went into registration. They took the records of everything about you, from the country you came from, all the vital statistics, your profession, your scholastic background, everything was taken down. Then in Stutthof we got black numbers on a white piece of cloth that had to be sewn on the sleeve. In Auschwitz, as you know, they had the numbers tattooed into the forearm -- inside the forearm -- but in Stutthof, we had numbers that we had to sew on. My mother and sister and I had it in the 54,000s I believe, when we came into Stutthof. They were three consecutive numbers. Stutthof was located on the sea by the city of Danzig, which is now Gdansk and very much in the news, but at that time, before the Germans came in, it was called a free city. Then the Germans took over and through my lifetime even, this was called the Polish Corridor.. it belonged at one time either to Germany or to Poland -- this whole area. We knew that we were close to the sea, because the sand was pure white sand when you sat outside or stood in line or whatever. Sometimes when we put our hands into the sand, we could pull out hair -- braids -- anything that had fallen into it, it was such very soft sand.

Q: What was you and your family's expectation about the meaning of deportation?

A: The way we figured was that we knew that the Russians were close to Lithuania, and we had figured out that they perhaps would use us for some work, because we could not get it into our heads -- I personally have never even discussed with my parents -- that we will never see each other. We hoped that we would see each other even when we're separated from my father and my brother. I want to explain. I have thought about it very often, and I try to analyze things a lot and I am asked so many questions that I really have to come to grips with so many things. When I was in the camp and at the age of from 19 to 23 when I was a prisoner during those years, my view on the whole thing and my hope about life and my wishes about seeing my brother and my father were so totally different from what my mother must have experienced. And I can only relate to that -- to her horror which was probably even greater -- because now I'm a mother and grandmother and I understand these feelings better than I could then. So for myself I had the hope. My mother had never expressed the fear that we will never get together again. She always kept the hope up. My sister and I were lucky that for the time that we were together, we had each other to think about. It was, I think, easier to survive if you didn't have to be all alone and not have anybody to worry about. I think it made it easier if you had somebody to worry about.

Q: What was the means of transportation to the camps?

A: They were cattle trains. We had no bathroom facilities, no latrine facilities on it. There was a pail on one side that was usually quite full, very soon. We were very crowded in the trains. The stench and the lack of water and the fear -- the whole experience was just beyond explanation. At one time, when we were out in open country, the guard opened the door, I remember. We could sit on the side and let our feet down even, and got some fresh air. We tried to keep our spirits up. We



tried even to sing or do something to enjoy whatever we saw going by in this open country, but then of course they would close it off very fast, and we were all enclosed inside.

Q: What was the approximate day and time and year of your arrival?

A: It took very long till they loaded, and so they usually started early in the morning and we left sometime during the day, and we came to the camp later in the afternoon. It was still light.

Q: What year?

A: 1944 in July. As a matter of fact, after a few days being in camp, on July the 29<sup>th</sup>, I think, was the assassination attempt on Hitler. And that was a terrible few days that we had right then and there, because they were so furious, and all their hatred and everything -- there were so many killings and beatings in the camp at that time -- their rage was sort of poured out on all us prisoners

Q: Who were your barrack-mates, and where did they come from?

A: (Sigh) As we came on the train with members of our ghetto, quite a few ended up in the barracks together, because if we stood in lines for any registration or something, we sort of proceeded among friends. We tried to be in groups together. So I ended up with quite a few acquaintances. I also found people from all over Europe. We had Hungarian women and German women, somebody from Czechoslovakia, somebody from Belgium, from any country, you name it and they were there. Some single, some mothers and daughters. Children were not there. Even if people came from certain ghettos at that time, from communities where there were still families together with children, the children were taken away right away, and then again, men and women were separated in Stutthof. So children were not around at all.

Q: What kind of people were they, from what countries were they from? Were they all Jewish? Were there other kinds of people?

A: I have never been with anybody in any barracks or on any work group that were not Jewish.

Q: What kind of work were you doing in camp?

A: In the camp we stayed only a few weeks. And then later, as prisoners of Stutthof, we were taken to outside work camps. This is how it worked. There were several things that were done in the camp, like sorting clothes, or having all kinds of alterations departments, or cleaning departments, or people who ran the camp -- prisoners. They were kept inside. But the real work was done in outside work camps, so whole groups were transported out to areas where they were needed. A

few weeks after we were in Stutthof, 1,100 women were taken out -- my mother and sister luckily together with me -- and we were taken again, by boats and trains, deeper into Germany, south and west of the camp. We ended up in some barracks, and we had to dig anti-tank ditches. We had guards with us. In those barracks they had latrines, they were prepared for this group of workers. We were marched for miles! And we had to dig. Those anti-tank ditches are very deep and they are V-shaped. They went like a V-shaped ditch for miles and miles through very flat country. The Germans had the idea that Russian tanks would come and fall nose-in into those ditches, and will not be able to come up again because of the shape of that ditch. This was a defense line. So we worked in the front lines, waiting for the approach of tanks which never came.

But once we were done in this area, our group was split up. Then 400 of us were taken by train again deeper inside Germany, and we ended up in an open field in tents, 50 women to a tent. This camp didn't even have a latrine that gave you any privacy at all. And that camp didn't have any water -- for drinking or washing or anything. We got there about the end of September, beginning of October, 1944. The weather was still passable. There was still some sunshine. The climate in general in that area is much like here in Minnesota except that the fall there is a little longer and rainier, and the snow comes maybe by November. In that camp the conditions were so rough that it is unbelievable to me today how we really survived it, as people and as women, especially. There was no sanitary help at all. We didn't have, as I said, even a covered latrine. As a matter of fact, at night, after the last roll-call -- it was called in the camps 'appell' for the last roll-call -- once you were inside the tent and you wanted to go to the latrine area, you had to step out and call a guard who would escort you to this little area. It was all out in the open, and he would stand by you while you were crouching down, and he would escort you back. This was part of our lifestyle there

We were covered with lice. We became very sick and weak. We had no means of even washing. Also the tents did not have any wood so we could heat a tiny little oven that was a heating stove that was put in the middle of the tent with a pipe sticking out through the top. It was not bigger than a big marmalade can or something, on three legs. If we had the wood, it could be heated, but we didn't even have that. It was so terrible that I honestly don't know today, knowing what would happen, if I could survive that. We stayed in that camp, again, till about the middle of December when we stopped working, because by that time the snow was very deep and we worked with pickaxes and shovels by hand. So we couldn't work. It was all frozen. Then they made a selection in that camp, too.

The age group was from about 16 till about 40 or maybe 45, who were really the work force that had still survived up until that time, because the children had been taken away, and the elderly were gone, and this was the strong element, really, that could still be used. My mother was selected out of the selection. She was 45. They probably figured out that if and when the camp will be closed down and people will be marched out, that the sick and the "elderly" quote-unquote, will not

be able to march. We had already again a notion that the camp will be closed down very soon. We could hear when we slept on the floor that in the east someplace there was a lot of rumbling going on, and we knew that the Russians were close. On January 20, 1945, they closed the camp down and about 300 were marched out and 96 were left behind. That was the whole camp. The camp leader knew that we were daughters, and he gave us a choice to either be evacuated and leave mother behind, or we could stay with her. Of course we decided to stay. Whatsoever will be done to her, we would stay with her. I lost a very dear friend at that time -- taken away, she and her mother -- that was one of my old friends that I had been to the university with. She had been a medical student. Her mother was a chemist. I owe a lot to her mother, because when we were in this last camp, my mother worked in the kitchen for a while, and Frau Schmidt, my friend's mother, was one of five that worked in a group together. We worked five as a unit, and in my group was my friend Thea, her mother, Frau Schmidt, my sister and I, which makes four, and a fifth was a young woman from Belgium. Frau Schmidt taught us to survive -- really -- because many times I think we would have gone out of our minds or collapsed physically, if not for her. First of all, while we didn't have snow yet, she taught us what roots or grasses or anything that wasn't poisonous, that wouldn't hurt us, that we could eat. And that's what we ate. We chewed on things that we could find that she allowed us to eat. She also said that to survive we have to keep our minds occupied and not to think about the hunger and not think about the cold. And she made us study every day. For instance, even now I remember Russian poetry that she taught us by rote, by heart, every day, when her turn came to be the lecturer. And my friend spoke about all her lectures that she remembered from school, and so did I. And my sister contributed whatever she could contribute to the conversation. The only one that was very hard on us was this young woman from Belgium who always reverted to speaking about food. We called the day when she talked, when it was her turn to speak, "the day Lorna cooked," because she came up with recipes, and luckily we didn't know what she was talking about, such fancy things that she knew, that she had eaten, so it didn't really make much of a difference, it was very familiar to us.

Frau Schmidt also taught us to have a real perspective -- on the guards, for instance. She taught us to think every time when we felt humiliated, or were cringing inside, or were hurting inside, who the animal was and who the human being was. Because she always used to say, "A human being cannot make you into an animal. He can tell you you're an animal, but it's only because of the way he treats you. And the animal really is one that humiliates another human being." And so on. I remember she used to keep our spirits up, and it really was very helpful.

As I said on January 20 the camp was closed down. The 96 who were left behind, we all stayed without food and without any provisions and we had only two guards left in the camp. They were both armed. Quite a few among the ones that stayed with us were sick, because this was the purpose of the selection to begin

with. There were some people who couldn't walk, some people who had bent backs or were in pain, who were just very emaciated, skeleton-like and couldn't work. We stayed in the camp only overnight, and the next day we were put into formation and we started on a highway. The snow was very high. I remember that was a very harsh winter. We marched on a highway until we came to a small town where we would be put overnight into the jail there. I think that by that time we were pretty scared already, because in the beginning we thought that they will burn down the tents with us in them. When that didn't happen, we had heard rumors that around Stutthof there was a soap factory where they boiled people -- bodies -- for the manufacture of soap. When we were put, 96 women, into a small jail cell, we honestly stood so close by that we couldn't sit down. If one bent down there was no room for anybody else to bend down. We thought that maybe the floor will open. Maybe some things will happen. The panic I remember was so great. Everybody started screaming. It was such a hysterical moment. Then slowly we quieted down. You can imagine 96 women pressed like this together, with no bathroom facilities, with everybody going just crazy! And it was just horrible, this tension. The nerves were on edge. We were just absolutely not normal, and it was a relief in the morning when it was still dark, they opened the doors and we really spilled outside. They recruited a whole bunch of Polish -- home guards or some other groups -- Poles with guns, rifles -- and they surrounded us totally as if in a box. And 96 women is not that big a group when we went five in a row. This whole box, this whole enclosed group went further on the highway. We started to ask the Poles where and what is happening. They said they don't know. They were recruited to escort this group for a while and then they will be told, but we didn't know. We marched like this till about noon, I imagine, because the sun was high. I cannot really tell. We saw some German soldiers, one by one, sort of, going on the highway, and we thought that there is something going on, and we hoped maybe Russians were proceeding there in that area, because we could hear bombardments. Then the guards told us to stop, and they dismissed all these Polish guards. And they told us to run into the woods.

B: And the snow was so deep --up to the knees and most of us were barefoot -- totally barefoot. We were all frozen and blistering, and it was very cold, and we couldn't really run in formation, so we spread out into a long line. In the front of the line was one guard and at the end another. Whether by design or by a coincidence, I don't know, but my mother and sister and I were at the very end. And all of a sudden I heard the sound of a rifle being sort of -- something done, with a click, and I still have the feeling in the back of my spine, and it felt very strange and very scary. To my mother and my sister, I said, "Let's run ahead a little bit to be within the crowd," not right there at the end. We ran a little faster, and when we sort of reached the group, we were in a clearing in the woods. The guards shot into the air. There was a terrible panic and screams and people went really crazy. My mother, that was one time she let go of our hands. We always hand-held. She was always in the middle. She let go, and she ran towards the guards screaming, and not to shoot, her children, and all these things that mothers say. And they shot her. My sister and I just couldn't face the barrage, I suppose,

because we had no design of escaping or leaving, but we grabbed each other by the hand and we ran! And it was in the woods. We stopped when we had to catch our breath, and we could hear the screaming and the shooting, and it went on like forever. We just stood there. Then it got very quiet. I don't know how long after, because we were afraid to move. Every tree looked as if it had an armband. The guards themselves were these awful, awesome looking guards in black uniforms with the skull and cross-bone insignia. Anyway, when we sort of came to, my sister luckily, had a piece of blanket, and we had straw. My mother, too, may she rest in peace, we had covered her feet with pieces of blanket and straw inside, and I didn't have enough, so I found a pair of some boots in the snow, not boots, but old shoes, but they fell off. I was really totally barefoot and I started to hurt. Then my sister and I started to move away, and we wanted to go and see what happened. Then a few more women came out from behind the trees, and we were nine that escaped, and we wanted to go back, and milled around in the woods, but we never found that place again. We were lost. Besides, wherever we went, we saw German machine gun nests -- the regular army had positions there in the woods. We were afraid to fall into their hands, so eventually we made it out on the highway. And there another woman approached us who had been shot through. She was wounded but she probably survived in the snow. By that time it was already getting dark, late in the afternoon, and we took her with us. So the ten of us tried to march back to that village, because we knew there were people, at least. We needed help by that time, it didn't make any difference what would happen. We just had to have some contact, to rest or to eat or something. We couldn't make it. We were so weak we couldn't. We knew it was seven kilometers, because we had seen a sign. So then we saw a small village about a mile away and we, with the last strength really, made it into the village and knocked on some doors. It was a Polish village and they didn't let us in. Then the next house they started to throw things at us, and we went straight to the church and asked for the priest. The first thing he said was, "I can't do anything for you. The Germans are in charge here and there is nothing I can do." He said, "Maybe if you survive, you will be liberated very soon, because we know that the Russians are coming very soon." It was no help. So we just parked there on the steps of the church. Later in the evening the priest came with a man who told us to go and hide in a barn that was empty. There was a German national who had left because he was afraid to be caught by the Germans. He had left the village. There was an empty barn. We stayed there overnight. We did not get any help whatsoever from the whole village. Not water. Not a rag to cover ourselves. Not any medical help. Nothing. We stayed there till the next morning when there was a terrible battle in the area. It was just so noisy. There was a machine gun nest right in front of the barn, because the barn was on a hill overlooking the village square. We were so afraid that they might throw a bomb in or something. We had locked ourselves in.

. Then this machine gun nest sort of got very quiet. We heard Slavic sounds -- "Ogonye", which means "fire," -- and we knew that Russians were running around. Then when it got quiet, somebody from the village came and told us to

open the door and look outside, and he said, "If you want to, you can see the first Russian tanks coming in. You're free." That's when we opened the doors and really saw the first Siberian troops that came through this area.

Q: So can you tell me briefly about the liberation and where you went from there?

A: The liberation, very briefly; we stayed in the barn just for a little while, because at night came some Russians. They took us out of the barn, and they put us into that empty farmhouse. We were debriefed by the Soviet military commander in the area, and we were told to leave, because there was a battle waging for a while there. The Russians did not provide anything special except very slight medical help. They gave us some Vaseline to cover the wounds and some rags. That's all they had, even their military group that came in there. It was right in the front lines, so they went all ahead, west, and they put us into trucks and took us to the town of Ostrovliemko. We went through parts of burning territory and fighting.

Q: What country was this in now?

A: In Poland. Now we went east. We thought that in Ostrovliemko we might find trains, but there really was no transportation. There was some kind of a freight train going -- open platforms. We just jumped on it, because we couldn't stay in the open like that. We came to a border town where the Russian police caught up with us. They took us off the train and we were taken to a Russian gathering point, where they caught all kinds of refugees that they found on the roads and on trains and all over. They put us all into this one area, in one big building, actually. They had their police there -- the NKVD. And they started to grill us; "How did you survive? You must have cooperated with the Germans. Everybody else was killed. How did you as Jews survive?" it got so terrible, that we had to defend ourselves. We were five who wanted to go to this particular city, to Vilna, because we thought, stupidly, that if everybody will survive in the family, we would want to meet some place in Lithuania -- at least how will we find ourselves. That was our only worry at that time. We lived through it and we should have stayed in Poland and waited out the war. Eventually there were more refugees, which we didn't know. We thought that we were the only survivors. That was January, '45, still during the war, because the war didn't end until May of '45.

Q: So you didn't stay there? You went to Vilna?

A: So we went. We wanted to go to Vilna. Then on the way we had to work there with these Russians. Finally we got out of this terrible place. We got some kind of a document. In Russia, without a piece of paper, you are a nobody; you have to have some kind of an I.D. So we got these I.D.'s and we made it into Vilna. We wanted to go back to Siauliai, where we had lived. But in the station in Vilna, we heard our names called. There were a couple of Russian officers who looked for me and my sister. It happened that on the same train when we were going into

Lithuania, there was a Jewish doctor that had come onto that train before we reached Vilna, and we were the first survivors that he had ever seen. He asked for our names and where we were from, and he said, "Don't go into the small towns, because they'll kill you! You are not welcome there. There are no Jews in smaller towns in Lithuania." But you know, we just didn't know better. We said, "We want to go on." So when we came to Vilna, he had already disembarked, and he had run over to some officers' quarters and he knew there were some from Lithuania -- from Siauliai, our hometown. And these two men, who were my parents' age actually, came and they took us off the train, and said, "Don't go into smaller towns."

So my sister and I stayed in Vilna. We only heard in October, '45 that my brother and father had survived. To get out, it was impossible just as it is now. There is no way that you can get out of the Soviet Union. There was only one way, right after the war, that Polish citizens could leave for Poland, that had become then a Communist state. So former Polish citizens in the area of Vilna were allowed to go into Poland. The Brichah, the Zionist Jewish underground, worked in that area, and we managed to get documents and things going and then we got to Poland in 1946.

Q: Was there any discussion then in Poland about going to Palestine?

A: There was. For us it was not the time, because we were still looking for my brother, who had not returned to Lithuania. He had stayed in Germany, so we couldn't go anywhere. I only delivered that child that I had taken with me. I delivered that to the illegal -- at that time -- Youth Aliya group, that took the children into Palestine. We proceeded back into Germany. We had to cross the Carpathian Mountains on foot, my father and my sister and I, from Poland into Czechoslovakia. And only in Czechoslovakia could we find some camps that were administered already by the international refugee organizations. Then we took a train, had to cross, again, the Russian zone of Austria, and through the whole of Austria, and then we came into Germany.

In 1946 when we got there, I started to work for the Central Committee of Liberated Jews. We were an organization that had special privileges. All the Jewish refugees that lived in the city of Munich, and who administered all the Jewish D.P. camps in the area, were not under the jurisdiction of the Germans, as other survivors of other nationalities had been. The American military government issued us a special status, that this organization was responsible directly to the American government. And it was very interesting work. It was the time prior to the establishment of Israel.

Then my sister was married in 1947 while we were still there. Although I had relatives in South Africa, and my father received one affidavit to go to South Africa, he said that he will not be separated from the family ever again, so he did

not go. We had no relatives in the United States that could issue us an affidavit to come, but my sister, when she married, her husband had family here, and they had an affidavit almost immediately, in '47. On the way to the United States, my brother-in-law stopped with her in Paris, where his parents were stuck for a while. In the meantime, the law of immigration was changed in the United States, and Congress then approved 250,000 refugees to be allowed to come into the United States, and we didn't need affidavits.

Q: You were on your way anyhow.

A: When my sister was on her way to the States, my father said that we will all try to wait till our turn will come, and that's why I came to Minneapolis only in 1950.

Q: How did you happen to come to Minneapolis?

A: I was married here in 1951, but I knew my husband from my hometown too. He had gone through Dachau and all this, and I had met him very briefly in Germany after the war. They had a lot of family here, and they had come to the States already in 1947 -- their whole family, my husband, his brother and his parents. We corresponded all the time, and he had seen to it that I could find work here in Minneapolis and so on, that I should be transferred to Minneapolis, so I came here. And the year after, I was married here.

Q: Can you tell me what it has meant to you to be a survivor?

A: Most of all, I think, it has meant to me to be a witness. It's not that I'm obsessed with talking about it, or letting everybody know about it, even though I feel that being quiet would really not be very fair to the ones who did not survive. And this made it, maybe, a little easier to speak about it, because in the very beginning, and not only the beginning, but maybe the first ten years up to fifteen years, we had no audience here. We kept it all inside. It was very hard to talk about it. It's only in the last few years, really, when it's out in the open, because the study of the Holocaust started to be incorporated in the curricula in the schools, at the university, and so on.

Luckily we can speak about it, because I want it to be known. I feel that revenge, for instance is not the thing that I could live with, but to look for justice, to be a witness, and all this combined had meaning for my life.

Q: Can you describe very briefly your general feelings about human nature, non-Jews and Germans?

A: The whole experience, of course, has taught me about the possibility of a human being turned into a beast, into something non-human in relation to other people. I honestly hope that a thing like this will never happen. I think there is a danger in not speaking out when you see something brewing, in the very beginning. I think



that the onlooker, the bystander, is as much at fault as the perpetrator, because he lets it happen. I have a fear of what is called the "Silent Majority." That is a very frightful thing. Very often a non-Jewish friend here will ask me, "So what can I do?" Or when I speak to students, when I speak to groups, or to anybody who is interested already in the subject, they say, "What can we do?" If I open a paper after some anti-Semitic thing happened in a city or a community, and I see letters to the editors, the ones that will react are mostly Jews! So I say, as non-Jews, I don't want you to do anything. I want you to get up and say, "I feel it's wrong." Or, "I protest." That's all you have to do. Send in a letter. "This should not happen in my community. I don't want this. I protest against it." And sign your name. Then maybe somebody else will be brave enough to come forward and say he protests, too, that he thinks that is wrong.

Q: Has your belief or practice in Judaism or a Supreme Being changed?

A: I feel a great comfort to be within the Jewish community and to be active within the Jewish community. Also about being active in a community in general. It is a good feeling. I have a good feeling, for instance, when I am at the synagogue, and when Jews, as a community, perform their rituals in a group, and I feel part of a group, and I feel that all over the world, Jews at this moment are doing the same things that I do. It's like a family to me. I could not live without it.

Q: Have you seen any of the films or read any of the books related to the Holocaust, and do you think that they are accurate in what they describe?

A: Whether a person writes his memoirs or relates personal things that happened to him during the war, or there is a fictional account of the years during the Holocaust with maybe a real background of somebody involved, I have a feeling that anything that a person will even make up out of thin air could have happened, because it did. So I cannot judge if this person in particular makes something up, or if it really happened to him. Personally, I think it was heroic just to survive -- but I cannot judge that, because everybody has their own story, whether they escaped from a massacre, whether they survived a child being torn from their arms, whether they saw people dying around them, friends and others, whether they were in one camp or another, whether conditions were better or worse, and, you know, quote-unquote, "It could have happened." What they show on T.V., I don't always approve of, especially not that horrible thing Playing For Time where I feel that the Jewish prisoners, those musicians, were shown at such a disadvantage, it was absolutely ridiculous. But I don't want to go into the critique of everything. There are many, many people who think that the movie The Holocaust should not have been performed on T.V., but I think it let people, non-Jews, be involved with a particular family. I think this is the only way that maybe they could feel something, because throwing out numbers like six million, or a whole village, that doesn't have any meaning. It has more meaning when you get involved with a certain person or a family. So there are things that are worthwhile that are shown. But things happened, and I think we should still keep talking

about it, because there are already opinions afoot, people write already, saying that the Holocaust never happened, that it's a hoax, that it's Jewish propaganda. If we don't repudiate that, then the next generation might grow up not knowing anything, saying that maybe it never did happen. So I feel it is our duty to study the Holocaust.

Q: Yes, and I think this will be a valuable contribution to that study. I'd like to thank you for your time today. And this completes the interview with Hinda Kibort by David Zarkin on June 16, 1983.

A: Thank you.