

Interview with Lucy Smith
By Rhoda Lewin
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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: This is Rhoda Lewin and I'm interviewing Lucy Smith for the Holocaust Oral History Project of the Jewish Community relations Council and this is March 11, 1987. Lucy, could you tell me please what is your complete name, including your Jewish name if it's different?

A: I've got a Jewish name, but I was told about it. It has never been used, as is usually the case. It was Leah Tova.

Q: And what was 'Smith' in Poland?

A: That's my married name. My maiden name was Kreisler.

Q: And when were you born?

A: In June, 1933.

Q: What town and country were you born in?

A: Krakow, Poland.

Q: Could you tell me your parents' names, your grandparents', your great-grandparents? How far back can you trace your family?

A: My grandparents, yes. My mother was from Tarnhof and my father from Krakow. His name was Heinrich and his father's name was Mauritz -- Morris. Those were the Kreislers. My mother's family was Grunhut.

Q: What were your parents' occupations?

A: My father was a chemist and he had a small factory, that he produced ink for printers.

Q: And this was in Krakow?

A: This was in Krakow.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: No.

Q: You were an only child. Was this a business he had founded himself?

A: Yes. His father had a shop where he was selling paint. At that time it was not in cans, but a powder.

Q: Did your father make some discovery himself on how to make the printing inks?

A: He had some problems with it, because he was such a good discoverer, that he was discovering or rediscovering each time, and he was not too good in keeping once discovered colors! (Laughter)

Q: But he did make a living. What languages were spoken in your home?

A: Polish.

Q: Can you describe what your home was like? How you observed the holidays, what kind of neighborhood you lived in, things like that. I realize that I'm asking you to think back to when you were very small.

A: We were quite assimilated Poles, and I did not know I was Jewish 'til war started. I didn't know there were Catholics or Jews. It was not mentioned. But I knew there were holidays, and that was mostly my uncle, my mother's brother, took me to Temple a few times. But I still didn't connect it, that there was anything specific. It was rather that it was entertaining.

Q: So then you hadn't really started school yet when the Germans came into Poland in 1939?

A: No, I started when they did come to Poland. That was the year I was supposed to start. And I went for one month before I was told not to come any more.

Q: Can you describe what happened then? When the Germans came in?

A: I had to stop going to school and I couldn't go to public parks any more, but it wasn't terrible at the time. We went on foot on the river Vistula or some other places, and kind of found alternate places, and played on the street.

Q: Did you have a boat on the Vistula, or were there boats you could rent?

A: No, not on a boat. We used to go walking, like along the Mississippi. The same way.

Q: And you and your mother would go.

A: Usually it was not my mother. She still had a kind of maid. Actually it was at that time that I began to hear that there were German Jews -- this was a little bit before the Germans came to Poland -- German Jews started to come to Poland. And there was a German woman who was employed by several women to take children for a walk. So she was going with me, and several other children, to take us someplace, like the river, the Vistula.

Q: Would you like to just tell me the story instead of my asking you questions? I think chronologically, step-by-step, you would like to tell me what happened.

A: Gradually, somehow, I don't know how it happened that I started to get this Jewish conscience, but of course during the war, it was quite clear. I was told I couldn't go to school; because I was Jewish, and so it was more and more clear to me that I was Jewish.

Q: Did you have to wear the yellow star? Any kind of mark on your clothes?

A: No, not yet. At that time, it was not ordered right away. And besides, I was under ten, and that was for only ten years and older children. So we stayed in Krakow for about a year. My father went to Lemberg and stayed there for a while, it was Russian, and my mother decided to go back to Tarnhof, where she was from. And meantime, Poles who claimed to be German -- they were not Volksdeutsch, but Stamdeutsch, something in between, or even fake -- occupied our apartment and told my mother to go out. And this was at the time my mother wanted out anyhow. I was already in Tarnhof. But they came and took the apartment, and she couldn't take any furniture or anything. So she also came to Tarnhof. My mother had half the house, that she had with her sister, and her sister left the apartment and rented a room for herself in another apartment and let us live in this apartment. It was a one bedroom apartment. And then we stayed there. It was maybe another year or so. I'm not quite clear about it, it blends with time. And then it started, during that time, that things got worse. There was action started, even before ghettos. And my mother had two uncles, who were brothers of her father, who were much younger than her father, so they were practically like her cousins, almost her age, and they had children, wives, and one day Germans came and both of them were killed, shot in the street. One of them had a son who was just after Bar Mitzvah and the son was taken separately away and then the wife. We were told that we are going to have to go to ghetto, and they had this apartment already redecorated, but the whole family was taken even before ghetto was created. So we ended up in that apartment, with a million other people. But before that happened, we were hiding. My mother told me, not a long time ago. Why she did what she did. There were posters, you have to come here and here at that time---

Q: You mean that put posters up on the walls?

- A: Yeah. And make an appearance at a designated place. Well, she never did. She just didn't go. She said that there was another cousin, her mother's sister's son, who lived in Lemberg, with whom she didn't have much contact, and suddenly, quite unexpectedly. He sent her a postcard, saying, "Do not trust Germans, and don't do what they say to do."
- Q: And that postcard got through?
- A: That postcard got to her, and she decided to follow that. He himself didn't survive. We never heard what happened to him. His brother did survive. But my mother always hid. Whenever there was any sign of an action, whenever anything was starting, we were always hiding.
- Q: Where were you hiding?
- A: The first time it was in the attic, in our house. We were also lucky. There was a Ukrainian who was assigned by Germans to administer this house that was ours and who was a very decent person.
- Q: This was the house in Krakow or Tarnhof?
- A: In Tarnhof. So he stayed downstairs. He was studying German there and he stayed in our apartment. Apparently they were ordered to go up to the attic, and he said, "Oh, as far as I know, no one is there." He helped us, that we sell our ties. And then one of my mother's uncles was shot in the store, and another time we were hiding in this store. And then we went to ghetto, and even in ghetto, we were hiding.
- Q: Where were you hiding there?
- A: There was a man, an engineer, who made it. There was a cave for coal under this house, not really a basement, and he covered the door. He put bricks so it was absolutely impossible to see that there was a door ever, and left only a small passage underneath, and one could go just on the belly, crawl under.
- Q: You're a very small person, even now. Is your mother also a very small person?
- A: No, she is about maybe like you.
- A: Five-two.
- A: Maybe even somewhat taller.
- Q: And so you'd just crawl underneath whenever the Germans were coming.

A: Right. So we were crawling, and then we were pushing a crate, to cover this passage underneath. And somehow, they never found us. So we were there a few times, and sometimes it lasted several days. There were babies that were drugged that they wouldn't cry.

Q: You mean there was a group of you that were hiding?

A: There were people from the house, many. But not everyone succeeded. For example, the man who made it, could never use it, because he was caught on the way there. But he never told anyone about it.

Q: Do you remember how many of you would be hiding there all t the same time?

A: Maybe twenty.

Q: And you had food supplies in there?

A: Yeah. We took with us some, but of course it wouldn't be much.

Q: And how did you know when to come out? Did you just not hear any more noise? Did somebody go out to look?

A: Right. Eventually my father, who was in Lemberg, he bought there false document -- a real document of some Poles -- a Catholic certificate of baptism.

Q: For you and your mother, and for himself?

A: Right. And for himself. He had from a different family. But I and my mother had the same name. And he sent them to us. But before that he took me out of ghetto through someone, so I stayed with some Polish family in Krakow for about six weeks and that was just after one action. They were supposed to have me there, and they were waiting for money, and that was my more hungry time in my life, because they had several small children, they both worked, and they went to work at six o'clock in the morning or so, without leaving any food. And they were coming back in the evening, and cooked some watery soup with some potatoes in it. So I was really very, very hungry.

Q: Was this a Jewish family?

A: No, it was gentile.

Q: You mean the food was in such short supply that this was all they had to eat?

A: I assume so, right.

Q: And so you were with them for six weeks.

- A: I don't know exactly. Later on we, with those cards, when we were pretending that we were gentile, we were getting more to eat. We were never that hungry, as I was with these people, and they both worked, so I really don't know what was the situation, why it was that bad. But my father sent my cousin, who was only 18 at the time -- he was an only son of his sister -- with money, and it was a great mistake. I don't know why he did it. My cousin went out and bought some bread because he was so hungry, but he also went with this man who had the crazy idea to buy some gold, to sell to a gypsy. They were caught by Germans, and I was promptly sent back to ghetto. As it turned out, just the six weeks there was no action. When I left was action, and when I came back, right after, it started, so we went back to that cave.
- Q: The "action" -- we should define the word for some people who will be reading this transcript and listening to this tape.
- A: It was not constant killing all the time. Of course it happened that the Germans would shoot someone, and I was told not to go and play on the balcony. At the beginning there was a group of children, and we played on balcony, and there was ruin of synagogue next to the house. We played there, too. But then most of the children were gone, taken by these actions.
- Q: So in an action they would just come into the ghetto and --
- A: In an action, they would come into the ghetto and take anyone in sight, practically, and especially children, and families with children. So when we were hiding, we escaped it.
- Q: So now you were back in the ghetto then with your mother.
- A: We were in the ghetto, and it was getting worse and worse. My father sent us these papers and so we had papers, and somehow, through someone, my mother got in touch with a gang, kind of, that specialized in getting people out, for money. There was a house that was one side in the ghetto and one side out of the ghetto, on the border. The house was being used for delicing people. So we went there, pretending that we wanted to get deliced, and these people prepared the door on the other side that was open, and we went just across, through. And they were waiting.
- Q: The gang.
- A: The gang, right. It was kind of toward the evening, and we took the night train to Warsaw. We separated. Someone went with my mother in one compartment and I was with someone else in another compartment. Then we arrived in Warsaw.
- Q: Which was not the safest place to go.

A: For us it was, because no one knew us there.

Q: By now you were pretending to be Christians, because you had the false identity cards.

A: With false identity, and there was less likeness that someone knew us, and would recognize us. First we went with them to a place in the old city, that is now rebuilt. But at the time it was original and it looked original and smelled original, too. (Laughs) And we located a type of apartment, long, and the woman who owned it was kind of a madam or former madam or still a part-time madam. So there was a couple, left the bed, and we were showed that that would be our place.

Q: I can tell this was not the best part of town.

A: We stayed there for some time. We had some belongings, and we were waiting for it, and eventually it came, but not much of it.

Q: These were clothes?

A: Clothes, and especially there was a very precious thing for my mother, a comforter. The down comforter. And they were looking for some treasure there, so they cut it open, but my mother repaired and still has it. And my mother began to feel more and more uncomfortable, thinking that they are waiting to see how much they can still squeeze out of us, and after that they would denounce us.

Q: And all the money you had to live on was what your mother's cousin had brought from Lemberg?

A: That was for giving those people, for keeping me.

Q: How were you living, then?

A: My mother had some jewelry, some rings, which she sewed in her coat, and was selling from time to time. She also had some from the store of my uncle, it was kind of a drugstore, like the perfume department of the drugstore, combs, and such things. So she had a variety of objects that she deposited with some friends, and they sent some of it. Some didn't, but we made it somehow. And we also had a lot of blackmails, which was part of living in hiding.

Q: You were paying blackmail?

A: Blackmail. Some policeman, or someone, who wanted to make some money. It was not necessary always to kill us, but just take advantage of the situation.

Q: You mean he suspected you were Jews?

A: Yeah, and really took advantage of it. Would follow, and take whatever he could. So my mother, after a while, moved. We found another place, and we didn't tell this gang where we were going. We lived there for almost a year, I think. That was a wife of a prisoner-of-war, a Polish officer, and her two daughters. At that time the ghetto burned. That was the uprising of the ghetto. One daughter said, "Well, let them burn. Main Street used to be theirs." But at the same time, quite knowingly, they also kept a Jewish man, who underwent surgery, to hide his circumcision. So it was kind of a double.

Q: It was like they didn't like Jews as a group, but a few Poles would do good things like that for an individual Jew.

A: Not out of kindness, but for money they would do it. Then, there was an administrator of that house. It was a big complex, a lot of people lived there, and my mother went to him and asked if he didn't know someone, because we would like to move. There were just too many blackmails, and it began to be kind of a "hot" situation. So he said, "Yes, actually my parents are looking for someone," and he said to be quiet and just try it with them. That happened to be on the right side of a suburb of Warsaw, because we lived there, again, some time, and when the uprising started in Warsaw, we were not there. So that was really lucky, that we were out of that situation. Then we moved again, but still in the same village. And they were fighting in Warsaw, but also where we were. The Russians were already there. They were fighting between Russians and Germans.

Q: Do you remember the name of the suburb?

A: Yes, it was Kobilke. We were hiding again, this time with gentiles, because of bombs and whatever was falling around. So we went to a house and many neighbors who had wooden houses went to the house that was made of brick, thinking they would be somewhat safer. The house was owned by a woman who had a little dead girl, and there was a whole company of people, and there was a priest, it was his housekeeper. There were all kind of people, some woman that came with her mother and child from Warsaw for vacation and couldn't go back, and a German, at one point, got us out, and started to direct us towards some place. So we walked and walked and walked, and then we went to some other village, where there was a lot of people.

Q: Now, this was not Germans gathering you up, this wasn't an action. This was just, "Get out of the way, because we are fighting the Russians."

A: There was a camp next to Warsaw called Pruszkow, where the Germans put everyone, and it was quite possible that that was our destination, at that point. However, we spent the night in some other village and I remember, we stayed in some store, some empty place, and there was a lot of Polish women praying novenas, that repetitious type of prayers. And they were saying this absolutely

the whole night. But in the morning my mother got to some German officer, and spoke German, and told him we are Ukrainian, and somehow she got from him permission that our group could go back. So this priest, and the whole company, set out to return and when we returned, it was absolutely quiet, because no one was there, in the village. So we returned to that house and we went back to our cave, and someone went out after a while, and came back. "There are soldiers here. Hiding!" But someone else went to look, very quietly, and there were no Germans, they were Russians. There were two Russians on two horses, and so at that moment we all rushed out and then that was the end of the hiding.

Q: Do you remember about what date that was? What time of the year?

A: It was 1944, and I think it was fall, probably September.

Q: To back up for a minute, before you tell me what happened next, all this time that you were in hiding, you weren't getting any schooling. Or was your mother giving you lessons?

A: No, I wasn't getting any schooling. I had some before we went to ghetto. I had a good friend, actually it was a cousin of my cousin, so he was a little bit related, and we played together, and one day, we were six, and we got married. He was my first husband, (Laughter). So we had a together a woman who was teaching us for a while. She taught us even a little bit of Hebrew, and a little German, and even some religion, and she was quite demanding and very stern.

Q: Did you know what became of your father, where he was? When you were liberated?

A: Yes. I knew before that. What really killed him was his inability to write down his formulas, in a way. Because when he was in Lemberg, he was still selling his formulas, and at a certain point he sold one of his formulas to a Russian, a paint for trains. And this paint wasn't drying! (Laughter). So they were after him, and he was afraid. So instead of being taken to Russia with a lot of other people who did survive, and probably he would, too, he was hiding.

Q: Yes, a lot of people did survive that way.

A: In fact, that's something we should talk about, too. I often wonder, because even if it was not a Russian design to do it, the fact is, that they did save a good number of people, and as long as we say a lot of bad things about it, maybe for fairness, we should also admit to the fact that they got them inside Russia and they didn't leave them in the Ukraine to be killed by Germans. Most of the people who were taken to Russia, that I knew, came back.

Q: So what became of your father? The paint wasn't drying---

- A: My father was afraid, so he did not go. He was hiding, in order not to be taken to Russia. So when the Russians withdrew from Lemberg he was there, ready and waiting for the Germans. At that point he bought those papers for us and eventually he also came to Warsaw. He lived separately, but he was visiting us. And one day, it was kind of during the time we were moving to the countryside, there was sabotage on the train station, that was carrying merchandise, soldiers, whatever, that was done by the underground, the resistance. But my father unfortunately lived close to the train station and the Germans took all men from surrounding and once he was in their hands, they probably found out that he was Jewish.
- Q: So you never heard. So, the war ended, at least in Warsaw. The Russians are now occupying and you came out.
- A: We came out, and at that point I went to school. We lived with Russians, and they were waiting for the Germans to finish Warsaw. They decided to stay and not move any further, and they left the Germans to do the dirty work. There were two organizations, AK, the Armia Krajowa, and Armia Rudova. AK was not sympathetic to the Communists, and in fact they probably “made” the uprising, to prove that they liberated Warsaw, and not the Russians. It was about six months, and I have really a very happy memory of that time, because life started to be quite pleasant, relatively speaking. We didn’t have to hide any more. We were not afraid to be killed. The Russians settled in this house where we were, and there was a kitchen, and they shared food with us, and they were showing movies, and we had a good relationship. There was a Russian woman soldier who was put in the same room where we were, with the owner of the house and me and my mother, together in a very small room, in which they were showing movies, and where, sometimes, a Russian soldier who was being sent back home, he saw party in our room, too, a good-bye party.
- Q: A little girl with all these grown-ups.
- A: For them it wasn’t so entertaining, but for me it was. And I learned Russian at the time, mostly from this woman. I had a very good memory of her, she was such a nice person. She was an architect.
- Q: Had you shown artistic talent then? Were you the kind of little girl who drew pictures?
- A: I have some, a copybook of that time. (Brings out drawings)
- Q: You were telling me about a teacher you had right after the war.
- A: She had sixty children in her classroom. And no books. Nothing. And she was able to keep, not only discipline, but also to teach us, and to correct, and she was choosing rather good quality literature, and she spent a lot of time simply

dictating, and she really taught us how to write, and also a certain sensitivity toward literature.

Q: Did you have to write some stories of your own, too?

A: No, only some sentences, for grammatical examples.

Q: And here's your copybook with the arithmetic problems.

A: She taught us everything, so I just had the one copybook, and put everything there.

Q: Let's see. There you were learning subtraction. Five equals nine minus four. Here's algebra.

A: Which I haven't used much lately. Here's another one. That was somewhat later, after we left, and we went back to Krakow.

Q: When did you leave Warsaw, to go back to Krakow?

A: When Warsaw was taken, and Russia took Poland. First we went to Tarnhof, before we went to Krakow.

Q: Was any of your mother's family left there?

A: No. Nobody was there. There were some acquaintances, but otherwise, no. But we already knew that all those people were gone.

Q: How did you know?

A: Well, they were killed. They were shot.

Q: Oh, you mean these were the ones who were shot before you left?

A: Right. And I think we kind of thought even that it was worse than it was, probably, that everyone was killed. So when people were coming back after the war, every one was a surprise, that they were coming from concentration camp, or whatever. I don't remember that anyone would say something, but we did see Warsaw burning and people being killed, so we didn't have any doubt.

Q: How did your non-Jewish neighbors treat you when you went back to Krakow?

A: When we went back to Tarnhof, the director and principal of the school, who was my mother's favorite teacher, with whom she had great relationship, when she was taught by her when she was little, in spite of that, this principal suggested that we don't say that I am Jewish. So I had quite a difficult time. I was there only a

few months, and then we went to Krakow. I remember that there was a kind of place where we ate dinner, it was a kind of custom during the war that certain people make their living by making home cooked meals, like a restaurant, but at home. You could eat, and you'd pay something for it. It was definitely a Jewish place, and one girl from school saw me being there, so she put two and two together and started to persecute me later. I remember still a priest who had religion lessons there, making fun of Yom Kippur, and how wonderful that Christians just go to confession while Jews put everything in gold, and he made quite a circus out of that. Strangely enough, my only friend there in that school was a girl who was a daughter of Stamdeutsch people, a very mild and rather nice girl. (Laughter). At that point she was not in a good spot either

Q: Because the Germans were not popular at this point, either.

A: Right. But that was a short time. Then I went to Krakow and the same thing happened. When I went to school this time I was under my own name but the principal also said, "Don't say you are Jewish." So I was still hiding.

Q: And they did have religion lessons in school?

A: They had them many years after the war. In fact, at the end of my study -- I finished high school, it was maybe '51, something like that -- in public school, they had religion lessons.

Q: Catholic religion.

A: Yes.

Q: Your mother couldn't have been supporting the two of you all that time, selling what was left of the jewelry. How were you managing?

A: My mother came from rather wealthy family. So there were some houses left, and she was selling them. There was some relatives here in the States, and I think she sold some land for about five hundred dollars, and these relatives were buying some shampoos, Helene Curtis, and sending them. So this five hundred dollars supported us for a long time. Those kind of things. But we were living quite modestly.

Q: So then you graduated high school in 1951. Then what happened? Were you talking about coming to the United States?

A: Well, then I went and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, and people were leaving, practically everyone was leaving for Israel, and somehow my mother was very ambiguous about it. On one hand she was saying that we would leave, and on the other hand she was not.

- Q: What finally made you decide to come to the United States?
- A: I didn't. I went to France, first.
- Q: By yourself or with your mother?
- A: By myself.
- Q: To study art?
- A: Well, I finished study, so that was supposed to be kind of an artistic trip, because I was in art. So after a long time I got a passport, quite a long time, but I finally got it. It was a tourist passport..
- Q: This was when?
- A: 1959. It was just the time I was finished with my study.
- Q: So you left your mother behind?
- A: Yes.
- Q: So you went to Paris. You went to France in 1959, and you stayed. How did you get a permit to stay?
- A: That is not needed for that.
- Q: We'd like to know when you came to the United States, how you and your mother were reunited. And did you have a job?
- A: No, I got married, to an American. When I come here, that's how.
- Q: In France?
- A: Yes. That was Smith.
- Q: Was he an artist, a student living there? (Shakes head no) But you met him there and then you came to the United States with him?
- A: Well, not right away. We lived there about eight years.
- Q: So then you came to the United States in '67. And when did your mother rejoin you?
- A: She left Poland two years after me, and she went to Germany. When I came here, she followed me.

- Q: You helped her get her visa. What got you to St. Paul? Was this where Smith was from?
- A: No, he got a job here for a while.
- Q: Was he Jewish?
- A: No.
- Q: Have you gone back to Judaism?
- A: Yes, I never left it, actually.
- Q: And so you've identified with the Jewish community here in St. Paul. You belong to the synagogue, organizations. Did you do that in France?
- A: Yes, I did. Not so much. My mother didn't give me that much. She had strong identity, and at the same time a good deal of self hate.
- Q: You said that you did not come from an observant house. So then when you came here you didn't really have to have any contact with the Jewish Family Service, agencies like that who help newcomers to this country.
- A: Well, that was a very unhappy experience I had. I tried. At that time there was one woman there, when I came, and I needed just a little bit of help at the time. I separated from my husband, I haven't been living so long here. I had a baby. I didn't know language that well.
- Q: You were beginning to learn English.
- A: Well, I knew English, but I was not proficient in it. What did I ask her for? Was to help me find work, and look for an apartment. And I didn't get even that. She had absolutely no one else there, nothing particular to do.
- Q: I think a lot of times the people who do succeed with the system are the people who keep on going back until they find somebody who will help. But it's hard to know that.
- A: At that time it seems to be just her. It was very small, it wasn't like today, that you have other people to choose from. At that time there seemed to be just that one woman. And maybe there was one director who was coming and going. She was really interested in making interview and getting my life history, but finally they just said they wouldn't help. I had car. I didn't know how to drive it, I needed to drive it to get some employment.

Q: So how did you work it out? Did you find a job? And somebody to take care of your son?

A: Yes, actually, but not through Jewish community.

Q: What kind of work have you done since you came here?

A: I was teaching handicapped. I was teaching art.

Q: Did you have any training for teaching the handicapped?

A: Actually not, but it was combination, to teach art to handicapped, and I had to devise ways.

Q: Was this in the school system?

A: No, it wasn't. Handicrafters, or something like that.

Q: Oh, an agency, an organization. And you taught in workrooms or classrooms?

A: No, I was driving to people. At that time I already learned.

Q: Now we get to these closing questions. Can you tell me what it has meant to you, to be a survivor?

A: I think that, initially, I thought not much. I was taking things for granted. I was taking things as they came.

Q: Either the past or the meaning of what had happened?

A: Meaning of what had happened.

Q: Did you feel alone? You didn't have aunts and uncles and cousins.

A: Very much. I felt terribly alone. But it was also part of it, my mother made it even worse. (Turn off machine while she describes problems with mother.)

Q: So, if you can, after your experience during the Holocaust, can you describe how you feel about human nature, about non-Jews and Germans? Why this happened, how people could do this?

A: Right now I think that everyone would be capable of doing that. I do not think that the Germans were particularly worse than other people, even if they did it, because I suspect that if it happened in some other nation it could happen the same way. It happened in Cambodia, for example. And there are some nations, of course, like Denmark, or even Italy, that didn't do it. But even the United

States sent those boats back, and they interned Japanese, so I think that potential is there. I also think that too much obedience is not healthy for anyone, generally. For myself, it affected me, that I am still hiding, in a way. I started to see that only not that long ago, when I was looking into myself and my behavior, that in many ways I could not go forward, that I was hiding a lot of what I was, and that I could not be open. It took me a long time to learn to be open. To talk.

Q: About who you are, and what happened to you.

A: Right. Even sometimes professionally, like going out and having exhibition of painting, or going out and trying to accomplish something. I am kind of still living in hiding, especially that I lived also during fifteen years or so after the war in Poland under Communism, so there was still another part of me that needed to be hidden. And with so much hiding and hiding, it's very hard to go forward and to be like an American six-year-old child, who just is, nothing to hold back.

Q: Do you have any vivid memories of what it was like to be in Poland under Communism? Anything that really stands out in your mind? You had said that the Russians were very good to the Jews when they chased the Germans out of Krakow, but then when you were living under a Communist government, that was different. Did you feel anti-Semitism?

A: Oh, yes. Definitely.

Q: By now you were being identified as a Jew. How did that affect you?

A: Strangely enough, I had friends, some. So it was not like I was ostracized in school. It happened when I applied and got accepted for stage design. I was one of five who were accepted, and I had a friend before that who also applied, and she was not accepted. At that moment she stopped being my friend, and started to campaign that I was accepted because I was Jewish, and because I had some special favors. So this kind of things. So I was ostracized at that point by the other four people that were accepted, and had really hard time there.

Q: But you did finish your course in stage design?

A: I didn't, because, well -- that will be all.

Q: It was hard to be ostracized. I notice you're reading Shoah, the script of the film. Have you read other books, and seen other films about the Holocaust? Do you feel that they accurately depict it?

A: No. I don't know how I would do it. The impression that I get when I see a movie like Towering Inferno, for example, it was set in soap opera sensationalism. I'm afraid the Holocaust is being treated the same way. And then people say you don't understand, like Elie Wiesel. And when they say you don't

understand, they probably mean inside, being there, because you cannot understand it when you see it. It's a soap opera. When my son went to religious school, he was taught about Holocaust, and he got a lot of statistics and he got a lot of ghoulish stories and it turned him completely off. I can understand that, too. It would turn me off, too, because after a while I got desensitized, rather than sensitized to it. After you see so many pictures, even the most horrid pictures, somehow those people become like historical objects, like mummies, and there's something emotional lost there. I can't put my finger on what exactly it should have been like, but it's kind of this relationship, painting this two-colored picture, or this painting, this soap operish picture, and there's truth between the two. I got a total dislike for martyrdom, first in Christianity, hearing about Christian martyrs, while I was being Christian, and then I hear about even now, Central American martyrs, and this martyrs, and I feel very cynical toward it. I can't get too much sympathy. On the other hand, I'm writing letters for Amnesty International, and I have worked with refugees for years.

Q: What kind of refugees?

A: Jewish Russian refugees, and Hmong refugees, and Cambodian refugees, and Ethiopian refugees. I should be a little more active again, for Ethiopian Jews who are still in Ethiopia.

Q: Yes, they didn't all get out.

A: Just last September I went to visit my son, and I was also in Washington for a conference about Ethiopian Jews, so I don't withdraw from being active. But I wouldn't like to do it through crying "martyrdom." There's something wrong with it. It also puts you or that particular person in the position of victim, and there's something wrong, definitely wrong, for me with that.

Q: You can't really know what it was like to be a victim and that may be part of it. Do you feel that way about Shoah, too?

A: No. Precisely because Shoah doesn't do it that way. It's the only one that doesn't.

Q: Shoah was criticized by some people because it's so repetitious. You see so much footage of the train on the tracks. Do you think that maybe that's what it's strength is? That it's so ordinary, it isn't martyrs?

A: Exactly. People come out as people, not as "roles." Even Germans come out as people. And that is what is so wonderful about it.

Q: Is there a possibility, though, that you're being a little more critical, because you understand the techniques of staging, of drama? You're suspicious or cynical when the camera pans in for a close-up, and all these dramatic devices that were

used. Do you suppose maybe the reason you're so unhappy with some of these films is, that you are such a knowledgeable observer as far as the techniques go? Have you ever thought about that?

- A: I don't know. I think that maybe it's reaching in the wrong emotions. If you put messages in such a direction, you can also put response in that direction. If the message is wrong, the response is wrong. So I don't think it is because of media, but because of message, that I'm thinking this.
- Q: Thank you very much for sharing.