

Interview with Dora Zaidenweber
By Jane Katz
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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

- Q: This is an interview with Dora Zaidenweber. The interviewer is Jane Katz. August 15, 1984 for the JCRC-ADL Oral History Project. (Katz then asks a series of factual questions, using the questionnaire provided by the JCRC/ADL. Zaidenweber's answers are as follows:)
- A: My name is Dora Zaidenweber. My Jewish name is D'vora. I was born on January 24, 1924, in Radom, Poland. My parents' names were Hannah Eiger and Isaiah Eiger. I had one living grandmother. Her name was Chaia Frydman. I also had one living great-grandmother. Her name was Chavah Eiger. They were born in small towns in the general area of Radom. My father was an accountant, and my mother was a homemaker. At home the parents spoke Yiddish, largely, with each other. My brother and I spoke Polish, mostly. Our family was basically secular, but it had a religious orientation. Primarily they would be classified as Zionists. My father was very prominent in the Jewish community, and was an active Zionist in the Polish Zionist parties -- the Centrist Party. He was on the executive committee of the Zionist Labor Party, but it was really the Centrist part of the Zionist movement. My formal Jewish education was quite extensive. I went to a Jewish day school, which was a grade school and high school, and so my Hebrew background and Judaic history and Bible, and so on. The population of Radom was close to 100,000. It was an industrial town. The Jewish community was probably about 25% of the population. And it was, relatively speaking, a middle class Jewish community. There were poor Jews, of course, but a large number were in the middle class. Radom is located about 60 miles south of Warsaw in an area that was deliberately built up by the Poles as an industrial center, where there was actually quite a bit of war-type industry. There was a very large weapons factory in Radom, and there were some other munitions factories in other towns in the area. It was called the Iron Triangle. Not that Poland ever amounted to any kind of a military power, but whatever military

production there was, happened to be in that area. And as I'll explain a little later, this may have been the reason why quite a substantial number of Jews from Radom survived, because the manpower was used to work in those factories.

Q: It occurs to me that in order to support a Jewish elementary and high school, there must have been quite a bit of affluence in the city.

A: Yeah, because that was private, of course, and everybody had to pay tuition. So it was a very vital, very vibrant, a viable Jewish community. A very active Jewish community.

Q: Now your father had a college education?

A: Yes.

Q: And your mother?

A: No, my mother did not.

Q: As you said, your mother was a homemaker.

A: She was a homemaker, very busy visiting with relatives and friends. We had, actually, a very nice middle-class type of life. We lived, as most people did, in apartments, but we had a very large, very beautiful apartment, very nicely furnished. And my mother was a very elegant lady. She was very concerned with clothes and trends and she was always very nicely dressed, and she was very concerned about how I looked. Of course I had to wear a uniform. All school children wore uniforms, regardless of whether they attended public schools or private schools. We all had to wear uniforms, which was in some ways probably good.

Q: Was your mother concerned about your education, or was that entirely your father's province?

A: Oh, no. She was very concerned about my education until we got to the college level. She didn't happen to believe that a woman needed a college education...but she didn't stop me. So the educational concern was for all of us. I think it was the typical Jewish concern. My mother grew up in a time when very few women went to high school. In fact, a high school education, even in my days, in the '30s, was a really privileged thing. Not that they couldn't afford it, but it just simply wasn't done in those years. Women did not go to college, yet, in my mother's generation. They did go to high school, but not to college. It was not the common thing to do. It was just my generation that started breaking out, and going to college.

Q: And that is true to a large extent all over the world.

- A: That's right. And the mothers had a hard time coping with their daughters going off to school, because of course there were no colleges in these small cities. The nearest city where there was a university for us was Warsaw, and that was the "big city," the biggest city they had ever seen, you know. So it was, for those mothers, a real trauma to see their daughters go to a place like Warsaw, or Cracow, or Vilna -- even further away -- to go to a university. So it was...
- Q: Right. Come home with new ideas.
- A: New ideas, and then they were really afraid for their virtue! (Laughs) but of course, I didn't go to college in Poland. I was too young. I didn't go to college until after the war ended, and that was in Germany -- and after I was married already. So my mother didn't really have much say in it. But when I told her that I intended to, she didn't think it was necessary. She wanted...
- Q: Your role was to preserve the home and the traditions.
- A: That's right, but then I told her, she sent me to high school and had given me all these fancy ideas, now she had to put up with me wanting to go to college.
- Q: What about religious observances in your home?
- A: Well we did observe. My mother was much more observant than my father was. He was the secular one. She came out of a very religious home. Her father was very religious. It was a very interesting family situation, because my mother's mother died when my mother was very young. She was maybe 10. My grandfather, my mother's father, had an estate. They lived on a farm near a small town. So then after his wife died, and he was left with -- my mother was the second oldest, so he was left with four young children, three boys and this girl, he remarried. And he married this woman from Radom. She was a widow and had five children. Well her oldest son became my father. So then the two step-children married. You see my mother married her step-father. So it was a merging of families that was quite interesting, because then I found myself with just one set of grandparents, the other being dead. So she came from a very religious, very observant home. My grandfather was very religious, and I think he thought my father was really far out, but my father, before his father died -- just after the end of World War I -- my father was planning to go to Palestine. He was a very ardent Zionist. He had quit the Yeshiva -- he came from a religious home, too -- and he threw himself into the Zionist movement, and was planning on going to Palestine. But then his father died and he was the oldest son, so obviously he couldn't. So he continued his education. That's when he became an accountant. Went to Germany and attended a German school of higher education. There, at that time, and even today, like we have here colleges within a university, there they're special institutes -- separate. So he went to a school of business. Which was a college level school. But it was not part of a university. Then he got

married, and of course started raising a family, and ended up not going to Palestine. He went as a tourist later on.

Q: He did finally go.

A: Yeah, finally, in the '30s he went. I think it was 1935 or '36. So they were both very dedicated to Judaism in different ways -- my mother and my father -- and they didn't interfere with one another. My mother kept kosher, of course, and we observed all the holidays. I didn't go to school on Saturdays, because I went to a Jewish school but schools ran for six days, so you either had to go to school on Saturday, if you were in a non-Jewish public school, or you had to go on Sunday, which we did. My brother attended a private school, but not a Jewish one. And he went to school on Saturday, so there were certain compromises that we had to make. And riding on Shabbat was never any problem, because everything was walking distance, anyway. So, yes, we were a traditional home. Ours was a traditional home, certainly.

Q: With a strong sense of spirituality?

A: Very strong sense of Jewish identification.

Q: And ideals and a belief in a Supreme Being?

A: Yes, very much so. And Jewish precepts such as education, observance, a commitment to, and loyalty to, the family. I was 15 years old when the war broke out, so I was in high school. And I was very much aware of what was going on in the world already. Our high schools were somewhat different than the general high school here. I think the level was much higher. We were probably, in educational terms, maybe two years ahead of the high school student here in knowledge. It was much more concentrated, and the education was much less specialized, much more humanistic, particularly the gymnasium. The high school that I went to was a humanistic gymnasium. And we studied languages, and we studied history and geography and biology and all the sciences as well -- math and science. But I think that our awareness of literature and history and world events was absolutely superior to what I found here. I found this to be very disappointing when I came. At the age of 15 I could already speak German, which was a foreign language. I had studied Latin for four years and I studied English! And in addition, by the time the war broke out, I had probably read all of the Nobel laureates --up to that time.

Q: In what language/

A: In Polish. In translations, yes.

Q: But at the same time, you were in a Jewish high school, so that you were getting an intense...

A: No, no, no.

Q: ...education in Jewish literature.

A: Yes, but that school, which was accredited by the State, had to provide all the general education that was required of all other high schools, and the Hebrew language and Jewish subjects were all in addition, so our school day was longer. Our school week was 7 or 8 hours longer than the others. And in those 7 or 8 hours a week we had our Hebrew so...

Q: So there was early training in self discipline.

A: That's right! We had an awful lot of homework! But we had no television to distract us. We all belonged, most of us, to Jewish youth groups and very often on Friday evenings were what we called an Oneg Shabbat. You know, that you find here, too. And there were some meetings during the weeks, too. But otherwise there weren't as many distractions. And gym and sports were included in the school curriculum; boys, I suppose, played soccer a lot after school, but the girls didn't have that many sports events. I did go skating in the winter, played some tennis in the summer. I was a gymnast -- or track -- mostly in track. And I was good at it.

Q: Okay, so you had broad education, wide interests and very clear community expectations.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: You knew exactly what your role was, what was expected of you and what you needed to contribute.

A: Yes, very much so. It was expected not only that I would excel at school -- which was very much expected in our family -- but also that I would make my contribution, eventually, that my training would get me to a commitment to the Jewish community, and that's where my direction would be. And I think that that early training, even in spite of all that happened later, remained. The commitment to Jewish education, to the Jewish people. Because of my father's position in the Zionist party, we had some very important people pass through our lives. When they came through Radom, they would stay with us, and we sat in a corner of the room and listened to the conversation, and a lot of it rubbed off. I can't remember, exactly, the names at the moment, but I know that the people, later, became leaders in many aspects in Israel.

Q: That was an important part of your education.

- A: Very. Zionism was very important. My membership in a Zionist youth organization was probably the focal point of my extra-curricular activities. And I certainly, at the age of 15, entertained the idea of going to Palestine.
- Q: Now, tell me about the onset of threatening activities, threatening events in Europe which you were becoming aware of. How were you obtaining information. Were you reading about these events?
- A: Well, the first thing, radio. Radio and the media. But the first really upsetting event that I remember happened in 1936. My mother, and my brother and I always went away in the summer. At least until that year. After that, we went to camp -- my brother and I. But before that, we went to various places. When we were young children, there was a little resort outside of Radom where everybody went in the summer, for the whole summer, and then the fathers came for the weekend. But in 1936 we went to a resort sort of northwest of where we were in Poland, closer to the German border. And in fact it was an area that was very much culturally Germanic, because up until the end of World War I, that area was part of Germany. This was a political, historical situation that you may not have been aware of. My uncle -- my father's brother -- married a woman who lived in that area. And it was some distance from that resort where we were staying, but my father came for a weekend visit, and then we all took the train and went to visit my aunt and uncle. As I said, this was an area that was very Germanic, and there were a certain percentage of German population which later turned out to be quite loyal to the Germans, and it was the first time when I saw placards on the walls with real hate messages about the Jews. We already knew what was going on in Germany, that the German Jews were being persecuted. But of course, Jews have always been used to persecution, so you think, "This will blow over, too." But when I saw these placards on the walls, and beside the scribblings on the walls, hate messages about the Jews, that was the first time I really saw that it was practically in our backyard.
- Q: What was the content of the messages? "Death to the Jews?"
- A: Well, "Death to the Jews!", "Juden Raus!", meaning "Jews leave!" That sort of thing. And I remember saying to my uncle, "How can you live here? How can you? Aren't you afraid?" And he said, "Oh, well, you know, the anti-Semites are everywhere." So this wasn't anything that anybody was particularly upset any more than about anything else. Now to be sure, we encountered anti-Semitism in one form or another in just daily contact. Even the non-Jewish children who lived in the same courtyard that we did...the buildings in Europe, they're sort of like U-shaped, and there's a courtyard in the back, and that's where we all played.
- Q: You were not really in a Jewish community, were you? You lived among gentiles, as I recall.

A: Oh, sure. Even if 25% of the population was Jewish, we were not all confined to a ghetto. We happened to live in an area where it was completely mixed.

Q: And I assume that your father's work as an accountant brought him into contact with gentiles.

A: Yeah, some. But he really worked mostly with Jews. His clients were mostly Jews, but being an accountant, he dealt with the tax authorities, who were not Jewish. So I think, in my case, since I went to a Jewish school, mainly my contact with non-Jews was just the kids in the neighborhood. My brother went to a non-Jewish school, and so he was only one of three in his class, and I'm sure he told you about some of the incidents that happened to him, which illustrate that there were tensions, that there were problems. But it wasn't anything that we really let bother us. You have to go on living. A girl might say to me, "You damn Christ killer!" And ten minutes later she'll come back and say, "You want to play?" This was a reality of life, but I think what it did to me, is made me want to get away, to leave, and I really considered, that when I could, when I didn't have to ask my parents any longer, that I would leave, and go to Palestine. Because as I said, my father really always wanted to go to Palestine, too. And I think, even when he came back, in 1935, that he wanted to go, but my mother, she had her siblings, and her father was still living then. And she felt that we should have an opportunity to finish school first, so she wanted to wait. I mean, nobody could have foreseen...if they could have been clairvoyant, and could have foreseen what was coming, I'm sure they would have all left! But you couldn't foresee that, so that's how it was.

Q: So it was 1936, your first awareness of hatred,

A: That was my first encounter after knowing, intellectually, what was going on in Germany from radio and newspapers. It was my first eye contact with the German version of anti-Semitism. We were used to the Polish version of anti-Semitism. When I was young, things were fairly quiet. But then in 1936, Marshal Pilsudski died. He was a benevolent dictator of Poland, the father of modern Poland, the freedom fighter who by the end of World War I, regained independence for Poland. After he died, the anti-Semitic forces really came to the fore, and there was actually official anti-Semitism in the Polish government. There were incidents that were very disturbing, and they probably took their clues from Germany -- if you can get away with it, you know -- and they hated the Jews. So therefore, there were some incidents in Poland, too. But you don't live your life terrified all the time. It wasn't any worse than going out here at night, or maybe not even as bad.

Q: Do you recall specific laws? Can you pin-point the year of those laws which...

A: I can't remember exactly.

Q: ...put restraints on you.

A: It was a gradual...the restraints? They never happened until after the war broke out. But the first incident, that hit me in the face, were seeing those German signs -- in Poland. You see, this was Polish territory. And so you could see that the hatred penetrated from Germany to Poland already, and this was not official yet. This was probably the work of just people who were anti-Semites putting up these placards. But the point is that the police did not object to it. The government did not object to it. And from then on, in the late '30s, there was an upsurge of this open anti-Semitism in Poland. For instance, if a Jew insulted a Pole, he could be taken to court and really be severely punished for it, whereas a Pole could insult a Jew and say anything! There were certain phrases that they used, and that were considered more than a misdemeanor if a Jew uttered them. And there were beatings. My grandfather was beaten up one evening when he was returning home. So in the late '30s, there were bands of students -- primarily they were students -- and young thugs, but you don't think of them as criminals. They were ideologically opposed to the Jews. And they wore little sabers, a little reproduction of a saber in their lapels, and you knew they belonged to this organization which was violently anti-Semitic. That carried through during the war. In fact, that same faction, which later fought the Germans in the woods as guerillas, they, at the same time, waged the war against the Jews, too. Jewish young men or women found their way into the forests, into the guerilla groups, and encountered that ultra-nationalist group, and they were invariably killed.

Q: So they had their training in killing against the Jews first.

A: Yes, yes. That's right.

Q: Do you recall any talk in those early years of resistance to those thugs who were taking over the streets?

A: Well there were some actual cases, of course. There were some Jewish men who fought back. There was a pogrom in the small town that my mother originally came from, and a number of young Jews then retaliated.

Q: And the pogrom was in this period of the late '30s.

A: Yeah, it was in about '37 or '38. I don't remember the exact year, but it was in the late '30s. I had read about pogroms, but I had never really been close to one. Those were things that happened way in Russia, but there actually happened one on market day. The Polish thugs ran out, started turning over the stands of the Jewish merchants, and beating them up. And then the Jewish boys came out and started to retaliate, so it was a hassle. Some of them were arrested. Nobody ever found the Poles, needless to say. The police never found the Poles, but they did try to find the Jews. They really hunted them, and one of the guys -- one of the Jewish kids -- they were older teenagers and in their early 20's -- was a cousin of

mine. And what I remember is that he fled, and came and hid in our house for a few days, and then he skipped the country.

Q: Where did he go?

A: I think he's now in Canada. This was a cousin.

Q: You've lost track of him for a long time.

A: Oh, yeah, I lost track of him, and I don't remember his name. But he was the son of a cousin of my mother's.

Q: So the message was conveyed during that period that there was a price for fighting back.

A: Yes. Definitely.

Q: For resisting anti-Semitism.

A: At least there was still a possibility to fight back. Okay, you could skip town or skip the country. It wasn't the same as happened later. We were not yet trapped. We were trapped in a sense, trapped by the fact that immigration was very difficult at any given time. You couldn't pick up and go to Palestine. There was a price to pay for emigrating -- if at all possible. America was closed at that time, too. You couldn't go to the United States, and besides, who can just easily pick up and go. A young man can. If his freedom is threatened, he can skip out and run. But a family cannot pick up and go -- even if they have the means. So, at that time, not envisioning that anything more drastic would happen. I think that people sort of philosophically thought, "We've gone through this before. We'll weather it again." But this is before the war broke out. Times were still fairly normal. If you look in retrospect, of course you can see some danger signals already. At the time, looking forward, it certainly wasn't possible to predict.

Q: Hitler was getting more and more organized, but then again, this was another country.

A: Yes, and not only another country! Let me tell you what happened. I think it was in March of 1939. How blind everybody was! This is after Munich, already after 1938. This was at the time when the Germans annexed the Sudetenland, and then marched into Czechoslovakia. There was a town, and I can't remember the name of it without looking at the map. I think the name of the town was Cieszyn -- the town was half in Czechoslovakia and half in Poland, on the southern border. And when the Germans marched into that part of Czechoslovakia, they handed that half of the town back to the Poles. And I remember the dancing in the streets and the rejoicing, because this town was now reunited and was in Poland. This is how blind and how unprepared everybody was. But it's not any different than all the

other allies. Nobody was prepared for what was happening, or what ultimately happened. It's not unusual for a civilian population not to recognize the danger points, not to be prepared. I think it would be too much to expect.

Q: Well, a great many of the political machinations are secret.

A: Yeah. And besides, which, at no time can we really be sure that we know everything that's going on. Of course there were the German Jews who were expelled in 1938 after the Kristallnacht, after the Night of the Broken Glass. Some of them came to Radom. We housed a family in our home for several months -- a woman and four children -- until the Jewish community could set them up on their own. Every community in Poland took in some of those German Jews. That was part of the Jewish way of doing things. But that was Germany! Hitler was in Germany! We were in a different country! And we knew that there were Geneva Conventions, and there were international laws that forbade any kind of access to other populations! So we felt sorry for them, but of course, this wasn't going to happen to us.

Q: The world was a rational place.

A: At that time, it seemed to be going in a rational direction. It seemed like countries were setting up certain rules of conduct. And it seemed like we lived in a civilized world. And that we're becoming more civilized than less. From what I studied in history, it seemed to me we were becoming more civilized. And at that point, there was no reason to believe yet, that we were actually falling back - so far back that we couldn't even comprehend it! But it was too early to know. And in fact, we lulled ourselves into this, much, much too long. In 1942, at the height of the deportations, we still didn't believe it, because it wasn't possible to believe, that human beings really are basically, at their core, barbarians. When you're not, you cannot believe that others are. So you can see that it was really not possible for us to foresee what was coming. Not at that time. When the war broke out, I was 15, and it was September 1st, so school never started. The weather was very nice.

Q: Now we're talking about 1939.

A: 1939 and just prior to the outbreak of the war, about two weeks before I went through a very traumatic experience. I was in a summer camp with my Zionist Youth group, in the mountains in southern Poland. It was a very stormy summer. There were a lot of electrical storms, and they're very dangerous in the mountains. We went on a hike in the mountains, and one group -- there were three groups -- one group encountered a severe storm, and as they were approaching the peak of one of the lower mountains, lightning struck the rocks on top, and the rocks started rolling down. And the two leaders and another person -- I think in the end, six people were killed -- but both leaders were killed and another 12 were severely injured, either by falling rocks or by lightning. And so

we came back. It was just a terrible, terrible thing. And it happened exactly on the 14th of August, in fact, of 1939. So it's some kind of anniversary today -- or yesterday. Forty-five years. But it really affected our community a lot. There were 400 kids in that camp from all over Poland, so it was really a very traumatic experience. And then we came back and were still in total shock from what had happened, and then the mobilization started, and a lot of boys who were in that camp, and were our friends, were 18, and some volunteered to go into the service, so obviously there was something going on that we did not quite know, and it was just a lot of rumors. By the time we realized what was going on, in fact, and by the time anybody really had time to be inducted or mobilized, the Germans were there.

Q: So no members of your family went into the service?

A: David, my brother turned 17 in November, 1939, so he was just under 17 -- they wouldn't take him, because he was too young. He tried to volunteer. Nobody from my family, because all my uncles were older, but a lot of people I knew did get mobilized. I remember we didn't really have anything to do, and what we heard on Polish radio was not necessarily...we could hear German radio, too, by the way. We could receive German stations. But we couldn't really make much sense of it, because there were many conflicting reports. But the early morning of the 1st, it was announced on the radio that the German troops had crossed the border. I don't remember exactly how far Radom is from the old German border. Maybe 200 miles. Of course the Poles claimed -- there was fierce fighting going on -- that they were repelling the Germans. In the meantime, we saw the German planes flying over. I don't know, really, whether I can convey it truthfully to you; there is a certain excitement in war for young people. I really can't explain why there is. I think our culture has played up and romanticized war -- at least up until that point. Maybe today, after Vietnam, we look on war differently. But, there was a certain romantic notion about young men going off in uniform, and leaving girls, their sweethearts, behind and crying. There was a romantic element to it.

Q: Don't you think that that was almost universal? Historically.

A: Yes. I don't think it was unique to us. I remember, in the '30s, seeing a lot of movies of World War I. I didn't realize, until I studied history, how miserable World War I was! When you looked at the movies, it was always something very romantic. There was always somebody being hidden, a wounded soldier being taken in by a family, landed gentry, you know, and then the Russians coming in and searching the house and not finding him, because she put him under the bed. And that sort of romantic notion was very universal. Because until you're hit with the misery of war, there is something gallant about it.

Q: Well also, don't you think that was the way countries preserved themselves throughout history? By teaching their young men that it was noble to fight for the motherland?

A: Maybe, yeah, it could be. But I remember the excitement in the very first days. The war only lasted, for us, one week. Friday the 1st the Germans crossed the border, and Friday the 8th, they went through Radom, and we were occupied by the German soldiers.

Q: You saw the tanks?

A: Oh yes, absolutely. I fact it was a very, very long week. It was very eventful. At some point, when the bombs started falling, and they did fall on Radom, my father wanted my mother and me to leave. At that time, 1939, he was 42, he was a young man. He was still going in and fight the Germans, and so was David. So my mother and I were to leave town -- which we did. We went by horse and buggy to my mother's home town -- this little town of Przytyk, where the pogrom had been. And it's a well known town. Because of that pogrom, it became notorious, of course. So we went there and stayed. I think that was on Tuesday. Now we're talking about that one week between September 1st and September 8th. This was, however, a little west of Radom, so we were closer to the Germans ,unfortunately than we had been in Radom. Well there was no communication, no way to communicate with father and my brother and so my mother was really torn. Here she was with me, and there, the other half of the family. So she decided that we would go back. On Thursday evening, finally, she found a horse and buggy that would take us back. And it was absolutely an unreal scene. It was really in the middle of the night, because we arrived back in Radom just at daybreak, and this having been September, I would imagine daybreak must have been at about 5:30 or 6. Well, it was like going through a landscape of unreality, like I would think of Dante's Inferno. Everything burning around you! As far as you could see-not where you were, but around in the distance -- everything...well, we finally got to Radom. And then, not only was there fire burning, but the Polish soldiers were fleeing in great disarray, and so it looked like things were going pretty badly. Where that driver let us off, wasn't anywhere near our house. It was daybreak -- very brilliant sun - the sun was just rising....this image is so with me, because it was probably one of the most frightening experiences that night, being so close to what was going on -- the actual fighting. When you're in the city, and the bombs are falling, you're kind of scared. We spent the days, when the air raid sirens went off, in the courtyard. There was an orchard in the back of our courtyard, and we had dug a zig-zag trench, where we were hiding, and I was looking up and seeing the anti-aircraft fire, and little silver bullets, not hitting anything, you know, but that morning was really close -- with those fires and the fleeing soldiers and the artillery in the background. When we got back to town, there was a curfew, so we really should not have been walking. We had to sneak through back yards. And at one point, as we were in the back yard of a house-- not too far any more from our own, from where we lived -- the planes came in. They came in so low that you could see the faces of the pilots. We hid under the bushes, and the planes were flying over, flying low, and spraying the area with machine gun fire. And this is something you see in a film, you never

think it will happen to you. It was the most fascinating, the most terrifying thing up until that time that I had ever experienc4d. So after this, was almost like a relief, the war was over for us. The Germans came in. They came that afternoon. They marched through town. And that was the beginning of the occupation. It was a very uncertain time. It was being trapped, the realization that we were here to stay. We could no longer get anywhere. A lot of people fled ahead of the Germans. They were fleeing ahead of the Germans. They were fleeing eastward. But now we were behind the German lines, so this was it. This was really actually the end of combat for us. For the next three weeks, the war was still going on in Poland. It lasted another three weeks, and mainly because we were, I guess, in the flight pattern of the airplanes coming into Warsaw, bombing Warsaw, that every time there'd be a squadron of planes, a formation of planes flying heavily -- you could hear how heavy they were, laden with bombs, going on... to Warsaw, only 60 miles away, and then returning empty -- and we could discern the difference in the sound of the airplanes. And then the motorized divisions driving through the town, which was also a main highway, in the direction of Warsaw. The siege of Warsaw, which we really didn't know...it was at that time and ever after that, that listening to the radio was really sort of a background for guesswork. You couldn't trust anything you heard on the radio. From that point in, was all German broadcasts, and everything we deemed to be propaganda. And from then on, all through the war, all through those long 51/2 years, we never really knew for sure what was going on. It was always used as a background for discussion, for speculation, for rumor. Nothing was factual any longer. Do you understand what feeling that is?

Q: Yes, I think I do, yes.

A: You really don't know what kind of world you're living in. And nothing is certain. You have absolutely no knowledge of whether what you're hearing is true. What enters, at that point, is wishful thinking. You interpret what you hear any-old-way that suits you, in order to maintain some kind of sanity and you have to be somewhat normal. And you can, only by creating your own world within what is going on. So reading German newspapers, forever after, we always deemed it to be propaganda. Whatever we read, whatever we heard, was always "propaganda." It was exaggerated. Therefore, things must be bad for them, and the expectation was that the war, because it was so swift, would have to end very soon. I remember the exultation when we heard on the radio that Britain and France had declared war on the Germans. That was on Sunday the 3rd. It was two days after the Germans marched into Poland. And we knew that that will do it! I mean, they'll destroy them, immediately. It's just totally incomprehensible, unless you really dig into your own thinking processes, and see how this is very plausible, that you have to create your own world, that's more positive than what you're encountering, or else you could never make it.

Q: Oh, I'll say you had the conditioning process that a...

A: Well that didn't enter in until somewhat later.

Q: But these other countries were super-powers.

A: Of course, of course. Absolutely. I mean, they will just swoop down with their airplanes and their armies, on the Maginot Line, and it was, "They will just crash them!" And you know, in a week or two, they'll be running back through Poland, leaving all their trucks and everything behind. And from day to day, this is what we expected. Give them four weeks, and that will be it. But it didn't quite happen that way, of course. Those first few weeks, as it dragged on, a lot of things that happened were pretty much what was happening in World War I. You see World War I wasn't that far back in time. It was only a little over 20 years. And my parents were young adults at that time. They remembered very well. With the curfew hour being about 8 o'clock, you couldn't go anywhere. What became the norm, was that all the neighbors would meet every evening, and there would be political discussions going on, speculation. And so we kids were just sitting there listening. It usually was at our apartment, that all the neighbors met. The neighbors were all very good friends of each other--the adults -- and the kids, too. So sometimes we'd listen and sometimes we were busy with our own things. But eventually, as people optimistically kept thinking the war would be over very soon, it turned out that there really wasn't anything going on on the western front. Britain and France weren't doing anything. They were just sitting there. They mobilized their armies and they were sitting. I guess some British forces were transported to France, but there was no action going on on the western front. They just had plenty of time to destroy Warsaw, and to mop up. And of course the fact that the Russian army entered into Poland, too, this was the big surprise that even the allies never knew about -- the fact that the Soviet Union executed with Germans, that they would divvy up Poland, and therefore there wouldn't be an eastern front after half of Poland was "conquered" by the Russians -- so that's what happened. So what was happening, was mainly what happened in World War I under an occupation, and that is, it seemed like they always needed some workers, and so they would round up Jewish men for day-work, and everybody was trying not to be caught., of course. I remember in those days, those weeks, we were looking out for the German soldiers coming, and the men would hide in the attic and behind locked doors so as not to be caught to go to work. That's from stories that we heard of World War I. That, I guess, was common behavior for soldiers.

Q: The men were rounded up and the men disappeared?

A: No, no. They came back. They were just rounded up for hard work. A lot of it was work that they weren't accustomed to doing, like digging trenches, and carrying heavy packages, unloading and loading, and that sort of thing. So they preferred not to go. Of course, there was an element of uncertainty too, and you didn't get paid for it either. And there was some rough handling. But mainly it was a sort of a preparatory stage for occupation. You must understand that we

were the young generation. We had never encountered an “occupation.” But I don’t think there was a person alive who was more than 30 years old that didn’t know about an occupation. Every country in Europe was occupied either by the Russians or by the Germans in World War I. And so they knew about occupation, and they were pretty stoic about it. They knew you had to put up with certain things that were not very convenient or comfortable. They took away our radios. But that wasn’t as Jews. They took away everybody’s radios. We had to surrender that. If people had weapons, which very few people did, had to surrender them. I mean, there isn’t a lawful, legal system where there’s an occupation – at least not in the initial stages while there’s still a front going on. So in a town like Radom, we experienced the behind-the-lines sort of treatment. And at that point, a lot of orders were issues which were posted on walls. And of course, you don’t have any excuse for not knowing what the order is. You have to know what the order is. So these things had to be surrendered. And then, I think the biggest thing that happened at that time and probably something that nobody could foresee the consequences of, was the registration and the issuance of separate passes, different passes for Jews, the identification process, which you can only understand in retrospect. I guess, at the time, we couldn’t envision that this would be the base for the identification of the Jews. Everybody had to register. They set up these registration places, and in order to get a ration card -- rationing of course was instituted -- everybody had to receive a new I.D. card. And the Jewish cards were, if I remember correctly, blue, and they had the word “Juden”, “Jew”, stamped on it. And we had to carry that with us at all times. So that’s the thing that really was the crucial point in that whole plan, which we did not, at that time, understand, because, obviously, they had no other basis to identify the Jews.

Q: And here you identified yourselves. That was very clever.

A: Yes. Well, there was really no way of not, unless you didn’t want to have a ration card. I believe you had to bring with you an identification, which was a birth certificate, and the birth certificate obviously had the religion on it. So you didn’t have to come and say, “I’m a Jew.” It was right there. This was not unusual. I think in Europe, still, people are identified by a religion. And I think in your day, probably, when you were a child, your birth certificate might still have your religion on it, too. Religion and race. I wouldn’t be a bit surprised, because it wasn’t until the ‘50’s that that was discontinued. So a birth certificate was something that was you, that gave you the status of being a person! And all the information was there.

Q: So with the issuance of that pass, you were clearly marked.

A: Yeah, that’s right. Not yet outwardly marked, but marked, nevertheless. The first big action that I remember -- I don’t remember if there was anything sooner -- was really also of a general nature, that there were hostages taken. And that was just prior to November 11th. In Poland, and until recently in the United States, and in

most of Europe, November 11th is Independence Day. That was the day of the end of World War I, so it was observed as a very important occasion. It was an important holiday in Poland, because it was the Polish independence day. Poland was not independent for 150 years until that day. So prior to that, I guess in expectation that there might be some unrest, the Germans rounded up quite a large number of Poles and Jews. And across the hall from us lived a doctor, an older man. He was retired at the time. He was one of those who was rounded up and taken hostage. There weren't any riots, and there was no unusual activity, so they were eventually released, but this was the first time that we encountered this responsibility of people, who were totally innocent, for actions of others -- taking hostages -- which is quite common today, but it was very frightening then. And then several events took place in the Jewish community. The Jews of Poland were issued a charter by the king of Poland, way back in the 15th century, that guaranteed them self-determination and autonomy. So Jews were allowed to take care of their own internal matters, such as marriages and births and deaths, and internal organizational matters of a religious nature. And there was always a committee that was called the Kehilla, representatives of the Jewish community, and so they pretty much ruled themselves. The Kehilla was even empowered to deal with minor legal matters that involved only a civil law between parties, so they could mediate. The Bet Din is a sort of court, which is mainly a religious court, but it also carried over into the civil area, where contracts can be negotiated, or disputes negotiated and arbitrated. And it had legal power in Poland. When the Germans started settling down in their occupation, they converted this organization to a sort of liaison. They still would carry out the functions of overseeing the activities of the Jewish community. The representatives of the Jewish community really became sort of a contact group. They were to convey the orders of the German occupation forces to the Jewish population, and then carry them out.

Q: Now you're saying this is the responsibility that was given to the Kehilla?

A: To the Kehilla. They had a ready made group. Of course some people had left. Some fled to the east, and some just simply did not want to serve. Eventually they set up a Council of Elders, and there was one in Radom, that was the liaison between the Germans and the Jewish population. One of the first things that they did require of the Council of Elders -- and I'm not sure when that name was actually coined, I can't exactly pinpoint it, whether it was yet in 1939 or somewhat later -- was imposing a fine on the Jewish community. And that is a fine of some hundreds of thousands of zloty, which is the Polish currency. And if that wouldn't be delivered within a specific period of time, members of the Council of Elders would be arrested and executed. Now this is the sort of official extortion that went on continuously. But that, too wasn't new, from what we were told. That happened in World War I, too. Those were all things that were sort of expected. Except that identification -- the patches, the armbands, which was done, as I recall, late in 1939, maybe in December, or January of 1940 -- I think that was totally new. But those extortion periods took place throughout.

Every so often that would happen. And I remember one joke that went around. Curiously enough, during all this time, there were actually jokes, there was actually a certain sense of humor that people had to maintain.

Q: It was the only form of resistance open to you at that time.

A: Well, not only resistance, but also survival. You have to be able to laugh at it, to take a lighter approach to life, or else it would have been totally intolerable. Because in economic terms, things became just absolutely, awful, almost immediately. Schools were closed. Factories were gradually being opened. But stores, pretty much, had no merchandise in them -- only grocery stores where rations were delivered, so that people could pick up their rations. But actually, commerce had come to a complete standstill. I suppose doctors had some patients I don't know how they got paid for it -- but lawyers certainly didn't have anything to do. There was no law that they could practice, because the Jews, particularly, were outside of the law, and law was imposed on the country -- occupation law, military law. So there was no government, no Polish government. So really the only means of making a living was either bartering or working for the Germans. Ultimately that became somewhat of a routine; they required certain numbers of workers every day. And it became the function of the Jewish council to deliver these people. They weren't paid, you know. The Germans didn't pay, but if you worked for them, you could possibly get a meal, depending on who you worked for. So in a sense, the Jewish Council was responsible for delivering a certain number of men -- they may have had some women that they needed, but most of them were men -- so it became like a work force that was bought! And if, say, my father -- he worked in a different capacity, and I'll tell you in a moment -- but somebody like my father, who would be required to go to work for the Germans on a given day, but he really didn't want to, he could pay to have another man go for him.

Now my father was actually working and earning money. What was one of the big industries in Radom was the tanning industry. There were several tanneries, and a number of them were owned by Jews. Well, some of them were my father's clients, of course, before the war. When the Germans settled down to their occupation, they expropriated all these factories, but they were in great need of leather, so these tanneries were very soon reopened, and because it is a highly specialized type of industry, they had to keep the owners and the managers, and the people who knew about how to mix these chemicals for tanning. They had to keep them on, but they kept them on as employees, of course, not as owners. My father was also one of those employees, but naturally accounting services still had to be done, only he was working in the factory as an accountant. So as a result, he was not subject to the daily work, because the work he was doing in that industry was more important. And, as I mentioned before, those were parts of the things that made for the fact that the Jews of Radom were slightly, ever so slightly, more likely to survive in a little larger percentage than in some other cities. And indeed, that's the case. There are many more survivors, percentage-wise from

Radom, than there are say from Warsaw, where there were ten times as many Jews. But that's because of those industries that were very essential to the German war effort, where they needed forced labor, and later slave labor, until quite late in the war. And the longer you lived -- worked -- the slightly better your chances were. So those are some of the reasons.

Q: Okay, now during this time of occupation, what were you doing?

A: How was the family faring? I mentioned my father. David went to work for the Kehilla, for the Council of Elders, in the office there. And I was sort of at loose ends. Being 15, there really wasn't anything much for me to do. I had finished the 10th grade. David finished high school that summer. He went to a specialized high school, which was primarily a business and accounting orientation, so he had office skills, and that's why he went to work in the office. But my education wasn't complete. I did finish 10th grade before the war broke out. The high school system in Poland was such that there was a breaking point at the 10th grade. After the 10th grade, there was an examination, and you could consider yourself a high school graduate. The next two years were college preparatory, and they required an entrance exam. I had passed that entrance exam that summer, but school never reopened. What we did then, was that a few of the girls from my class, five of us, hired one of the teachers -- our parents did -- and we were having private instruction, so we continued our education. Teachers didn't have any means of making a living, either, so this was one way. It was really forbidden, and it was kind of risky to be meeting that way, but actually, we had three teachers! We had one teacher who taught us science and math, and then we had one teacher for the other subjects. We had a teacher for Hebrew. So we were busy studying at that time. And then a little later in the winter of 1939-'40, I also had an English teacher. I studied some English. That was strictly risky, because English was really something Germans frowned upon studying. This whole thing was very clandestine. But that's what I kept busy with. In the meantime, there were some other developments. My uncle whom I talked about before, who lived in the northwestern part of Poland, the one we visited in 1936, where we saw these placards, he and his family were expelled. So he came back to Radom with his family, and they lived with us for a while, because we had the largest apartment. Eventually, he moved to my grandmother's house, and the room that they had was then billeted by Germans, so we had German officers billeted in our apartment.

Q: What was that like?

A: Well that was really very inhibiting, because you had to be very careful. You had to be quiet, you had to be very careful about what you were saying. And we still had a maid, a live-in maid, at that time, but the German officer did not allow the maid to clean his room. I had to clean it. And I was just as skilled at cleaning as you can imagine! I mean, we always had a live-in maid. So there were certain things that we couldn't do as a result of having Germans billeted in our house, and

at that point, of course, we couldn't even have our neighbors come in the evening to talk. We would have to go...

Q: Well, at a certain point, I recall, gatherings were forbidden.

A: Yeah, gatherings were forbidden. But certainly, after the curfew hours, we could gather and take a risk. But with a German in the house, you certainly couldn't take that risk. So during that period, we had to meet in somebody else's house. It was very inhibiting, and it was very inconvenient. But we had someone billeted in our house quite, quite some time. Different people. Sometimes there were men...

Q: Did you have to put an end to all your religious observance at that point?

A: Not really. Not as long as they were private. There were no synagogue services, of course. But to some extent, people still gathered in a minyan and had services. But holidays weren't really, any more, what they used to be.

Q: And I imagine with Germans in the home, it was becoming more and more difficult to have any kind of observance.

A: It's interesting that life sort of went on. It settled down to an unpleasant kind of normalcy -- an expected kind of unpleasant normalcy. Measures were being taken on the outside that were tightening the noose. There were more pronouncements being issued. More orders. We had to start wearing an armband, which identified us as Jews. And then at some point it was announced that we could no longer walk on the sidewalk. We had to walk in the middle of the street. At first, it was, you had to step off the sidewalk if you encountered a German soldier. And after that, you just couldn't even walk on the sidewalk. And there were beatings, and there were very unpleasant encounters, but, as I mentioned before, it was all sort of part of the occupation. We still didn't envision anything much worse than that. It was a terrible inconvenience, and it was very disappointing that the war wasn't ending sooner than it was, which we sort of expected in those big conversations and speculations. The war was going to last only a month! Well,, the months started dragging on. And it didn't seem like anything was doing, and then of course in 1940, the big defeat of the allies was a terrific blow to the expectations. But the point really is that at some phase, in that kind of situation, you do settle down to some sort of normalcy, a lower level of normalcy. There were things going on, like a lot of sickness and a lot of poverty. The economic situation was such that most people didn't have, really, any means of surviving, so the community had to take care of them. There were soup kitchens. And there was a great deal of suffering on the part of people.

One incident is very, very interesting, very important. My father had always been very active in the Jewish community, as I mentioned before. He was a prominent member of the Jewish community, and always very active in one capacity or

another. So that year, 1939, maybe even before, he was the chairman of the committee of the board which oversaw the local orphans' home. During the war, in those early months of the war, a lot of people who were really in dire straits economically, wanted to put the children into the orphans' home, so the children would at least have some food. And every day my father would come home for dinner, and there'd be people lined up at the door, waiting, asking him to see if he could get their children into the orphans' home. And I remember my mother complaining that his food was getting cold, and in the meantime he was talking to the people. And the thing that always stuck in my mind was the reply he gave to my mother. He said, "I can't do anything for these people. The home is full. I can't take any more children in. But I have to listen to them. That's the only thing I can do for them. At least listen to them." And, you know, how kind he was. Really, he suffered that he couldn't help everybody, but he couldn't. The place was full. Now this is something that I have never forgotten. I've tried to live up to that example. You know, how important it is to listen to people, and let them get their suffering off their chest. So the months that followed, were pretty much that low level of normalcy, with a lot of individual things going on that affected people's lives, that were hardships. But at that time, our family was not particularly affected with great hardship, because my father did work, and as a result we did have some means, enough, probably, for my mother to buy additional food on the black market, so that I don't remember, really, ever being hungry in those days, those early couple of years of the war, or not having clothes. We still lived in our apartment, and had our things. As a result of having Germans billeted in our house, we probably were sort of off limits to the bands that came into the house and just took whatever they wanted. It did happen later, but not at the point while we were still living there.

Q: The bands, you mean people who were pillaging, is that what you're talking about?

A: Yeah, Germans! Germans. German soldiers who could just come in and take furniture and linens and silver and whatnot, and sent it home! They were the masters, and we were totally outside of the law.

Q: So even then, it was the law of the jungle.

A: Yeah. But I think there must have been a tacit approval. They were probably given the freedom to do that. The Jews could be done anything to, that they wanted to. We had no protection, in other words. But it did not happen to us at that time. Actually, at that time, we settled down to a certain degree of normalcy, and I continued with my studies with the teachers, and I continued to see my friends and things were sort of on an even keel. But certain people we knew were coming down with the typhus, and were dying, so there were disturbing things. As I think back on it, it was biding time. I think we thought that's what it would be like until the end of the war. That year, 1940, things were getting tighter, and they were being set up in a more administrative way, and the Germans were

consolidating their hold on the country. But it was pretty much, for us, waiting for the war to end. And I think the thinking was, if it doesn't get any worse, we can survive. What that "worse" would be, we really had no idea -- the depth of the actual misery that could be inflicted on people. But obviously, other people did suffer a great deal more than we did at that time. And then, it was in the beginning of 1941, that the order was issued -- it came through the Jewish Council -- that all Jews would have to move out of their houses if they lived outside a certain designated area. And of course, in every city there was an area that was more Jewish, more concentrated than others, and we lived outside that area. So that meant that we had to move out. And I think we were given six weeks to find a place in the designated area. I don't really remember exactly when the word "ghetto" was used first, whether the Germans actually used the word "ghetto" in designating this section. The German word was not "ghetto" it was "wohnung bezirk" -- the "living area."

Q: But you knew that your life was disrupted!

A: We knew that our lives were being totally disrupted, and that because that quarter was already very crowded, it would be difficult, and nothing like the large apartment that we had, that we had to move out of. We could still take our furniture and our belongings. Eventually, because my father was who he was, we and all the neighbors in that building, we all got a small house that had four rooms, so there each family had a room. I think we had sort of like one larger room and a real small little room, which was a little better than a lot of the people. Now my grandmother lived in that area, but her apartment was already full, because I had an aunt who was a widow, with her daughter, who lived with my grandmother, and then another family -- an aunt of mine and her husband and two children, had to move in from the outside of the designated area -- moved in with my grandmother, and also the uncle who was expelled from the west. So they had five families there already, so of course there wasn't room for us. Well, as it happened, we got assigned this little house for all the Jewish inhabitants of the building that we lived in, and it was a house that Poles had lived in that had to move out, because the area that was designated as the special area for Jews included that little section of very little, and very poor quality houses. It wasn't a villa, it was just a small house, a small wooden house with an outhouse. It didn't have indoor plumbing! There was a water pump outside, and there was an outhouse, one or two, maybe three or four, maybe one for each. I don't remember. A couple of outhouses. So it wasn't your luxury place, you understand, but compared to the tenements where people lived two or three families in a room, this was really terrific. But it was a real step down, and it turned out to be what we had feared when we said, "If it only doesn't get worse, you know, it won't be so bad." It did get an awful lot worse, because of the crowding, and because, in the ghetto, once we were in that isolated area, it was much harder to get around. In order to get out of that designated area, one had to have special permission, and not everybody would be given a special pass to go out. The first summer we could still sort of move in and out. I remember riding

my bike with Jules. That's when I met Jules, because Jules -- my husband --and his family moved in next door, also, into a little back of a house. I knew him by sight -- he's four years older, so when you're a 15 year old, you don't really know many 19-year-olds -- but I saw him going to school. We went to a school which was near where I lived, and when I went to school, our paths sometime crossed. So I knew who he was and he knew who I was. He, too, was working where David was, for the Jewish council. So he knew David, and that's how we met. That house where we lived was the very last house on the block. In fact, the other side of the street was already outside of the ghetto. It was important later, in one incident that happened, that was important to our survival, actually. So that's when Jules and I met. And that summer our romance started blooming. It was interesting that at this time, the young people -- I think we started developing sort of a nihilistic attitude. You have to live every day, because there is no point, the tomorrow became very uncertain. The uncertainty was really based more on the hunger that was all around us, and the disease. It seemed like it would catch us all. We still didn't think of any ultimate destruction of all the Jewish people in 1941. But certainly it looked like there wasn't much left of our youth. And so we got together a lot with our friends. There was a curfew even in the ghetto. We couldn't go out after 8. But we did. We sneaked through backyards -- you know, young people do take risks --and we got together, and we sort of partied, and did a lot of laughing and joking and talking, in a...really sort of a...I can't quite describe what I'm trying to say. I think "nihilistic" describes it. Does it? To you? Sort of a "hell with it all! We're not going to live to enjoy adulthood, anyway, so we might as well have some fun."

Q: In your conversations, were you questioning the impact of being Jewish? What it meant?

A: I don't recall that we really philosophized about being Jewish. I think it was an accepted fact.

Q: I see. There was no resentment of the fact that you were...

A: I really don't remember, at any time, except on very rare occasions, and that was much later, that I started thinking, "Why did I have to be born Jewish?" It wasn't at this time. At this time, it still looked like some of us will make it. Maybe most of us will make it. But our youth is being wasted. We're not really enjoying our youth. What will we do when it all ends, how will we get back into some sort of mainstream, pick up where we left off? It didn't look so desperate yet. It was beginning to look more and more so, but it didn't seem like we were yet in any immediate danger, except from disease and hunger. But at that time, some people were beginning to leave -- to get false papers. Not very many, naturally. Not very many had the means to do so. And not many would leave families behind, but some of our friends did.

Q: Were there efforts by the Zionist organization to enable those who wanted to leave? Or had that organization, at that time, fallen apart?

A: Not in Radom. In Radom, I was not aware of any organized effort. I think that whenever anybody left, they left by their own effort -- by their own contacts with non-Jews on the outside who provided them with false passes or a place to stay. But not too many yet, at that time. Now the first traumatic action that took place -- it was the forerunner of things to come -- was in February of 1942. At that time, in the middle of the night, there was a raid, and a number of people were arrested, among them the president and vice-president, I believe -- I don't remember for sure -- the president of the Jewish Council. And they were shipped out. Nobody knew where to. Now this was a time when we didn't know anything yet about camps, other than the concentration camps which were official concentration camps, and everybody knew about, such as Dachau and Buchenwald. They existed before the war. So everybody knew there were official concentration camps. The first time we hear about Auschwitz, which apparently was also a detention camp, was in the winter of 1939. I told you they took hostages before November 11th of 1939? Then some Poles came back, when they were released, and I remember one coming to our house. I don't remember who he was or why he was there, but he was very reluctant to speak about his experience, and at some point he mentioned the word Auschwitz, so apparently already in '39, they were setting up something at Auschwitz which was a detention camp.

Q: Now this man was a non-Jew?

A: He was a non-Jew. He was one of those hostages, and I don't remember how we happened to have him come to our house one evening, when he came back after he was released. But I remember that that was the first time that I heard the word Auschwitz. We had known that there was a town named Oswiecim in Polish, and that the German name is Auschwitz, but it wasn't something that made any particular sense in terms of it being a special place. So that night, in February of 1942, when these men were arrested, the next day they were shipped out, and by then, there were rumors about a camp in Auschwitz, but really it was almost impossible to isolate rumor from fact. "Who told you this?" "So-and-so and someone." You could have been the 50th or the 150th person to get it, and how much accuracy there was in that rumor, was really not...that's why we were so reluctant to believe almost anything. Nobody knew where it came from. Our entire lives were based on rumor.

"Such and such is going on in Warsaw, and so-and-so is going on here and there." And absolutely no way of finding out, because we were not very mobile, and we couldn't travel from town to town. There were some people, of course, who did take the risk of removing their Jewish identity, and traveled. They were probably the ones who brought communications from one place to another, but who knew, when it eventually got to you, what the actual facts were. So it was really a time of total uncertainty of what was going on, what the actual facts were. There were

people, of course, interestingly enough, who worked for the Germans long-term. By then, a sort of a steady work force evolved. There were still these who went for daily work, but over a period of these months, Germans, say in the army, who needed work to be done daily -- it was usually just labor, daily labor -- would keep some of the same people. And people actually became steady workers from some German unit or another. And it wasn't necessarily the army. Even the Gestapo employed some Jews. They weren't picky. When they needed simple labor or hard work, they used Jews, because that was slave labor. They didn't have to pay them. But they did get some food there. They'd get fed. And also they had access to some of the German information. Not that that information was, in our opinion, dependable, because of course, it was all biased and all propaganda, at least from our point of view.

One important thing, of course, that happened, which I should mention in general terms was in June of 1941. The Germans opened an eastern front and attacked the Russians. That had a very, very terrible effect on us. It was obvious the allies had lost. They were expelled from the continent and had to run for their lives to England. And so the Germans were completely in control of all of western Europe, and now, in a very quick swoop, they took back the Polish territory -- the eastern Polish territories -- and took care of the Russians, and put them running. And from then on, I remember the discussions that went on -- about the big conquests that the Germans were making, Leningrad was besieged, and Moscow was besieged -- and we still clung to the idea that this was all propaganda. It can't possibly be true, because by then it looked so desperate. You see, the Germans were winning the war, and if they were winning the war, I think that more than anything else gave us this outlook on life that we really didn't have much to look forward to, in the second half of 1941, because the war wasn't going to end in a month, and it wasn't going to end in a year. The Germans were winning, and that's what we have to look forward to for the rest of our lives. We still weren't going to be all killed, you know, but we're going to die out. This is it. This is the end of the war, and they won it. So I think that, more than anything, dampened our spirits, until 1943 when the German retreat started. That's when it picked up again, but by then, of course, there weren't very many of us left. So in 1942, after the arrest of the leadership of the Jewish Council, they started registering again. Everybody had to register -- the Jews -- and receive a work pass. But work passes were only given to those who were not younger than 16 and not older than 35. And then a terrible thing happened in our family. And that was in April, on April 28th of 1942. That's when the knock on the door came at our house. That night, there was a knock on the door, in the middle of the night. And since there was an early curfew, you knew it wasn't anybody from the neighborhood or any of your friends. You knew it had to be a German -- besides which, of course, there was firing going on outside, so we were already awake. There was something going on, another action similar to the one that took place in February. And I think David opened the door. There was a Gestapo man standing at the door with a list in his hand, and asked if Isaiah Eiger lived in this house. And David said yes, so he came into the room where we all slept. And

my father was getting up. He had not been well. He had an inflammation of the sciatic nerve, so he couldn't walk very well. He walked with a cane. He got up and had to show his I.D., and then the Gestapo man told him to get dressed and come with him. Which he did. And we were just standing there, paralyzed, totally unable to say anything. I think he hugged us and he walked out limping, with the Gestapo man, and there is this machine gun fire going on outside, and my mother was totally beside herself! And we...I don't know. This is like totally blotted out of my memory, what happened after that, because naturally we didn't go back to sleep. I think we were just standing around, waiting to see what to do. We didn't know what was going on. We did know, at that point, that our neighbor across the hall was also arrested, and that there were arrests going on all over. There was a so-called Jewish police, sort of a militia, in the ghetto, which had to keep order, and deliver orders; the Jewish Council and the Jewish militia were really conduits of the Germans to carry out orders. And at some point, I think one of the Jewish militia came by, and told us what was going on, and he said that there were a lot of casualties, that a lot of people were just being taken out of their homes and just shot on the spot. Well about 6 o'clock was the end of the curfew -- the night curfew -- and then David went to the Council, which is where he worked, to find out what happened, and what happened to our father. It was really an event that was very traumatic to the whole ghetto. He found out that about 200 people had been taken out of their homes, and more than half were executed on the spot. He wanted to know what happened to father, and they said, "Well, nobody knows! You go and look at those who were shot, and if he isn't among those who were shot, then he's at the Gestapo headquarters." So David actually had to go and...I imagine he told you about this. This is probably an experience that I couldn't relate, that was probably indescribable. I don't really know how he felt when he went and had to look at all these lined up bodies to finally know that father wasn't among them. But he had to do that. That was his function, unfortunately. So we knew then, at that point, that father was among the maybe 75 people who were at the Gestapo headquarters. And during the day, the Jewish Council was notified that they were to bring food for those, which they had sent with the Jewish militia. And then my father writes about that day in his memoir. How they were beaten and mistreated and questioned and really thought that was the end, that they would never see the end of that. And by the way, my uncle -- my father's brother, who was expelled from his home -- he was also arrested that night, but not executed. So both of them were there at Gestapo headquarters.

Q: As you explained to me earlier, but not on tape, your father survived the camp, and later was to write his memories of that experience.

A: Right, yes, he did.

Q: And that memory in Yiddish is deposited where?

A: Well, I have a copy, and David (Eiger) has a copy, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, which is the memorial to the 5,000,000 has a copy of it. I hope to, someday, be able to translate it into English and incorporate it in some kind of story -- family saga -- because we each, really, had separate experiences, having been separated at one point or another, except for myself and my mother, who were together the whole time. So someday, those memoirs, hopefully will be integrated into the whole story.

But it was that night in 1942 that my father was then shipped out -- the next night, that is. He was arrested one night and then the next evening they were taken to the railroad station and they were shipped out. And it was, again, by word of mouth, it was conveyed to us that they probably were sent to Auschwitz. Auschwitz, by then, was popping up more often in conversations, and it was a word that was used more often describing a detention or a concentration camp. Nobody knew much about it, yet, but there was such a place, and there was some kind of camp, because the people in the first group that were arrested, in February, were also sent to Auschwitz. And about four to six weeks after they were shipped out, that first group, telegrams began arriving to their families that they had died at Auschwitz. And eventually, I think, all but maybe two families were notified that their people had died in Auschwitz of "natural causes", of course. And shortly after my father and his group were shipped to Auschwitz, a few weeks later, telegrams started arriving, too, to those families. But then, everybody just denied it! "It can't be! They didn't all die. It's just a ruse. It's just to make us suffer more." We didn't believe it, you see. It's denial, because it's the ultimate that destroys your life if you accept it.

Q: That's right. It occurs to me, that this capacity to deny is sometimes destructive, and at other times, it's a protective mechanism, don't you think?

A: I think in this case, as I look back, in all instances, I think the denial was more constructive, psychologically. It may have been destructive, in some ways, that people became more fatalistic. Because if they didn't believe that it was going to happen, they didn't do anything, maybe, to enhance their chances. In the end, there really weren't that many ways that one could enhance one's chances, but in some instances...

Q: There must have been an increasing sense of hopelessness, helplessness.

A: Helplessness, but not hopelessness. Yes, yes. I think that's the big difference. But we never did get a telegram, interestingly enough. My uncle's family was notified that he had died. Our neighbor's family was notified. There were only about two or three that didn't receive telegrams. So of course, the idea was then, that the telegrams certainly don't mean anything, because why wouldn't we receive a telegram/ By then my mother began to worry, because she thought that those who didn't receive telegrams, maybe, were the ones who died. You just don't know what to worry about! You don't know what any of this means! And

it's a just absolutely impossible situation. Well, in the meantime, of course, after my father was arrested, we lost our protector. He ran the show. We looked to him to...he was all powerful to us. Do you understand?

Q: Your supreme being.

A: Yeah, he was our supreme being. He really was. The whole family. Because he was really the man that everybody looked to for advice, and for judgment. And suddenly we were just rudderless. We were just floating there. My mother was very severely affected by this, because she really never exercised her own personality, or her own initiative. This wasn't the sort of things that one did. But then suddenly she had to gather herself together, and she had to become the head of the family. She had to start making these decisions. And one thing that was very disturbing at that point, was that she couldn't get a labor pass, because she was over 35. We didn't know exactly what that meant, but it had to mean something bad. And she didn't have it. One thing that happened to us as a result of not having father's protection, because he knew all these people in the Jewish Council, was that immediately they raided our house, and took a lot of the belongings, a lot of the lovely things that my mother cherished, because we had to all surrender furs and silver and gold and jewelry way before that, that the Germans required. In fact there were a few things that my mother just said she absolutely isn't going to give to anybody, and so my parents dug a hole in the basement and buried a lot of their lovely things, like her fur, and beautiful sterling silver. It's still sort of a joke in our family. I sometimes recall what a beautiful candelabra my mother had that she used for Friday evening. A beautiful, big sterling candelabra. And Barbara, my sister-in-law, is very fond of antiques; I like modern things. She says, "Oh, I would have loved to have had that candelabra!?" And I say, "Barbara, don't sharpen your appetite, you never would have gotten it! I would have had it." (Laughs) But nobody ever had it. I don't know who dug it up. I'm sure some Polish family that moved in afterwards; I'm sure they found it. That's not something I miss. But my mother, at the time -- when she was losing her things, that they worked for for so many years, they struggled, they didn't have anything handed to them, either, they worked for it -- she suffered very much, and she really cried when the Germans came and took her beautiful wardrobe, and they took her beautiful linens and tablecloths and such. Some of it she gave to a woman who was our maid -- had been our maid -- for safekeeping. Of course she never saw that again, either. But those are the sorts of things that I certainly have no particular regret about, except when you intellectualize the whole thing, you can see that unfortunately, a lot of people benefited from the misery of the Jews. To us it was unimportant. At that point, when was 18 years old, I said to my mother, very matter-of-factly, "Don't cry about things, because if you are alive, if you survive this, you'll have new things, and I don't think we're any of us going to survive this." By then, by April of 1942, May of 1942, it looked like nobody would ever make it. This is, you understand, all the victories, the military victories of the Germans. And the situation of the Jews was getting worse and worse and by now we're seeing the

victims lying on the streets with bullets in their heads. This wasn't common before. This was new. And as a result, a certain amount of resignation is now entering into the picture, and it looks like we're not going to make it. It looks like the Germans are going to win the war, and as a result they really have nobody to account to, and they can do to the Jews what they want. Later, much later in life, I realized how people would feel the way my mother did. You know, "Here goes my whole life! Now my husband is gone! Now my things are gone! What's next?" And I think that she was in a very, very bad state of mind at the time. Took a little time for her to dig herself out of it. She still had to feed us, of course. She still had to get some kind of life going. She, she did pick herself up, and what she started to do was she was trading on the black market in order to have some food for us.

Q: As I recall, David was involved in that, too, felt the obligation to keep food on the table for the family.

A: Right, right. Well, he was the older one. There was a Polish woman who had been a housekeeper of my uncle's, and she came with him and his family. In fact, she, I think, was a nanny to his wife yet; she was an older woman. And she couldn't be with the family in the ghetto, because she was not Jewish, so she had a room outside of the ghetto. She would purchase some vegetables and fruits and some foodstuff, bring it to the wooden wall -- there was a wooden wall surrounding the ghetto -- and she would take the money from my mother and hand her the bundle. And then my mother would sell it to other people who still had some money, and...

Q: Did this woman do it out of concern and interest in the family? Or was it simply for monetary reasons?

A: Both. No, not simply for monetary reasons. She did risk her freedom to some extent, and I'm sure she wouldn't have done it just for anybody. She did it because of the concern for our family.

Q: Were there other instances of non-Jews coming to your aid...

A: There were other people! Sure there were other Poles who were trading with Jews. This was a very common thing. This was one way that we could get some food. But my mother made enough in food -- what she sold was enough money -- to buy some more food from her and keep some for us. So this went on for about a year. Between April of 1942, and when the deportation took place in the Radom ghetto, which was August of 1942, it was a time of foreboding and knowledge that something was happening, that was going to disrupt our lives terribly. We didn't know what, and we tried to deny it. There were rumors at that point, that there were deportations, that there was an "action" in a city by the name of Lublin, which was to the east of us, which is where Jules is from, originally. This is where his family lived, and his family, indeed, was all killed in

that action. But not until Jules's cousin came to the ghetto did we know for sure what had happened there -- and it was really a massacre -- in the ghetto, and then the rest of the people were deported, and nobody knew where they had gone.

And then the rumors started reaching Radom that the same thing was going on in Warsaw. And I don't remember when we found out about the incident with the chairman of the Jewish Council in Warsaw committing suicide, but I know that we knew about it. We did hear about it. Again, probably because some people did risk their lives by taking off their identity and traveling. That's what Jules's cousin did. Unfortunately. That was later -- after the deportations already.

But in those few months, people started scampering around. It became apparent that something with those labor cards was important, that it was important to have one, that it was important, maybe to work for a German unit someplace. I had been attending ORT classes in sewing. I was taking a course in sewing. And in fact, that course was so filled, that the instructor said she'd only take me in if I could bring a sewing machine with me. It was another item that my mother dearly cherished. She isn't going to give up her sewing machine. I said, "Mother, you're not going to have that sewing machine anyway, you might as well give it away, and at least I'll learn something. I'll learn to sew." So she did. She gave away her sewing machine. And I was taking this course in sewing, which came in very, very handy later. And in fact I still sew! My mother felt like her daughter isn't going to be a dressmaker! You know, I was going to be a lady of leisure. Once I get married, I'll be like her! I didn't need a trade! (Laughs) By then, maybe she changed her mind a little. There was an incident that happened at that time which was very, very significant, that takes a little back-grounding, and I don't know if David told you about this. And that was the encounter with that Gestapo man. Did he ever tell you about this?

Q: Yes, but you might tell it from your perception.

A: Well, I really have a hearsay only, knowledge about it, because I wasn't there. David really was the principal in this, but I was there when we met him. What happened was that a young woman came from a small town to see us, and she identified herself as the daughter of a cousin of my mother's. This is not that town named Strowicz. She traveled as a non-Jew, and indeed, if there is a stereotype of a non-Jewish looking person, she certainly was it. Tall and fair skinned, and light-haired, and blue-eyed. And my mother didn't know her, because she was young. She was my age. But of course, it was her first cousin's daughter. She came because she wanted to see a certain Gestapo man for whom she worked in Ostrowicz; he was very kind to her and very helpful. And she came to find out if he could do something for her, because now these deportations were going on -- these "resettlements" is what they were called -- but she wanted to protect her family, and she wanted to protect herself. So she apparently sent word to him that she was coming to Radom, and could he meet her. He was an older man. I mean, there wasn't any romance involved. He was an old, fatherly

man. Our place happened to be very convenient, because, do you remember I said ours was the last house on the block? And the other side of the street was already outside the ghetto, so one could slip in very unobtrusively, which is what he did. He came in civilian clothes. I remember being terrified. I thought that a Gestapo man has to just be a horrible person, to begin with, just looking at one. Well he came in civilian clothes, so he looked very normal, and we sat and talked. What it turned out, was that he had been a policeman before Hitler came to power. And he was just integrated into the Gestapo. He was really a very kindly man, and he really absolutely could not tolerate...he did meet a bad end, of course, because he was trying to be helpful to Jews. He gave us one very important piece of information, and that was if we didn't get a telegram from Auschwitz, that meant conclusively that my father was alive. That those telegrams were indeed true, but that they were sent when people actually died. He said he had checked, and that father was alive, so that was a very, very important piece of news that we had, and it just meant everything! I think it just revived my mother! It's interesting, because he may have died the next day, you know. Or the day after. But it just picked up our spirits. Here he was, two months later. He was still alive. And others, apparently, did die. What I suppose didn't dawn on us, was how people couldn't live there very long. It was a very high point, finding that out. And then he left, and I never saw him again. And my cousin -- we never saw my cousin again. We don't know exactly what happened to her, but we know that she did try to pass as a non-Jew and go to Germany to work, but was exposed by the Poles, was denounced, and she was killed.

Well, I still was going, taking these classes in sewing. And it looked like one has to be doing something -- has to be employed by the Germans, preferably. After my father was arrested, the Jewish Council sent another person to live with us in his place. I meant, we couldn't -- just three -- have one room. So they sent us a woman who was alone, who had already lost her whole family in another city. Either she lost her family, I wasn't sure exactly, or they were in a different ghetto, and she came to Radom. She worked for the German army. She worked in one of those units that they employed permanently. It was the unit that took care of their vegetable gardens, for their food, you know, for their kitchens -- and so they planted and weeded and whatever needs to be done in a garden. So she lived with us and went to work every day. And one day she came --- and I can't remember the exact date, wait, something else happened before. I'm sorry. And I don't remember the exact date of that; I think it was August 6th, but I'm not positive. Suddenly we woke up. It was just daybreak. And we heard distant firing. And here were, at the very end of the ghetto, so we really didn't know, most of the time, at least at night, what was going on, because we were really very, relatively speaking, far from the central square of the ghetto. But we heard the firing, and obviously jumped up. You know something terrible is going on. And by the time we found out what went on, it turned out that there was a deportation going on. I never mentioned this, but there were two sections of ghettos in Radom that were about maybe two-and-a-half miles apart. And they had emptied out that smaller section, that smaller ghetto, and apparently had some spare boxcars, so they came

to the big ghetto, and rounded up, maybe, 2,000 people. And when we came to, the whole family was gone. Grandmother, great-grandmother, all the aunts and children, the other uncles. (The one, of course died in Auschwitz) Everybody was gone. There was not one of them left, except the three of us, David, my mother, and I, because we were in that little house way on the outskirts that they didn't get to. And obviously there was an awful lot of killing. There was just a slaughter! And that morning, they took a bunch of young men from the ghetto -- and Jules was among them -- to the small ghetto, that smaller area, to dig a mass grave and bury all the bodies.

And that was, I think, at that time, the sign that we really didn't have a chance of making it. Because it wasn't a resettlement. It obviously was just a very brutal action that was just a matter of time. But we didn't know. We didn't know what happened to the people who went in the boxcars. That was an absolute unknown. The word "gas chamber" had never even surfaced yet, at that time. It wasn't until a little later when that term was coming up.

That was the time when people started really scampering to get some kind of a position with a German unit, to escape that, because now it became obvious that it was just a matter of time that the rest of the ghetto will also be resettled, or that the same thing will happen in the ghetto. My mother was absolutely desperate, because of me, because I really didn't have any place. There was no place for me to go.

Well one day this woman who lived with us, who worked for the German army -- it was a Wednesday -- she came running in the afternoon. She came running to the house, and she said, "They just told us to go home and get our belongings, because now we're going to stay there overnight, too, in the army barracks." And she said, "They told me I could bring somebody, so if you want to come with me," she said to me, "You can come." And I said, "No way. I'm not going without my mother." And my mother took me by the neck and practically shoved me out the door! And she said, "You're going!" That's the most unforgettable time, when I really felt I was saying good-bye to my mother for the very last time, that I'd never see her again. And I was very unhappy about going, but I went. We went to the military barracks, which were just on the edge of town. And that's where we were placed. This was a unit of the German army that employed these women. What we were doing, was tending their vegetable gardens, and it was a huge field of lettuce and radishes and all kinds of other vegetables which we tended. I remember weeding these beds. And it was backbreaking labor. You think of working in your garden as being a work of pleasure. This was really hard work, because, of course, a soldier with a gun was standing there watching you all the time, and you had to do it all day.

We were outside. It was August, so the weather was nice. It was sunny. But I was crying constantly. I didn't know what was going on in the ghetto. I had no

contact with the ghetto. And I was constantly thinking, "This is it! What am I going on for? What am I working so hard for?"

It was just a few days later -- I don't remember exactly whether this was on a Tuesday or a Wednesday; I think it was a Wednesday -- well it was a Sunday night, that we were awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of gunfire. This was not a large city, you understand, Radom, and the ghetto wasn't that far. We heard the shooting, but we didn't know what was going on. Obviously, we suspected the worst, knowing what had already gone on in the ghetto a week or so before. And I was just beside myself. I was crying. I was probably one of the youngest women there. This was a group of maybe -- I can't really remember the numbers -- maybe 50, maybe 100 women, and they were consoling me. Most of them to my recollection, did not have anybody in the ghetto -- certainly not a mother -- the situation I was in. They were consoling me, and I was crying hysterically. The next day, I was trying to find out what had happened, what had gone on. I knew one telephone number of a friend of my family's, an older man, who had a workshop that was important for the Germans. And so they had a German administrator, and kept the workers, so they were isolated like we were, kept there separately without being let into the ghetto.

A soldier went with me to a telephone -- one of the soldiers who guarded us, went with me to a telephone! I begged him! -- that I needed to make a phone call. And I telephoned this place -- this Mr. Brenamann, and I got to talk to him. And he said he heard -- he wasn't in the ghetto either -- but he had heard that my mother was okay. I really didn't know whether he was just trying to make me feel better, or whether this was actually so, but I did feel better that day. Not knowing, of course, that the second night, Monday night, was a repeat of the same performance, that they hadn't finished on Sunday. They were finishing up on Monday. I don't remember -- this is so fuzzy in my mind, because it was probably the most difficult time, just finding out, being on the outside, not knowing what was going on on the inside -- I don't remember how long it was that I finally did find out. I think the instant that I do remember, was when we were in the field working, and across the road was a factory where they made pots and pans, okay? These enameled pots 'n pans. And they had a unit of Jews working there. And as I looked up, somebody was motioning to me from across the road. I couldn't go across the road of course, because if I did, I would have been...(gestures.) I mean no question asked, you understand. It was a dear friend of mine, who had come to work to this factory, and he yelled to me, "Mother and David are okay!" In fact, this dear friend just visited us this summer. He lives in Israel. (Laughs) But I don't remember what day that was, whether it was Tuesday or Wednesday. It was a couple of days after, but I did find out. And he said, "I saw them! They're okay!" I wasn't very trusting, you know. I thought people are really trying to console me.

So that was great. I went on working there. And afterwards, when things quieted down, we did have some communication through people who were coming to

work in some of the places that we worked in. But I really wanted to get back, to be with my mother, and she wouldn't allow me. The situation in what had now become a forced labor camp -- that I really hadn't even seen yet; I didn't know what it looked like -- but they were now being marched out to work in columns, those who remained, and I really didn't have any opportunity, particularly, to talk to anyone, to know exactly what the situation was, until maybe two weeks later when Jules, my husband got a pass, and came to see me. And then I found out everything. What had gone on, what happened in the ghetto during the deportation, and that there were only, really, a small number left. His sister and father were both deported. His mother was left. So it was a very tragic meeting.

Q: And what was Jules doing at this point?

A: Jules was working, too, but he did get a pass and he got somebody to come with him. A Jewish policeman came with him, and he saw me. This was already September, and our work was pretty much coming to a close, after we harvested the vegetables. Ramblings went on that we would be transferred to a different place for the winter, which was maybe about 10 miles out of town. And I really didn't want to go. They would release me, but my mother still didn't want me to come back to the camp.

Well, finally, talking back and forth I told her that no matter what she'd say, I'm coming. So by then it was probably about the middle of October, I came to the camp, and of course you know when they were assigned places to live, I wasn't figured into it. So there were five people in a tiny little room. There was my mother and David, and my uncle Sam, the only other member of the family who was not deported in those mass deportations. He was my mother's brother. And there was Jules and his mother. So there were five of them. And when I came, I was the sixth. This whole big room of maybe 9x15 was just filled with beds. There was nothing else.

Well, at that point, food was being prepared in a communal kitchen, and we just got our rations every day, so there were no cooking facilities. We didn't need any. And I came to the camp, and I had to be assigned a job. I was not there legally, in other words. I was not counted into those numbers that were left. Of course there were others like me, too. There were some people who were hiding out with Christian friends who came back into the camp, but couldn't stay there for any length of time. There were others who were hiding otherwise, and some like myself, who were out, temporarily, in some work place, and then wanted to join their families -- came back to the camp. So at all times, there were numbers of people who didn't have an assigned place of work. And that was very dangerous. That camp was not for people to lounge around! You had to be going to work! Well very soon, some very terrible things started happening, because the Germans knew that this was going on, obviously, that more people were coming back to the camp. So they staged raids in the daytime, to flush those who weren't at work. And on at least two occasions, they lined up people and took out every

10th person -- just counted 10 -- the 10th person was lined up and executed in front of everybody else. So it was very imperative that I go to work. Well David was working in a workshop where they were making bookcases -- woodworking workshop. And he arranged with the German administrator who was in charge of this, that he would use me. So I went to work there, and I worked there for a while. Then, in course of the following year, maybe, I worked at a number of various tasks, because there were certain jobs that were temporary, and they needed people for maybe two or three weeks. I remember one particular incident that is very interesting. I was assigned to a unit that was supposed to mend rugs, runners that are finished at the end, and when those were fraying, they had to be replaced. So one day, I was working in the main government building in Radom, mending those runners. And the governor walked by-- the German governor. I was immediately dismissed. "A Jewess? In the government building?! In full view of everybody? A slave laborer?!" And I was very obvious there. And of course, I had to wear the armband, so it was obvious that I was a Jew. That was the end of that.

Then I made covers for mattresses. One thing that's memorable, is I was assigned as a maid to a government employee, to clean her apartment. Well, one of my tasks -- I never cleaned my own room at home, you understand, we had a live-in maid -- so cleaning somebody's apartment was okay, but to build a fire in the fireplace was a different story altogether. We had these freestanding fireplaces. I don't know if you've ever seen it, with white ceramic tile? On the outside? And then a fire was made. This was a coal fire. And when the oxygen was shut off, at a certain point when the coal was glowing, then the heat emanated from those tiles. Well, I was supposed to make that fire. I didn't know how to make a fire. I remember coming back absolutely desperate, and getting lessons in how to make a fire, David, my mother, and Jules teaching me how to make a fire. Another task I did was, at one point I was a cook for a group. Now, you understand, I'm 18 years old. I'd never done any of this at home. And here I'm supposed to be cooking a meal for a bunch of Jewish workers. The kitchen in the camp gave us the dry ingredients. This was an option if the place of work had facilities where a meal could be cooked. And I was supposed to cook a meal! I didn't even know how to cook -- how to boil water, or boil an egg. But I learned in a hurry. I became so good at these things that it's amazing. After a week or two, I was very good at whatever I was doing. And then I did some clean-up work after painters. I had a very, varied career. In other words, at least it wasn't boring. I did something different all the time. They weren't pleasant tasks, and those were 12 hours of work.

Now I had told you about my father, that he was shipped off to Auschwitz, right, in April of 1942? Must have been early spring of 1943 when we came back. I was working at Armbruster's at the time, this was the woodworking shop where David and I both were working. We came back, I believe it was Friday. My mother was very excited. She told us, very conspiratorially -- nobody could hear what she was saying -- that a letter came from my father. Well, this was totally

unbelievable! This is how the story went: My father had worked in that tannery before he was taken to Auschwitz. That tannery was still in operation, and the Jewish workers were still there. There was a woman who was in charge of the office, and when she came back into the camp, she said she had a letter from a former employee of that factory -- a Pole -- but when she opened the letter, it wasn't this employee, but it was father's writing. And she said she can tell father's writing! She knew him so well! I mean they worked together for a long time! So she brought the letter. And quite obviously -- my father had the kind of handwriting that was absolutely unmistakable -- that was a letter written by him, But of course, as a Jew, he was not allowed to write a letter. The Poles who were shipped to Auschwitz, could write letters to one address. Well we didn't know all this until much later, but it was a letter from him, writing as though he was this "John" or whatever, this laborer who worked in that factory.

He also said that he had run into somebody he knew from the factory, indicating that he saw somebody there. Father knew that we would recognize the handwriting, obviously. And then in the rest of the letter, he just said to send him some things -- I guess the Christian Poles could receive packages -- onions and garlic, and some other things which I don't remember. The memorable thing is the garlic and the onions! so I remember that next day, when we went to work, David and I, we made contact to buy garlic and onions and made a package to send to Auschwitz, which we did. And this went on. A letter would come maybe once a month. I don't remember exactly. We did get several letters, and we did send several packages that included garlic and onions. And then they stopped coming. The letters stopped coming. And of course that was very disturbing, although now, this is 1943, understand it's about a year later. So we knew he was alive a year after he was shipped out to Auschwitz, and that was totally unheard of, anyway. At a later time, we did get to see him in Auschwitz -- much later. But in the summer of 1943...well, I really have to backtrack, because during that year in the camp, there were several actions. This wasn't really going to work and living quietly. I told you about the executions that took place. Then on January 13, 1943, there was another action -- apparently the population of the camp had swollen by about 500 people, like myself, who came back -- and so there was a very tragic action on that day, and probably about five or six hundred people were deported. But the perfidy of it, was really just totally unbelievable!

In November of 1942, suddenly an order came from the Germans to the Jewish administration of the camp, to start registering people who had relatives in Palestine, and to set up a priority in such a way, that those who had parents or children in Palestine would be at the top of the list. Then other relatives, like grandparents, or brothers or sisters or cousins, whatever relatives, in that order, to register them. Well, first of all, everybody was very suspicious. Why do they want to register everybody who has relatives in Palestine? The top of the list would be those who actually had -- were -- had been residents of Palestine at any time -- assuming that they would that way have been citizens of Palestine. It was very, very suspect -- what this might mean. And a lot of people were reluctant to

register -- even if they did have relatives. Rumor had it, that there was going to be an exchange of Jews for Germans who lived in Palestine. There was a German colony in Palestine -- in Jerusalem -- Katamon, right on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and they were, of course, under arrest by the British, because Palestine was a British protectorate. So this was the rumor, that they were registering Jews in order to exchange them for those Germans. So a lot of people did register, and in fact, there was a real scramble to find any kind of connection to register. We registered even though we didn't have anybody in Palestine at the time, other than cousins, but my father had been to Palestine in 1936, so we registered as though we were Palestinian citizens! and we were pretty high on the list! it was pretty dangerous. We really didn't know what it would entail. That deportation -- and it was the first one that I had been to, in January of 1943 -- they actually took the time to read that registration list, and on that day, those people who were not on the list were deported, and those who were on the list were not.

Q: How do you explain that?

A: How can you explain anything that they did! It was a bitterly cold day -- the 13th of January. It was terribly cold! And there we stood, from dawn to dusk, standing there for that list to be read. About 2,000 thousand names were read. And the rest, whoever wasn't on the list, was to be deported. We got back to our places, and life returned to the horrible reality that it had been before. And actually, I have a friend who lives in Israel now, who stood there with her parents, who had a son in Palestine. Her brother was in Palestine, and they didn't register! And they were deported. They didn't register because they didn't trust the Germans! Can you blame them? Who could have trusted them? Nobody really knew.

That's a perfect example of how we couldn't take our own destiny in our own hands, because we never knew what the results would be. Then on Purim of 1943, suddenly the Jewish head of the camp received an order to get all doctors, lawyers, all professionals, together with their families. And so then the rumor was, they are going to be the first ones to be exchanged for those Germans in Palestine. And they were so overjoyed. They gathered together, and were led out in a column, out of the gate, and then somebody noticed, that as soon as they were put on a truck, another truck was following them, and that that truck was full of Ukrainian soldiers in uniform. And a few hours later, a few came back. They were taken to a town less than 20 miles away, to the Jewish cemetery there, and they were executed!

Q: And these were doctors?

A: Doctors, lawyers, all the professionals. The intelligentsia with their families. They left maybe a handful of people, who, after the massacre was over, were not dead. They had thrown themselves on the group, pretending that they were dead, whatever. A handful remained, and they were brought back to the camp. And

that's how we knew what had happened. The massacre of Purim of 1943. So this is understandable, then that those who registered really took their lives in their own hands.

You just couldn't outsmart them. We were absolutely helpless, totally helpless. There was nothing that we could do to foresee what might happen. They came up with constantly new tactics of terror. It really is just totally incredible because when you talk about these things, you talk in general terms, you know about the extermination camps, and all the standard stuff. But the terror was so imaginative, so full of innovations all the time, that you couldn't out-guess them, and you couldn't possibly foresee what was coming next.

Well, by the summer of 1943, a group came from Warsaw, a small group of people who were printers, supposedly. And they told us a terrible tale of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. This was a group that survived the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. They were taken to Majdanek and then brought to Radom where a printing unit was established. One of these people was Alexander Donat, who later wrote quite a remarkable book called the Holocaust Kingdom. He's still alive -- he's an old man now -- and I remember him. I remember that group then became sort of integrated into the Radom group and spent the rest of the war in the various camps with us -- the women with the women and the men with the men -- wherever we went afterwards.

The rumors in that summer of 1943 were that the camp -- the labor camp -- would be liquidated. Of course there were rumors going on all the time. Lots of people were working with Germans, not that the average German knew what the plans were -- but there was speculation. There was constantly speculation going on, and besides, after the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, it became apparent that none of the small camps which were still in residential area, sort of like small ghettos would survive very long.

Now in Radom, parallel to that small ghetto -- we called it Small Ghetto; it was officially called Zwangsarbeiterlager, which means, Forced Labor Camp, Radom -- all the while, while there was a forced labor camp in town, there was also a Jewish unit working in the weapons factory, which was in Radom.

There were maybe about 500 men working in the weapons factory, and they never came to the labor camp. We never saw them. But this went on for some time. And from where we were, that seemed like the worst that could happen to anybody, would be to be sent to the weapons factory to work. So, the rumors were, that's where everybody would be sent -- ultimately. So we tried to figure out, maybe, a way of going there before and getting some kind of work that wasn't the type of work that was so terrible. You heard about the backbreaking labor that people had to perform there. The worst jobs, of course, were reserved for the Jews. Jules had a friend from school, a Christian Pole, who he knew was an assistant medical director or something in the weapons factory. And so he

contacted him to find out if there was anything he could do to arrange for some kind of work that would not be awfully hard. Jules had -- in the meantime, of course, some experience. He was mechanically very good, and he knew about electricity. Now, being an electrical engineer, obviously he must have had this inclination. So this man -- I don't remember his name; Jules would -- said that he would look around and see if he could arrange for something. The main thing was, you see, the factory worked on a 24-hour basis, so there were night shifts. And the night shift was really terrible -- 12 hours night shift. What Jules asked him to do, was to find out if he could find work for us that would only involve day-work -- the 12 hours day shift. And eventually he did. By about September, Jules and I transferred to the factory, to that camp, which was outside the town, next to the factory, or in relative proximity.

But before that, Jules and I got married. This is really something that's related to that registration for Palestine, way back a year before. Jules was not registered, and it was a terrible thing to get him out on January 13th during that Palestine action which we, the Radomer, all called the "Palestine action," January 13, 1943. But now, since the rumors were still going, that that Palestine exchange -- they kept floating, coming up again and again, the rumors -- and I fact, earlier that year, they did take a group of people who really had relatives in Palestine, and took them out of the camp, and they told them to dress up very nicely, to take a nice suitcase with nice clothes, and they were taken out, and we didn't hear that they were killed. So if they weren't killed, apparently they were transferred someplace. As it turned out, that group actually was taken to a German internment camp, and they were not actually exchanged, because the exchange did fall through, but there was such a plan.

Q: But they were taken to Israel?

A: After the war. But when I came to Bergen-Belsen in January of 1945, there they were. They were treated pretty well. So they escaped going through these death camps and all the hardships we went through. They were in a camp, but they were treated like foreign nationals. But to us, if we didn't hear that they were killed, that means they were alive. So the hope revived that there would be more of those transports. And since I was registered and pretty high on the list, we decided we better get married, so if I'm able to leave, he would leave with me. So we got married on July 8th of 1943. This was some kind of wedding, you can imagine. We went to the Jewish head of the camp, who was a Dr. Klineberger. I guess he was empowered to perform civil marriages. And believe it or not, Jules saved that marriage certificate in his shoe, and it's really a museum piece, a marriage certificate from Zwangsarbeiterlager Radom. There was, however a nice Jewish man there who was a friend of the Zaidenweber family, who performed the Jewish wedding. But many years later, Rabbi Goodman married us again. (Laughs) So when we went to the weapons factory, Jules and I were married. However we didn't live together. I was in a woman's barrack and he was in a men's barrack. Jules got a job in the factory. Now my mother and my

brother David remained in the camp. This was a very unhappy situation for me. I really didn't like the idea of going away, but it seemed like four people could not constantly stick together. We really had to do something separately. My mother insisted that we do that.

So Jules got a job through his friend of his as an electrician. And I got a job because I had the experience from the woodworking shop a year before, I got a job in the woodworking shop in the factory. What they did, they had some very high class Jewish cabinetmakers working there. And I was the only woman. What they were supposed to be working on was making shipping boxes for the guns. But in the meantime, a lot of these Germans in the higher echelons had them make some very fancy furniture for them. And I was the finisher. I was the polisher. The men taught me how to do it, and it's a highly skilled type of work, which I did very well. And it was only day work. And these men really pampered me, because I was a young girl and I was only 19 years old, and I was the only woman there. And so they shielded me and pampered me and helped me when necessary. And I had it pretty good, at that time. I had many opportunities to escape, because this furniture was quite illegally done, you understand. So often, if they expected an inspection or something, the Germans would take the piece of furniture to their home, to their apartment, and then bring me there with a guard to finish it there. Well the guard, just walked off and left me there. I could have walked out, I don't know how many times! And just disappeared, if I had someplace to disappear to! And if I were willing to take the risk of what would happen to Jules and David and my mother. And that's why I never did walk away. But I remember having this overwhelming urge, sometimes, to do it. And I had to really use reason with myself, that, "What am I going to do? Who will let me in? who will help me?" And then to jeopardize their lives. That was for sure. This friend I mentioned to you? That's what happened. She walked away -- with help. She had assistance. Somebody took her out of the factory. And afterwards, her father was tortured to death. Well I couldn't possibly see myself doing that. But my mother sort of intimated that I should. I said, "No, I just can't." So I didn't. In the meantime, the camp in town was liquidated by the end of 1943, and mother and David also came. A second camp was established adjoining that camp that the people who worked in the factory were in.

They were separate camps -- they were separated by a barbed wire fence -- and guarded by Ukrainian guards, but they could be bribed. So like maybe every evening or every other evening I would go under the barbed wire, helped by this Ukrainian, and visit my mother. Sometimes I even stayed overnight and then came back in the morning in time to go to work. And again, things settled down somewhat. They settled down for a few weeks at a time until the next crisis arose. It seemed like maybe this is the end of it, and this is how we'll finally live out, live out the remaining time. We didn't have exact knowledge of what was going on in the world, but certainly, working for Germans, we did manage to get a glimpse of newspapers, and some people even heard radio when they worked in their places of work. Not in the factory, but if they worked for a German unit. So

we knew that things were going terrible for them, that they were losing the war. And that just helped to build up our hope, because in spite of all these terrible things that were going on, in spite of the constant terror and the uncertainty, there had to be an element of hope in order to even be able to go on from day to day, because the days were really long, hard -- there were physical hardships, there was mental anguish -- so there had to be something, to want to go on to the next day. Because sometimes it really seemed -- maybe not so much at that time yet, but later, it was easier to die than go on! The prospects were very bad.

So in that period, really, it was just work. Eventually I did get put onto the gun production. I did get transferred from that cushy, cushiony job in the woodworking shop, and I was put on the machines. And that first one that I was on was really terrible. I worked day shift and night shift. Coming back to the barracks in the daytime, there was no way to shut out the light. There was no way to shut out the noise when you're in a barrack with dozens of people. I couldn't sleep in the daytime. I couldn't stay awake at night. And the responsibility for the piece of metal that I was working on on a machine which was deadening, boring, because it was a semi-automatic machine, and it was exactly the same procedure on each piece of metal for 12 hours! It was devastatingly boring. It was just excruciating. And I stood there and cried, and I couldn't keep awake, and I couldn't sleep in the daytime. It was just a disaster.

Well, finally my husband, Jules went to his friend again -- the friend who had originally arranged for us to come to the factory -- and asked him if he could do something for me. Which he did. He came through again. And he arranged for me to be transferred to a day machine, to a machine where parts could be made during the day, in one 12 hour shift. It was a small part that went into the gun. And I think they made like 300 guns in a 24 hour period. That machine produced 300 little parts in 12 hours rather than in 24 hours. So it was a lot better, but I had a terrible unit. I was very unfortunate with the people I worked with. There was only one other woman, a Christian woman. To describe her correctly, I'd have to say she was probably a streetwalker, from the behavior, the language, the looks. You can imagine the type. She resented me bitterly, and called me "Intelligentsia," or something like that, because I was educated and she wasn't and this was an insult! The man who was the foreman -- the foreman of the unit - - was Ukrainian, who was known to have been a very...you know, the Ukrainians cooperated with the Germans so that had an "in." and they had to be even "better" than the Germans. Of course, the Ukrainians are also known for having been great anti-Semites. You know what happened to the Jews of the Ukraine. So it wasn't a very happy "marriage." I tried to mind my own business, but she particularly really harassed me, constantly. That whole department was headed by a German who was an ethnic German. Those were also the worst -- the ethnic Germans. They were actually Poles of German origin. The trouble with those was, that they spoke Polish. One day this woman harassed me particularly, and finally got my ire up to the point where I really got into an argument with her. And she cursed and yelled and screamed, and finally went to the foreman, and

then the foreman came, and very quietly said to me, "Follow me." It didn't look good. I followed him. And all the Jews who were working at the machines there were following me with their eyes, you know, and we were thinking, "This is it!" This Adler, the ethnic German, was known to be a particularly cruel individual, and everybody was just terrified of him. He'd beaten up many a person, but mostly men. Nobody knew of him beating up women yet, but it looked like I was going to be the first one. So I go in there. And the Ukrainian stayed there, too. I go into his office, and he says to me -- now this is the first time I hear what I am accused of, you understand, I didn't know what I was being accused of, or what was going to happen to me -- so suddenly he says to me, "You said to this woman that when the Russians come, you, the Jews, will take care of us, the Germans. Is that right?"

Q: Meaning that you would retaliate.

A: That we would retaliate, and that we would do to them what they did to us. Well I was absolutely devastated! And I wondered, "How am I going to defend myself from this?" And suddenly. Not having anything to lose, I decided I'd have to say something, so I said, "You don't really believe that I would have said that!. Even if I thought it, which I don't, you don't think I'd be that stupid that I would say that to her!" And he just looked at me, and he nodded, and told me to go back to my machine. Which I did. And the Ukrainian followed me. After that, I was really terrified of this Ukrainian. I thought, "He's going to look for something to pin on me." And I was even more terrified of this woman. I stayed away from her. This was the summer of 1944, and it was at the time when the Germans were being really chased across Poland by the Russians. And so the situation wasn't very good for them at all, and I suppose they were being a little concerned about this.

Suddenly, one day, we were told not to go to work, and to stay in the camp. And that day it was announced that we would be leaving. It was July of 1944. We had heard rumors. In fact some people even saw German soldiers barefoot and without guns, they were routed so fast across the Vistula, which was only about 25 miles from where we were. The next day, we took our bundles and we were marched out. Nobody told us where we were going, what was in store for us, but we were on our way, a column of about 2,000 people, I would imagine, maybe even more. And it was a hot day. We were marching on roads which are...well, at that time in Poland, it's hard to describe the roads. They were really not very good. It was a highway, but it wasn't a very good highway. Many people were not able too walk fast enough. It started looking almost immediately very, very grim, because anybody who dragged their feet and stayed behind, while we didn't see it, we did hear the shots. We were guarded by many, many SS, with machine guns and dogs. We were walking through fields -- the highway ran through woods and fields of ripe wheat and at one point, maybe five or six young men broke out and started running into this very tall grain, and immediately the Machine guns went off, and they were falling like flies. At the end of that first

day, we camped outside. They put us next to a small brook on one side and a pond on the other side, so there was just a little opening, where they could guard it very easily. They had given us some bread and some food to carry along, and you know, when you march like this, the heat, practically everybody was throwing away the food, because you can't carry stuff. We were terrible worried about mother. It was hard enough for us to walk. And especially, you know, she was older. (Laughs) I mean, not by my today's standards! In 1944, she was 45 years old! Which, I don't think, even by your standards, is "older," right? But at that time, she was! However she held up pretty well. Another thing was, that horse-drawn carriages were following us. And as the guards saw it that people had a hard time walking, they invited them to get on the carriage, on the wagon. And then pretty soon, afterwards, the wagons came back empty again. And of course, you couldn't tell any more, because the shooting was going on all the time. It was like a trail of blood and bodies on the way. They were just left there by the wayside. I don't know if anybody followed and buried those bodies or collected them, but there were an awful lot of them. One of the victims was my other uncle -- the uncle by marriage whose picture I showed you, my aunt's husband, who couldn't walk very well, and went for a ride on the wagon. We never saw him again. Then the next day we marched. And there were more people falling by the wayside. And the third day. Now the third day, in the morning, they brought back a young boy who apparently had tried to escape during the night. They brought him back, and right as we were assembled there in that place, in the meadow where we spent the night, they made him kneel in front of everybody and shot him at point-blank. Just maybe from a foot away, with a handgun. That was really a terrible, terrible experience, that march. The phrase "death march" wasn't coined until much later, but this was a death march! Well on the third day, towards the end of the day, we got into a town, and were told that this is where we were going to stay, that we had arrived at our destination, the town of Tomaszow. And I remember one thing on that evening. It wasn't evening yet, but it was late afternoon. One woman who was walking next to me, she was alone, an older woman, I mean, maybe my mother's age, meaning "older" for a 19 year old, she stepped out of the column and onto the sidewalk and then was looking around. I guess she was testing it, to see if anything could happen. Nothing happened. And she just disappeared into the mob. I never saw her again. I don't know where she went that night. She may not have lived another hour. I don't know. But it was very tempting, seeing how easy it was, to do the same. She obviously didn't survive, because then when all the Radomer gathered after the war ended, I never saw her again, so she must not had any place to go. Whatever happened to her, I don't know, but I saw her, making it, and at the time it looked very tempting. But we couldn't both do it, I mean, all four. We couldn't. It was out of the question.

We were separated in Tomaszow, the men and the women. There were fewer women, of course, than men; I would say maybe only 25% of the 2,000 were women, about 500 women and 1,500 men. The women were taken to a building that turned out to be the local jail, and we were put not in cells, but in an attic -- in

a huge attic where we all were. There were some straw mattresses on the floor -- bundles of straw -- and that's where we were.

The men, we didn't know where they went. We didn't see them again for a week. Needless to say, there was no water, and there were no sanitary facilities there, and we were given some food, but not much, and nothing very memorable, as none of the food was very memorable the whole time. A week later, on a Saturday -- that I know for sure, it was a Saturday, because this is probably the really most important moment in this whole epic -- that Saturday afternoon, we were gathered up from our attic and taken down and marched to where there were railroad tracks and wagons were waiting. And there were the men! So we saw them very briefly. And we embraced, and we cried, and expressed our uncertainty, because by then there weren't even rumors. We knew absolutely nothing that was going on. This was really being totally led like cattle.

Well, then we were put in those train -- the well known phrase, "the cattle boxcars." And we were not allowed to be with the men. The women were put in separate boxcars and the men were put in separate boxcars. And the train started moving. We didn't know where it was going. We didn't know how long we would be on the train. Spent the night there. Hot. No food. No water. No place to go to the bathroom. This looked like absolutely the end. I mean, we knew where that train was gonna go. This was it. What happened two years before to the other people, in 1942, was now happening to us. It was obvious that this was the final deportation. Well that Sunday morning, bright and early, just a daybreak, and it was a sunny day, the sky was as blue as can be, and the sun shining, we arrived. And the first sign we saw was "Arbeit Macht Frei." "Where are we? Where are we?" as they started opening the doors. And somebody said, "Auschwitz."

So, of course, we knew that was it. And actually, at that point, nobody needed to tell us what was going on in Auschwitz. The smell told us all. The horrible smell of the burning flesh. It was just unmistakable. Although you or I or anybody else had never smelled the smell of burning flesh, it was obvious what was going on there. And so the doors were opened. And "Out!" We were told to get out, which we did. And then we discovered it was just the women who got out -- at least at that point. The men did not. They only opened the wagons of the women's boxcars, and everything went very fast. We were ordered constantly to -- some orders were thrown at us -- we were totally bewildered. And then finally we ended up in a building where there were a lot of people, obviously prisoners, who were very nicely dressed, very clean. They wore the striped prison uniforms, but very clean and neat. Their hair, their appearance was very nice. And it was just like an unreal world. I mean the whole experience seemed totally unreal. The sun shining, the cloudless sky, warm, and these people, with smiles on their faces, very casual, but they did talk to us, and they said, "Do you know where you are?" And they told us what's going on here. "You know what's going on here? Do you know what you're here for?" And they were quite open about it. But the

orders kept being shouted very quickly, “Ger undressed! Line up here! Line up there!” Everybody was lined up and they were going through and shaving off some people’s hair and not others, but everybody’s hair was cut. My hair wasn’t totally shaved off, but it was cut like to here. It wasn’t long to begin with, but whatever there was cropped very short. My mother’s hair was shaved off completely, and many women’s hair was shaved off. And then the grotesque situation of looking at each other, we just started to laugh! Have you ever seen a woman with her hair shaved off? It looks grotesque, so we were laughing. I mean, the whole situation was so totally unreal -- the total uncertainty of what was going to happen and then what already was happening -- that we were crying and laughing. We didn’t know what was going on.

And then suddenly the order came to line up single file. At that point, a number of German officers walked in. At the head of that group was one who was very tall, extremely handsome. He was wearing a monocle in one of his eyes. He had a little stick under his arm, and he was wearing white gloves. His uniform was immaculate. And then a number of others, but he stood out, because he was like three feet taller than everybody else, or so it seemed. We were lining up, the orders are flying, “quick, fast,” and there he stood, with his hands like this, and one finger only going to the right or to the left. And it seemed like immediately there was a group forming on one side, and a group on the other side. And I’m standing behind my mother, and suddenly, almost as we come in front of the officer, she grabbed me and shoved me in front of her. And before we knew what was going on, it all went so fast, he motioned me over there, and by the time I turned around, my mother was behind me. And so when I came to from this total confusion, looking at the other side and seeing that on the other side were women who looked a little older, who didn’t look very good. Their bodies were a little, you know, the skin was hanging, and they didn’t look very good. I could see what was going on. Obviously those of us who were young and still in good shape were on one side, and those who were on the other side were not in such good shape. And so, suddenly, the whole terror of the situation became real to me, that here I was! We were going through a selection. But this was still just speculation. I mean, you don’t know anything for sure, but it was apparent, because there were daughters on this side, and mothers on this side, and they were crying and they were pushing, they wanted to go to the other side, and they were holding them back forcibly, so it didn’t look good. It looked like a selection, although I had never been to one before like this,

So then I said to my mother, “Why did you push me ahead of you?” and she said, “When I saw what was going on, I didn’t want you to follow me.’ She was afraid that if I were behind her, and she was put on the other side, I would follow her. It was many years later that I really fathomed the magnitude of this. You have to have children of your own to understand what a mother can do,

Q: Sure. And she knew you, she knew of your devotion, all the times when you could have left, and you didn’t.

A: She knew I'd follow her, and there wouldn't be any doubt. There was no doubt in her mind. She knew I would go with her. But we were lucky. We were both on the same side. And so then, in quick order, we were shoved into another room which had shower heads -- it wasn't until later that I found out that the gas chamber on the other side also had shower heads, and this is how the deception was. But everything was so fast. The water came out so fast that we knew we were in a shower room. We didn't even have time to speculate what it was. There it was.

Q: Excuse me, the German officer was Dr. Mengele?

A: That's right. That's who it was. But I didn't know then. I didn't know until afterwards. When we came out of the shower and they handed us -- now mind you, wet bodies, this was the beginning of August, but it was a very nice warm day -- they handed us a dress. That's it. And we had our shoes. They told us to take our shoes with us. In fact, that was one of the lucky things. Same as Jules and David. At that point, they didn't have enough shoes to take away those and give other ones, because there were so many transports coming to Auschwitz. There was so much commotion, they told us to keep our shoes -- and fortunately, because my mother had in her red shoes, which I remember, with heavy heels, she had diamonds in those heels, which later came in very, very handy.

Q: (Gasps.) and Jules, of course preserved the family pictures in his shoes.

A: Well it wasn't until later, also, that we found out that the men did not stay in Auschwitz. The men were shipped out elsewhere. And at that point, from then on, we did not know anything that happened to them. We had no idea where they were sent, we had no idea whether they were alive or dead, until six months after the war, that we found out where David and Jules were.

But we did find out, that very day, that father was in Auschwitz. And alive and well. As we came out of the shower and were given that dress, and outside to line up, a young man from Radom who had been arrested also, but later, and shipped to Auschwitz, came up to us. This son of this Brenamann. The man whom I called the first day after the deportation in 1942? He was there and he came to see us. And he said to my mother, "Your husband is here. He knows that you have arrived." And I guess we couldn't see him, but we knew he was there. There was an internal machinery in Auschwitz of prisoners who had been there for a long time. Obviously, those who had been there for a long time had contacts, knew each other, and by virtue of having survived for such a long time, had some functions that gave them a little more freedom to move around within the confines of the cap, and also to know Germans and have a tiny bit of pull. You understand. So this was the situation with this young Brenamann and this was the situation with my father, after two-and-a-half years of having been there. Of course, his is an entirely different story. He's no longer alive to tell the story,

but his story by far exceeds anything that we could tell you. To have survived for two-and-a-half years in Auschwitz is really something that's unheard of. From the transport he was in with, of the 70, some 75 - you remember, I told you earlier about it, only three were alive. But my father was a registrar. He knew German and Polish and Russian and French, and therefore he could act as a contact between these various nationalities that were arriving in Auschwitz. There was a group that did the tattooing -- this was all done by prisoners, and with them were the registrars. Germans kept meticulous records of everybody who arrived in Auschwitz and stayed. Those who were gassed immediately were not registered. But those who were tattooed and remained for any length of time in Auschwitz were registered. And my father was a registrar. So as a result, he wore a clean, neat striped uniform, and he could move around between the compounds, but not in the women's compounds.

He was a registrar of the arrivals of the men, although there was some work that men performed that did bring them to the women's compound. There were some men that came into the women's compounds, but not my father, so the time we did see him, and it was only once that we saw him when he was in Auschwitz, was across the electrified barbed wire fence. But we did see him, and we did talk to him. Our Compound B adjoined Compound A, which was a men's compound, so he came there one day, and somebody called us to come! We stood between the two barracks, on our side of the fence, and he was on the other side, and we yelled to each other, and talked. But he was able to arrange -- because he did know other people, having been there so long -- he was able to arrange for us to get a work assignment, which the women from my transport did not get. The Lodz ghetto was being liquidated at the time, and many transports were arriving every day. The gas chambers were going full blast. The compounds were full, and they were actually in the process of shipping many out into Germany. We were considered a transit group that was to be in Auschwitz only until somebody required labor workers. So we were not assigned any work. We were in the barracks doing nothing. Occasionally they would come and take a few of us out of the compound to carry rocks from one place to another, and the next day another group would go and carry the same rocks back from that place to that place. And in a place like Auschwitz, to sit there, every day, all day, doing absolutely nothing, with the amount of food that we were getting, and the shadow of the gas chamber, and the horrible smell, and the smoke coming out of the chimneys, was the kind of mental torture -- and physical, really -- that is totally impossible to describe. Not having anything to do just compounded it all. So he arranged for us to be assigned to a group -- a workshop, a sewing workshop. And as a result, we were transferred from the barrack, which was a transit barrack, to a permanent barrack. In other words, we're staying now. We're staying in Auschwitz rather than...well, one didn't know. Was it better to stay or was it better to try to get out -- on a transport. Nobody knew. The only certainty was where you were. Once you were given a tattoo in Auschwitz, it seemed like you were registered to stay. It didn't work that way, of course, because many people were gassed while they were residents in Auschwitz, but it seemed, at that

point, that perhaps the known was better than the unknown. And further more, we didn't have to stand muster for quite as long as the people who were in the transit barracks, so in a way, we were a little privileged, being there. And then there was an opportunity of course, to organize a little more food. and this was done by doing some sewing for the women who worked in the kitchen. Since I had a needle, and I had thread, and there was some fabric, I could make blouses to wear under those -- the striped prison uniforms were made of very coarse cloth -- and so it was nice to have a little blouse to wear underneath. And then, working in the kitchen, they wanted little aprons. Those who had plenty of food could think of these little things. I made blouses for them by hand, I sewed it by hand. And in turn they gave me a little margarine, and a little sugar, and some jam, some marmalade, so we could supplement our diet, a little -- which was really great.

I mean, one doesn't think that those things go in in Auschwitz, but even there, people who were there for a long time settled down to a certain routine! A certain amount of normalcy. It's totally inconceivable for us, living in a normal society, that there are levels of normalcy. And there are. I imagine that even prisoners in a jail -- in a prison -- have some kind of a normalcy routine. This is how we had it.

There were all these things going on. There was all this danger there, every day. There was always the chance to be put into the gas chamber. There was a chance that you'd get sick. There was a chance that they would pick you for medical experiments. There was all this going on. But in the meantime, while it wasn't happening, you had to live. You had to settle down to some kind of routine to feel that you're still a human being. Does this make sense to you?

Q: Of course! There is this extraordinary ability that humans have to adapt to their surroundings. And those who didn't adapt, died.

A: Exactly! It was a great effort not to give in to that state where you wouldn't accept, and you'd be rebellious, and you would think, "What's the use," and then give up. This was the easier way. You had to fight. It was a fight to settle down, to have a normal day.

I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow! But today, as long as it's a normal day -- I don't even know what's going to happen at 5 in the afternoon, but at noon, things are still normal -- I'm fighting. I'm living. And I resolve to be alive. And this is how, day after day went on in Auschwitz. And things happened. People were being sent out. Ultimately, by probably the end of September, all the women that came with us, that were still in the transit barrack -- were sent out. And I remember having some pangs at times, thinking, "Maybe, maybe it would have been better for us to leave." But in the meantime, you had to accept what you had, and hope for the best. And in Auschwitz, we definitely didn't know what was going on in the outside world.

In the meantime, one Friday afternoon, there was an explosion, and the camp siren, the main siren went off, and subsequently we found out that one of the crematoria was blown up by the Zonderkommando, which was the special command of the Jews who had to burn the bodies of those who were gassed. They were apparently all captured and executed. But there was a commotion at that time, and it seemed like things were very unsettled there.

There were air raids, air raid sirens went off a number of times, and we heard planes. There were maybe even some distant sounds, but I'm not sure that those were bombs or not. There were rumors that one of the factories in one of the camps was bombed by Allied planes, but I don't really know for sure whether that was the case. It may have been anti-aircraft fire that we heard. But we did hear things were going on. And in the meantime, transports kept coming. And the gassing was going on until about November. Everything stopped in November. There was no longer any smoke coming out of the chimneys. Suddenly everything stopped. The whole extermination process stopped, and transports were no longer arriving in Auschwitz. They were leaving. There was only one transport, I remember, having arrived. It was from Theresienstadt. And one fellow, a good friend who now lives in Minneapolis, was in that transport, in fact. He did survive. There were children in that transport, mothers with children, and the fires were not going anymore.

My father had left, too. We heard that he had left on a transport. I think it was young Brenamann who again notified us that he had left. It wasn't until later that we found out the circumstances of why he left. He actually left on his own. He joined a transport practically under the noses of the Germans, who didn't want him to leave, because he had a death warrant on his head, and he found out about it, and that's why he -- essentially -- escaped, via a transport out of Auschwitz.

And then things were very uncertain. We knew that the medical experiments were still going on, because around late fall, a group came to our compound and we all had to line up, and they were picking out women for experiments. That was terrifying. We didn't know exactly what was going on, but we knew there were medical experiments going on. And then on January 18th, it was like a replay of what happened in Radom six months before, when we didn't go to work, were told to get dressed, and be ready to leave. And again, the same thing. We were given blankets. We were given some food. and we were marched out. It -- it was almost like unbelievable, turning back and looking at that sign, and actually leaving Auschwitz. It was unreal. Some people stayed. They said nobody could stay, but it turned out later that those who were not well, those who were sick, or just couldn't walk, could stay. Which, of course, nobody would want to do. We thought, immediately after we leave, they'll blow up all the barracks, if only the sick people are staying. But it turned out that they didn't. That maybe 2,000 people remained. We didn't find that out until much later. But they were left

there to their own devices, without food, without anything, and it was at least a week before the Russians came. But they were alive! At least most of them.

They did blow up the remaining crematoria and the gas chambers -- the Germans -- before we left. In fact, maybe a couple of weeks before, they were blown up, so you couldn't even see the chimneys any more. You know, not only the smoke, but not even the chimneys, so that gave us a lot more hope. Once there isn't this immediacy of that death lurking right there -- no distance at all -- it seemed like there was a little more of a chance.

Well we were marching. That was another death march of three days, which was absolutely incredible -- in the middle of January. It isn't quite as cold there as it is here, but it was cold. And walking in the snow. And cold. With the guards. The same thing. People trying to escape. People sitting down at the side of the road, just not caring anymore, and being shot. We walked. We happened to be walking, and a couple of non-Jewish women that we got acquainted with, as we were walking. This was a column of thousands of women. I mean, this was a much larger group than the one from Radom. Maybe three times as large. And it was really getting -- I was getting very, very down. I was worried about mother, about her being able to walk. And all the while it seemed that while I was worried about her, I was the one to be worried about, because my state -- my psychological state -- wasn't so good. And I was beginning to contemplate whether it was really worth going on and fighting, whether there was, really, an end to this suffering, and I started talking to my mother about sitting down and just giving up. And it was really her strength that kept me going, and these two young women who were with us were really getting me worked up and pepped up.

The second night that we were marching -- well, you know, days are short, so it probably wasn't night, it was evening, it was after dark -- I was getting to the point of total exhaustion, and I thought, well, if we are not going to stop some place for the night, I'm just not going to be able to go on. While we were marching, my mother noticed one of the guards who was walking nearby was a guard from Radom whom she recognized. And he recognized her, too. So he started a conversation with her. It must have been boring, marching, for them, too. So he was talking to her. So I said to him, "Can you tell us when we're going to stop for the night?" and he said, "See that church steeple there?" it was about a kilometer-and-a-half, which is about a mile. He said, "That's where we're stopping, in that village." You know, when you have a destination, you sort of feel like you can gather the last of your strength and go on, which I did. And we're passing the steeple, and we're going and going on and on, and we're not stopping. Suddenly -- now this is, mind you, five years later, this is January of 1945 -- I got so upset that a German lied to me. Why should I have expected anything else, is the question? (Laughter) Five years later, I'm still trusting a German! I got so upset! "Why did he lie to me! Why did he lie to me!" And these two women said, "Why are you so upset?" "I can't believe it! He didn't

have any reason to lie to me and he did! I'm not going to go on any further." I really got hysterical. And finally my mother said to me, "Okay, if you want to sit down, let's sit down." And I said, "No, not you! Just I!" Suddenly the whole ridiculous situation struck me. And I mean, she was really saying I said, "No, you go on, I'm gonna sit down and have them shoot me." And why I ever thought that she would agree to that, you know...(Laughs.)

Your mother was a psychologist.

- A: She really was. So we went on. It wasn't much longer after that that we stopped. And we did stop in a village where the people -- those were ethnic Germans, and it was probably the first time in all these years that we encountered some kindness -- because these people let us into their houses. They were told we were either to sleep outside or in the barns. But they let some of us inside, and they gave us hot soup. And they didn't have room for everybody to lie down, you know, but we could sit on the steps, and we could find as much room as we could to rest. It was really, I mean, inside a warm house. You can imagine. Because the night before we slept in barns, and it was excruciatingly cold. And I remember my feet were wet inside, but I was afraid to take off my hiking boots. I was afraid to take them off, lest somebody would steal them. And so eventually, I had to take them off to let my socks dry out. And both of us put the boots between us, my mother and I, as we were lying next to each other, so that if anybody was tampering with them, we would feel it. It was a terror to lose your boots!

So here we were in this warm house, and it really, it sort of restores your belief in human beings sometimes, when you most need it. That was a real boost to my morale. And the next day, we marched again until late afternoon, and then we came to the siding where the cars were -- back onto the boxcars. Only this time, they were open boxcars. Now I don't know whether that was better or worse. I the winter it probably would have been better to be in closed boxcars, but those were open ones. And there was only room for half of us, maybe, to sit, and half to stand, so we took turns. And we didn't know where we were going. The train started moving, and not too much later, we arrived at a station that said, "Grossrosen." And we knew there was a concentration camp called Grossrosen. So it looked as though that's where they brought us. Now this was a very long train. There was more than one group marching from Auschwitz. There was also a men's group, so there were thousands and thousands of people. It took a long time to load up that train. And I don't know whether Grossrosen was a women's camp or a men's camp or both, but the train stood there for a while on the tracks, and what turned out later was that that was actually the destination of the terrain, but that the camp was being evacuated, also, and so they didn't want to accept us. This was, you understand, January of 1945. Things are very bad for the Germans, militarily. The war is going very, very bad. So while the train was standing on the tracks there at the station, I was right at the end of the boxcar, standing there. And the place was deserted. There wasn't a soul to be seen. And at one point, from the back of the train, one of the guards started walking towards the front of

the train, and as he passed by me, by the boxcar that I was on, I -- impulsively -- I said, "Could I get a drink of water?" He looked up, but he didn't even stop. He just kept walking. And I thought, "There I go again, thinking (laughs) that I can get something." A while later, he walked back. And as he was walking, he was looking up as if he was searching for somebody, and spotted me, and handed me a canteen full of warm water with a slice of bread floating in it.

That was the other incident of kindness that I encountered in that particular sequence. Of course that was something. Because I told you that in the beginning, when we left Auschwitz, they gave us food. They gave us each two loaves of bread, and a can, a large can of something. Well, very soon, we had to throw all this away, because we couldn't carry it. The only thing we carried were the blankets. We knew that you could survive without food, but in this cold, you couldn't survive without a blanket. And even carrying the blanket, I still remember how heavy my shoulders were, how I just couldn't really carry, even the blanket. So we hadn't had anything to eat except for that soup that was given to us by these people in the village. So that piece of bread was very welcome, which I shared as much as I could, you know, with the people who were around me, and my mother. Then the train started moving again, and it went all night. Early in the morning, it stopped, and we were at a big station. This turned out to be Breslau, a very large city in western Silesia. And from a distance, we could see a lot of people at the train station. Germans who were being evacuated, because this is already pretty close to the front line! The Russians are very close, and people were running deep into Germany. There were young boys, Hitler Jugend, with steaming kettles of soup, handing out -- to the Germans. This wasn't for us! We were parked there on a siding. But those were the images that I saw that morning. And it actually gave us a lift, because we saw how panic-stricken the Germans were, how things were going badly for them, and it seemed like the end of the war was very close, so naturally this somewhat lifts your spirits, we weren't being killed. They were still transporting us. So there was still some hope. And they could have lined us up. They could have thrown a few bombs, in Auschwitz. They didn't have to march us, and take us to the trains, and transport us. We didn't know what was going on, but it looked like there might still be some hope for us. Then the train went on, and towards evening, we got to Buchenwald. This was one of the major camps, Buchenwald. There we got off the trains, and we stayed. However they didn't put us anywhere. We stayed there right beside the siding. And there was soup. They gave us soup. This was a men's camp. We encountered some of the men, the prisoners of Buchenwald, and talked to them. but it appeared as though we weren't staying in Buchenwald, either. We didn't know what was going on, whether they were making arrangements for us to remain there, or whether we were going further. It was totally uncertainty.

Shortly after that, however, a different train came, with closed boxcars, and we were loaded again into the boxcars. And it was just an overnight trip. Early in the morning, the train stopped again. That was a very harrowing trip, because we

were very, very crowded, and people were getting sick. And my mother wasn't well. She was sick that night, and I was really terror-stricken. That was a very bad trip. It was still dark. Was it? Yah, I think it was still dark when we stopped at a station. The train stopped, and the guard opened the door a little bit, just a slight bit, and he asked, "Where are you coming from? Where were you, where did you start out from?" and we said, "Auschwitz." And he said, "Oh, you poor girls. It's too bad that they managed to take you away from there. The Russians just occupied Auschwitz." He was a Czech -- an ethnic German. He spoke Czech. I don't know whether he felt sorry for us really, or whether he was just taunting us. I don't know, but that's what he said. So we knew that much. That now, a week later -- this was now a week after we left Auschwitz -- that Auschwitz was now occupied by the Russians.

So we asked him where we, what station that was, and that was Hanover, which is a major city in northern Germany. He didn't know where we were going. And pretty soon the train started again. And it moved and it stopped and it moved. It was a long, long time. I think that took that whole day. And Hanover is very close to where we actually ended up. But it was dark when we arrived, so it must have been daytime when we were in Hanover, I think. It must have been. I don't remember exactly, but I do remember that it was dark when we got to our destination. And the train stopped. We didn't know where we were. The train stopped and we got off, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. It was right in the middle of a forest. And the reason I remember it so vividly, is because the surroundings were breathtakingly beautiful. It was fairly mild. It wasn't very cold, although it was January, and there was snow on the branches. It was a forest of needle trees, of pines, so it was green. And the snow on the trees, and just a little snow on the ground, and it was a very bright night. There was a moon, a bright moon, it was very bright. And it looked just totally unreal -- so beautiful. And there was no camp to be seen. Of course, it didn't dawn on me, at the time, that that's how the executions were being carried out -- in forests.

At the moment, I was just really taken by the beauty of the surroundings, And so off the trains, and we're marching again. And finally we came to where there were barbed wires, and there were buildings. Actually, it was almost comforting to see that there was a camp. And as we passed by some barracks, there were people at the barbed wire, and some of those people were the ones who had left Radom in exchange, who were supposed to go to Palestine. They were there. But in a separate section. We were taken to a shower. There was no smell, so it didn't seem like there was a gas chamber or burning bodies. We assumed we would just get a shower, which we did, and then get our clothes back, which were then put through disinfection, and we were brought to the barracks. Now the barracks looked very neat and clean. What tipped us off -- what this had been before -- were the signs in the various barracks in different languages. It had been a prisoner of war camp, see, so one barrack had all the signs in French, and one had all in Italian, and one had all in Russian.

But it was empty. When we arrived, there wasn't a soul. We were the first inhabitants of what was to become one of the most infamous of the end-of-the-war camps -- Bergen-Belsen. There were no bunks. Yeah, there were bunks in some of the barracks, but the barrack we were assigned did not have bunks. We were handed -- as we walked out of the shower room -- we were all dressed -- we were handed a bundle of straw. And we still had our blankets, or at least some of us still had our blanket. And there was the floor! So we laid out the straw, and we laid down on the straw, and that was that. And that was how we lived in Bergen- Belsen.

After that, daily, hundreds and thousands of people were arriving in Bergen-Belsen. We were the very first group. But after that, the transports arrived daily. And pretty soon, all these barracks -- I keep on wanting to say cabins, because they really looked like cabins, they didn't look like the barracks in Auschwitz -- they were all filled up. And this was just one area that I knew of, and there were some others. Ultimately there were 25-40,00 people in Bergen-Belsen.

This was the end of January. The camp was liberated on April 15 which was only 10 weeks later. We spent 10 weeks in Bergen-Belsen, and the kind of devastation that took place in Bergen-Belsen was never in Radom, or Auschwitz, with all these other things that were going on. This was new, imaginative. This was death by starvation and disease. Just absolutely incredible how people were falling like flies. Maybe for the first four weeks, I think, we were given a slice of bread and a cup of soup -- daily. After the first four weeks, the bread was cut out, and the soup consisted of rutabagas and water. And in the last six weeks, half the people, half of the 25,000 were dead. Because of the straw on the floor, the lice started. And by the end of February, many people were dying of typhus.

Now the group I was with, we were the ones from Auschwitz, and the crew, the guards and the commandant came from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, so the whole hierarchy was transferred, directly, and they were in charge. So they set up the same kind of set-up as in Auschwitz. So we just continued in our work -- in the workshop, the sewing workshop, which is what we did in Auschwitz, which of course, in a way, was also a blessing in disguise, not having to be in the barracks all day. We didn't have any special privileges as far as food was concerned, but just keeping busy -- doing something with your hands in this horror that was Bergen-Belsen.

But towards the end of February, one day I felt sick. I really felt sick. I felt nauseous, and I had a terrible headache. The main thing was that terrible, splitting headache. And pretty soon I was very, very sick with a high fever. And by then most of the women in that sewing workshop had become ill, and that was discontinued. Of course, I couldn't go to work any more, either. My mother, at that point, was transferred to work. She wasn't sick. She had had typhus in World War I, and very often, typhus gives you a lifetime immunity once you've had it. So she was working in the kitchen now. Of course there was nothing in

the kitchen but rutabagas and water, because that's all that was being prepared for the prisoners. In the meantime, we had been transferred to a different barrack that had bunks. We still just had the bundle of straw, but there were bunks in that barrack. I was very sick, and it was obvious that I had typhus. And typhus is a very deadly disease. It's carried by lice, and it's infectious. It's an epidemic kind of disease, since it's carried by infected lice. And the whole camp was infected. Generally the course of the disease takes two weeks. After two weeks there is a crisis point at which one either totally recovers -- the fever goes away and you're left very weak, but you're alive -- or else some vital organ is attacked. Nobody dies of typhus. They die from a secondary disease which is caused by the typhus virus or bacteria -- I don't know what it is caused by exactly -- and it attacks the liver or the kidneys or the brain, and that's what people usually die of. And there really was no treatment. It's a very fuzzy period in my life, because I had such a high fever most of the time, and I was really lucid only occasionally. Very often, I was just totally out of it. I remember certain episodes, but not the entire thing. So I remember episodes of my mother coming from work, my awareness that she was coming into the barracks, that she would come into the barracks, and I had to be conscious, because I was really in a twilight zone most of the time, that I'd better be conscious, because she called my name from the door of the barracks to make sure that I was alive. If I was dead, she wouldn't even want to come in, you know, so if I didn't answer, she would assume that I was dead. So I had to force myself to hear her voice when she called. I remember this. And I remember occasions when she brought me some potato peels to eat, and how I thought this was the greatest delicacy, how marvelous it was, how I really just relished this marvelous food. And then every day even though I was most of the time half-conscious, I had to get up and go to the muster. And I knew that if I didn't make it to the muster and they discovered that I was sick -- you see I had to pretend that I wasn't sick -- I would be transferred to the "hospital" -- in quotation marks "hospital" -- where people were sent to die. So I dragged myself out of the bunk, and dragged myself to the front of the barrack -- I was in the back of the barrack, my bunk, and I had to go the whole length of that hallway, out the front door -- to stand in muster, And I remember fainting about five times before I dragged myself out. And once I got there, two people would usually sort of hold me up, so I could stand up. And I managed, until I was past the crisis. I managed to escape being sent to the hospital that whole time, until one day I suddenly dropped. I just folded during the muster, and they took me to the hospital. And I knew that if my mother found out -- that if she came to the barrack and I wasn't there -- she'd think I was dead. Well, she did find out -- the blockelderster -- the woman who is in charge of the barrack, told her where I went -- and she came. There I was in a bunk about two feet wide, with two more people. And it was obvious -- I mean, people lived only maybe a few hours, then somebody else was -- this was it. Well, I mentioned the diamonds in my mother's heel. She still had those shoes. She still had that diamond there. She went to the woman who was in charge of our barrack, and she said, "I'll give you a diamond ring if you bring her back." (Laughs.) and that's where the diamond ring went. And that's how I came back

to the barrack to be with my mother again, still alive, out of that death trap that was the hospital.

Q: And with no medication.

A: No medication. Well, that goes without saying, of course.

Q: The diamond ring couldn't buy medication.

A: No, but the diamond ring got me out of sure death in that "hospital." So it was fortunate that she had that. And that was it. There was one other diamond ring that was left, that I have. She had two, one in each heel. She gave away this one, and the other one she had. And when she died, I have it. And when I die, my daughter will have it. I think this is probably the one and only thing that we have left of our former lives, plus a few pictures.

This was already the end of March or beginning of April, and so it was very close to liberation. At that point, it looked like we might make it. We knew that the Germans were surrounded. We knew that the Allied forces were already on German soil. We didn't know any particulars, of course, but we knew that something was very, very imminent. So while there was hope building up, there was also a certain amount of despair, because we were so trapped, that how much would it take to just take care of us all? First of all, death was all around us. There were piles -- mountains of bodies lying around, because there was no one to bury those bodies. There were so many hundreds dying every day in Bergen-Belsen, that there was nothing but piles and piles of bodies. I remember that in my lucid moments when I was sick, I was looking at those piles of bodies and saying to myself, "I don't want to be one of them. I'm not going to be one of them." I was so resolved. I had such will, and much later, most of my friends who are doctors say: "This is nothing to sneeze at." This was a very important psychological tool that I was using, telling myself, "I'm gonna make it! I'm not gonna be like one of those bodies." And of course, my mother, you know, the incentive of wanting to go on from minute to minute, because, while she hadn't been sick, she was just like a stick -- emaciated -- and it wouldn't have taken much for her to just fall down. I remember this one Belgian woman who lay on the floor next to me. She was alone. She had a husband and a child who were deported previously. And when we first arrived, she kept telling herself that they took the child to some place where children were treated pretty well, and she was kidding herself that they were still alive and that they were well. And then, at some point, she seemed to be changing. We didn't want to tell her anything, you know, otherwise. Nobody contradicted her, that she was fooling herself. But at some point she must have given up this delusion, this self-deception. And one morning she just didn't wake up. She was getting more and more despondent, telling how it's not worth surviving, what is she going to live for when all her family is no longer here, and one day she just didn't wake up! She resolved to die, because it was easier. And I could see that, and I knew that all it took was for

me to do the same. The body didn't have any more resistance, so it had to be all up here in the head.

Q: And you had something to live for.

A: Exactly! Exactly. But you see, most women managed to form the kinds of bonds with strangers that would make it possible for them to have a meaning, that their life had a meaning for somebody, that if they died, somebody would be sad, and it would be devastating to them, and so almost all of us who survived had some kind of an incentive, I think. Or it wouldn't have been possible to make it psychologically. Because physically, obviously, it was totally impossible to make it.

Well one week before the liberation -- this is now, of course, from hindsight: I know it was a week before -- the Germans left. They suddenly left. One morning we got up, and there were no German guards. However we weren't unguarded you understand, in their place were Hungarian soldiers. Just regular soldiers! And when we asked them what had happened, they said they didn't know, but the Germans left, that the Allies are very close, and that there is a front not far from there, and they were just told to guard us. So we just continued with hardly any food, and the total uncertainty of what might happen.

At this point, with the few barracks, a very confined little camp, a few bombs would have -- we expected it to be obliterated. And then day after day went on. And things were just the same. Until one day -- the day of liberation. Let me read to you a few thoughts that I wrote down about that day.

April 15, 1945, was a bright and sunny day at Bergen-Belsen. I remember thinking how ironic it was, that the sun would be shining on this desperate, indescribably horrible hell of a camp, which would seem more properly enveloped in darkness and gloom. The wretched remnant of humanity of which I was a part, on the verge of collapse from starvation and epidemic of spotted typhus, trying to soak up the sunshine which has meaning only for those who are free and happy.

Despair, hunger and death were our constant companions. Fewer than half of us who arrived here from Auschwitz less than three months before were still alive, shadowy skeletons all. The thought of death was with me for so long that it no longer scared me. All the emotion left in me was regret, sorrow that my life, too, like so many before me and around me, would end. That I, too, would end up on a pile of bodies which were filling the camp with no one to bury them, discarded like so much trash.

When I heard the commotion and noise some distance away, I didn't even raise my head, thinking that now the end was coming. But suddenly I heard a voice coming over a loudspeaker, a voice saying something, not in German, but in

English, and then in Polish. And then I heard the most beautiful words, “We have come to free you. This is the Polish Brigade of the British Army.’ And I saw a British tank with the white star moving slowly between the two rows of barracks, and the soldier on top of the open turret saying these words over and over again. And people crying and laughing and hugging each other, crowding around the tank. I didn’t see any of these very clearly; my eyes were full of tears I didn’t think I was still capable of. I wanted to shout, but no voice came. I was terrible afraid that this was but a dream from which I would soon awake to face the horrible reality once again.

But it was not a dream. For me, one of the not too many lucky ones, it was a dream come true. (Pauses, weeping.) This was a day of euphoria. But the reality was still around us. The British tank was the only one we saw that day. And it wasn’t until about two or three days later that there were more British troops. It turned out that this was really an advance tank. This was a front line. And there could have been a military reverse. That euphoria could have turned back into the nightmare that it had been. But fortunately, of course, the British did come and firmly occupied that area.

For the first two days, we had no food at all, which wasn’t any different than what was before. But then when they finally brought in a field kitchen, and they were able to establish their position, they did give us food. so what did they give us? A loaf of bread - freshly baked bread. It was warm. And they brought in a kettle of soup that was thick, and what I remember was the pieces of meat and fat on top of it. I mean, we were absolutely wild! Fortunately, our stomachs couldn’t hold much of it, because it was nothing short of disaster -- that fresh bread and that rich soup. For myself one of the lucky ones, I just got dysentery, which lasted for six months. But some people fared much, much worse. Some people actually died from it. It wasn’t until maybe a day or so later that they had some different food and realized what they were dealing with, and started giving us some very bland cereal-type food, which was what our stomachs could tolerate. (Laughs)

People were still dying of typhus, and people were still coming down with the typhus -- new cases -- and people were dying from the typhus and from the over-eating. In fact, they numbered in the thousands. I know people -- I knew people personally -- who died after they were liberated. So it was a lucky day for some of us, but not for all of us. There was still an awful lot of sick, dying people.

The British captured the German guards who had left the camp previously and brought them back. They bulldozed the entire area where the decomposing bodies were. The Germans had to do that, the German guards, and bury the bodies in a mass grave, which is still there. This is what remains of Bergen-Belsen.

We stayed in these barracks for three weeks. That was a quarantine. It was at that time that I found out that Roosevelt had died. We just found out what was

going on in the world! The war was still on! This was April 15th! It lasted for another three weeks, until the 8th of May. During that time, while we were still in those barracks, they brought in a van and had us all go through a DDT spray. You know, at that time, they thought DDT was totally harmless. I remember they told us that we could leave our food uncovered in the barracks, that they would spray it with DDT, because it was completely safe, and then we went through the van, and the entire body was sprayed with -- with just a ton of that white powder! I had holes in my skin from the lice. From the scratching -- the skin was so thin anyway, anyway, it was scratched off. I had really pockmarks on my skin from scratching from the lice. But after that, the lice were gone. So then three weeks after the liberation, we were transferred from these barracks to maybe a mile down the road where the military barracks had been. Those were very nice -- you know, the German military barracks. And we were put in those nice buildings which were divided into smaller rooms, and just a few people to a room. And by then we settled down to pretty much of a routine of a diet that was pretty bland, but very adequate. And it was at that time then, you started thinking, now, what's next? What's going to happen to us? Where are we? Where's everybody else? Who survived? Where is anybody? How are we going to find each other?

Well they started registering us. The UNRRA officials came. UNRRA was the United Nations refugee and Resettlement -- whatever -- Administration, I think was what "A" stood for. And the question they asked was to decide where one wanted to go. Did you want to go back to your country of origin? Actually, I think they wanted to repatriate most people to their countries. Well my mother and I really didn't know what to do -- whether to go back to Poland. It seemed to be a logical thing to do, because if anybody survived, that's where one would think of meeting again. But we really didn't want to make that kind of decision. Not that it was imminent -- we were told that repatriation wouldn't start immediately, they just wanted to have an idea of what people wanted to do with their lives -- so at the moment we did not make any decision. We said we wanted to stay and find out if there was any way of checking if anybody was alive, or where they might be.

And pretty soon, people started arriving, particularly young men who were healthy, and who had a little spirit of adventure, to start traveling in this country that was totally devastated, and where there was no communication, there was, really, no transportation, or anything,

But, in the meantime, some people came -- at least one person that I remember -- and said that he had seen some people, some men from Radom. But we didn't know where, we didn't know who, we didn't know how to get in touch with them. And one day -- without being told why or where we were going -- we were simply transported out of Bergen-Belsen just a random group from that building that we lived in, to a different camp. They said this was too crowded, so they were transferring people to other places. And where we were put up was in a town not very far away, but it was near a military airfield -- also in military barracks. And

nobody else arrived! There was this group. There we were. And then a couple of weeks later, maybe three weeks later, we were transferred to another place. The people who were from UNRRA, who were in charge of this group that I was with, they were French, and we really couldn't communicate very well, and we didn't really know what was going on, and we didn't know what to do, and we didn't know how to find anybody

One day, a young man from Radom came by, one of those who was wandering around trying to find somebody also. And there were a number of us from Radom in that group. And he said that he had come from a camp near Stuttgart -- near Heidelberg, actually -- where most of the men from Radom were, but he didn't see David or Jules. He didn't know where they were. They were not there. But to us, it gave us a little impetus to want to stay where we were, because he was moving on, and he said if he encountered anybody, then he would tell them where we were.

Pretty soon, they told us that we could go to Sweden, that Sweden would accept this group of women. And it was voluntary. If we wanted to go to Sweden, the transport would be leaving in two or three days, and we were to sign up for it. Well it was really very attractive. To go to Sweden for recuperation, was really very tempting. But we didn't want to go, because now we knew that there were men from Radom who survived from that group that left when we were separated in the summer of 1944, and how will they find us in Sweden?

So we decided not to go. But in order to stay -- not to go to Sweden -- we had to return to Bergen-Belsen, which is where we started out from. My mother wasn't feeling very well, and she was doctoring herself. She wasn't gaining weight. This was three months later -- we're now in July of 1945 -- and I had gained back all my weight, even though I weighed about 50 lbs when I was liberated. I practically doubled my weight, and I was really recovering very well. I suppose at the age of 21, you recover much faster than when you're 46. That day -- this was two days before the group was to leave for Sweden -- a young man came by again -- a different one -- from Radom. And he knew where David and Jules were. He told us. He said, in fact, Jules is on the way. He's looking for you. He knows where you are, and he'll probably be here tomorrow. So, for sure we don't want to go to Sweden. And so, the next morning, I was going to town from that camp where we were -- it was called a DP camp, a displaced persons camp -- to pick up the results of a test that my mother had. The doctors suspected that she might have maybe diabetes, and that's why she wasn't recovering. So I got up, and I started walking towards town. It was about a 15 minute walk. And as I was walking, I saw that figure in the distance, wearing sort of a uniform -- a khaki type of outfit -- but the step looked familiar. And he saw me immediately, of course, and recognized me right away, and it was Jules! Well, I can't tell you about this encounter. This was really something. I think I did go to the doctor's office to get the test, but it was all pretty fuzzy (laughs) in my memory. We stayed overnight with a German family, and then the next morning when

everybody else left for Sweden, we got on a coal train and started making our way to Heidelberg, where these people were. It took us a long time. It was very, very difficult to find transportation but Jules and David had been liberated by the Americans -- that's where that khaki uniform came from -- and he was armed with a letter from one of the officers there in the officers' club where they worked as busboys, asking whoever could, to give them assistance in transporting him -- this was Jules alone, because both of them couldn't leave at the same time -- and he told us, of course what had happened, how they were liberated, and where they were. They were not with that whole group of Radomer, because they had been sent to Dachau in the meantime, and they were liberated some place else, but that's a whole different story. And eventually, after about three or four days, we made it to that camp that the Radomer were in, and this was some camp, that's totally unbelievable. It was a castle near Heidelberg. This was in the American zone, the Americans, when they first encountered what they did, what they found in these camps, they simply threw the Germans out of some nice places and put the former prisoners in there. So it was just incredibly beautiful, a beautiful castle, where we stayed until August, about two weeks. And then this was liquidated -- of course, this was a very temporary thing -- and the whole group was transported to Stuttgart, which is a large city in western Germany. And we were put up in a housing project which was emptied of the Germans, and that became the DP camp in which we lived until September 1st of 1950. This is how long it took for us to be able to emigrate from Germany to the United States.

In the meantime, my father was liberated in Theresienstadt by the Russians, but we knew nothing about it. When we got to Heidelberg, there were some people. One person filled us in on what happened to my father, what camps he had gotten into, and then he told us about the death march that he was on with my father. And according to him, my father was shot on that march. And you know, at that point, with the four of us together, we sort of accepted it. We sort of felt we were so fortunate for four of us to survive that, while it was a tragic bit of news, we sort of expected it. But he wasn't shot! (Laughs) He ended up in Theresienstadt, and he was liberated! And he showed up! One day he just showed up! He knew about us, but he was under the Russian administration. There was no connection there; we couldn't find out. But he found out about us, and he came.

Q: That is remarkable!

A: It was really very remarkable. And he was great! He was in great shape. But my mother wasn't. She was sick. She got very, very ill that August of 1945. I don't know that it was ever really diagnosed, exactly what it was, but she had an internal hemorrhage, and practically died. She was in the hospital for six weeks, and somehow, miraculously, managed to recover. She was in a German hospital where the nurses were all nuns. It was really some experience to have to live amongst the Germans at that point after liberation. But they were really kind to her, and they were really -- they cared for her. She went from doctor to doctor, and tests, and all kinds of things. It wasn't possible to really determine. I don't

know what her illness was, but she was not well. And in 1948, on June 19th, she died very suddenly – probably from another internal hemorrhage.

It was a terrific blow to us. It seemed like such an impossible thing to happen, after having survived all this hardship, and all those horrors of the war, to just suddenly expire like this. It was a really terrific blow to us. And after she died, then my father and David decided that they had to leave. They couldn't wait any longer, and they emigrated to the United States. Now I have to fill you in generally, what was happening in those years between '45 and '48. We were in those DP camps -- displaced persons camps -- actually not knowing what to expect. We were waiting, most of us were waiting, for a way to leave -- to emigrate. A large number of people waited to have an opportunity to emigrate to Palestine. Other people were waiting for a chance to emigrate to the United States, which was also extremely difficult, because of the quotas. Most of us from eastern Europe, under normal circumstances, under the normal quota system, would have about a ten year wait, except for people who had close relatives in the United States who could send them affidavits. A few people left at the end of '46 and beginning of '47. But it wasn't really until about 1948, late '48 or maybe '49 that the DP act was passed by Congress, which admitted a large number of displaced persons. Now displaced persons were not only Jewish survivors of camps. This included all nationalities and also included people from eastern Europe who had been brought from Germany as laborers in the factories, and then chose not to return to their native countries. So the whole DP Act admitted maybe over 300,000 people, a very small portion of whom were Jews from the displaced persons camp.

Palestine was still totally inaccessible, except for illegal immigration. You know the story of 'Exodus.' People were caught and then sent to Cyprus -- to camps as well. But at this point, my father decided that they could no longer wait to go to Palestine. They just had to leave. So they left. They went to the United States. But in 1945, the end of 1945, we decided that we had to start our education. We've lost five years already. In Stuttgart there was only an institute of technology, but that's what Jules was interested in. He wanted to study engineering -- electrical engineering. So, as soon as the school opened, maybe it was early '46, I think, February of '46, he enrolled and started going to school.

Q: Excuse me, did you say that your camp was in Stuttgart?

A: Yeah, our DP camp was in Stuttgart. Most of the DP camps were in former military barracks. Stuttgart was one exception. As I mentioned, we lived in a residential area which had been cleared of the Germans, and we were given their apartments, and we lived right in the city. The others were usually in small towns, not too far from a large city, so there were camps around Munich, but not in Munich itself. Some numbers of DP persons -- privately with German families, also. People were settling down. There was a great uncertainty about when or where anybody would be able to go. Canada admitted a few. Australia admitted

a few. So a trickle was leaving, but the main body of the DP's were still there, and they didn't know when they would be able to leave, or where they would be able to go. So a certain normalcy set in, living in those DP camps. And Jewish communities usually were set up with all its institutions, as we've always done. So there were schools, not formal schools, but there were schools for younger people. There were ORT schools, which is the Organization for Rehabilitation and Training, so people could learn a trade. You understand, most of the survivors were young, so they also settled down to getting married and raising families. There were a lot of children being born. It was sort of a transitional period, but it had the smell of permanency. There were newspapers. There were all kinds of Jewish institutions.

When Jules went to school, I started working for UNRRA in the DP camp. I worked because somebody had to earn some money. We were given a basic diet. We didn't have to pay rent, we had food, and we had used clothing that was sent to us by the JDC from the United States -- that's the Joint Distribution Committee. But nevertheless, when you live, you want to go to a theater, you want to go to the opera, you want to go to a restaurant occasionally. You have to have some money.

Maybe in those days I didn't even really think that I needed an education, too. I guess it was that old fashioned notion that the husband was the one who needed to have a profession, so that he could support a family. I think that in those early years I didn't even think about it. Then shortly after that, David started going to school as well, but he didn't live in Stuttgart, you see. He lived near Munich. My parents and David lived near Munich. And so he went to school. He took business administration. But he interrupted his education in order to leave for the United States.

It was early in 1948 that I decided that maybe I should get some education, too, I really don't remember exactly the train of thought that lead me to this. But maybe three years after the liberation that we finally realized that we were there, and we really didn't know when we would leave, so maybe I should use that time, too. My friends were having families. We just simply didn't even think of starting a family at that time.

In Stuttgart in the Institute of Technology, one could take about a two-year course in some other fields of a more general nature, and I chose to take economics. So I took an entrance examination, because of course, I had never finished high school except for, as I told you -- maybe you remember -- that we studied, myself and my friends, with teachers individually. So as far as the material was concerned, it was there. I just didn't have a formal certificate of graduation. I was admitted, and I started going to school, too -- and working. And it was pretty darn hard working at the same time as going to school. But I guess, maybe that's when I became a feminist. I decided that I had the right to have something to further

myself, too. This was a very tough period, very hard, but rewarding, in many ways. And all the while we were waiting to see what might happen.

At that point, we really weren't pushing emigration, because by '49 Jules was more than half-way through his studies, and now we secretly hoped that it would drag out a little bit so we would still have the same situation that we were in, and he could finish. Whether I would finish or not was really, at that point, not that important.

Well, when the DP Act was passed, and people started emigrating in large numbers to the United States, Israel was declared a state, too -- at approximately the same time -- and large numbers started emigrating to Israel as well. And by 1949, a lot of the DP camps had been really depleted to the point where they were consolidated, and Stuttgart was one of the camps that was liquidated fairly early. So we had to look for some other arrangement, and in fact, from then on, until we were able to leave, we lived with a German family.

It's interesting how, in those years, after the experiences we had had how we could actually function in the midst of the German population, which wasn't even then very friendly, because what they were looking at is the Jews, whom they despised, who were suddenly better off than they were. The Germans were living under conditions of hardship.

Q: They were a conquered people.

A: Yeah. Whereas we were given their place -- their homes. We were fed and supported by the Americans, which meant that we had, certainly more food and better food than they had. It wasn't a very happy situation. For us, on the other hand, to be with them, was to have to constantly speculate: Where were those people? What were they doing? What was their part in this whole thing?

Q: And nobody was talking at that point.

A: No, of course not. I was the only Jewish person in that Department of Economics -- out of maybe 200 students. And of course they didn't know that I was Jewish to begin with, until the summer, when they saw the number on my arm. And then the conversation would start, you know, where are you from, and...I spoke German very fluently, and so they really didn't know that I wasn't an ethnic German from someplace, who was expelled and came to live here, until they saw my number. And then the young men, invariably, immediately started telling me that they were in France, and in Belgium, and in Holland, in Norway. Nobody was ever in Poland!

Now, since I knew that I really had no choice, I had to use their facilities, meaning their schools, and whatever I could get out of it, I just really had to forget it, and not let it bother me. We got a letter from an uncle of Jules's who lives in

Argentina, and he said in his letter, "How can you sit in the same lecture hall with these murderers!" Well, maybe that was a legitimate question. But he didn't know what situation we were in. And for us, it was making the best use of the time that otherwise would be wasted.

Well, by 1950, Jules was finishing his studies, and in fact, finished his final exams in the early summer of 1950, just about the same time that the Korean war broke out.

Now my father and David had already left for the United States, you see, more than a year before. And the Americans really speeded up the departure of a lot of people. It looked like the war might spread to Europe. It was a very uncertain time. I'm sure you don't remember this very well, but it was a very uncertain, "iffy" time. And so the JDC, which organized the Jewish groups and processed the Jewish applicants for the United States, let everybody know that if they wanted to apply for an exit visa to go to the United States, they better do it fast and leave as soon as possible.

Well, originally, Jules and I did not intend to go to the United States at all. Jules's mother survived the war, and she remarried after the war. Her husband had family in Israel -- very close family, like parents and brothers and their children. So they went to Israel as soon as it was possible, because he had such close relatives. He was one of the first to be allowed to leave. And we really wanted to go to Israel to live. But then, suddenly, I realized they came here to Minneapolis, my father and David, and I suddenly realized I'd never see them again -- ever -- because it was like the other end of the world, Minneapolis.

In those years, travel wasn't what it is today. And I just couldn't face it. They were the only people in the whole world that I had. And so I persuaded Jules that we should go to the United States, and we could always leave from the United States and go to Israel. It doesn't quite work that way. How many times can you put down roots? And how many times can you be uprooted? And by 1950, I was 26 years old already. You don't start life anew again and again. At 26 I really didn't think I was very old; then, I thought I was very young

So then we applied for the exit visa, and received it very fast. We were ready to leave within a couple of months, which really was faster than we had anticipated, and Jules didn't have his diploma yet. He had taken the final exams and he was finished, but it was the summer break, the end of July, the beginning of August, and the dean wasn't there to sign the diploma. It was so funny because we decided we weren't going to leave without that diploma. If there's going to be a war in Europe, he'll never get it.

And I had the experience with the lady from the JDC, Laura LaVine. I went to her, to ask her to postpone the visa for a couple of weeks until he could get the diploma. In front of all the people in her office, she started yelling at me. She

said, "You think that diploma's going to be worth anything in the United States? it's not worth the paper it's written on! He'll have to go to school all over again!" I felt like crying. Not only was I insulted because she did it in front of everybody, but here five years of this incredible effort, and she's telling me it's really not worth anything.

Well, luckily the Dean blew into town for a couple of days and signed the diploma. So she didn't have to extend the visa, and we could leave -- with the diploma. I hadn't finished. I had finished two years and another semester -- I had to commute about 45 miles every day to the university, because this was an institute of technology in Stuttgart, but the university was in Tubingen, a very well-known university, in fact, dating back to like the 13th century -- but we felt that now was really the time to leave. We had to leave. So we did. And we left on a very interesting coincidence, that our transport for the United States left on September 1, 1950, exactly to the day, eleven years after the war broke out on September 1st. That was a real milestone.

And we came to Minneapolis. We had some adventures on the way. We stayed in New York for a few weeks, and then finally came to Minneapolis where, at least in the beginning, it seemed like Laura LaVine was right, that Jules's diploma wasn't worth much. But that wasn't really true. He couldn't get a job as an engineer, because of the Korean war, because almost all large companies were involved in some way or another in the war effort, and they required citizenship -- for instance, Honeywell; in those days, Honeywell was actually the largest employer of engineers here -- and some other places where he applied, he didn't have references, because he hadn't lived here for any length of time. He didn't know any English, to speak of, so that first year was very tough. And he did some jobs that were only remotely related to his profession.

The first winter, which was a very severe winter -- that was another, that was a big surprise, was the climate here, was really hard, something unexpected; I thought I was in Siberia -- he worked putting up television antennas on roofs in that 30-degree-below-zero weather, and I think, until last year, that was the record snow year, too. Something like 85 inches of snow in the winter. So it was a rough winter, but then we got settled down. I didn't do anything that's worthwhile remembering, actually. My first job was working in a dress factory doing finishing work. You can imagine the type of sweatshop that one reads about in New York at the turn of the century. It wasn't a sweatshop, but certainly the caliber of the people who worked there were probably people who couldn't, because they didn't have any other background, do any other kind of job. In fact I spoke English better than many of these women whom I worked with, who had lived here for many, many years. But pretty soon, I saw that this was not to be my destiny. I just couldn't see myself doing that kind of work for any length of time. I was laid off shortly, maybe a couple of months after I had worked there, and I decided to find myself an office job. My English was a lot better than Jules's. I could communicate quite nicely.

So I applied for a job at Northwestern life Insurance Company, and I got it! I got a job. I was so apprehensive. Am I going to be able to do it with the English? I had to speak English all the time. Had to do my work in English. I did fine! After six weeks I was promoted, pretty soon I was one of them. I was doing very well.

And then David picked up his education again. He was doing some kind of menial work, too. And then he decided to go back to school, and applied to the University of Minnesota, and got all his credits from Germany. And then, oh, about January of 1951, I thought maybe I should start looking into picking up my education again, and I applied to the University of Minnesota, too, and David went with me. I translated my German papers, and now when I read them, it's really hilarious, because it's all literally translated, but I was actually admitted to graduate school.

Q: In economics?

A: In economics. I had enough credits, concentrated credits in economics, that I was admitted to graduate school. Of course, I didn't know what I was biting off. But I did. I went. I was working. I couldn't afford to quit working.

That was one thing I could not do. I had to work. And there was no night school in those days. It was all day school. So I took only like maybe nine credits a quarter, and the people at work were really super nice to me. They made it possible for me to work the hours that were convenient for me. I just had to tell them at the beginning of the quarter what my schedule was, and my hours would be arranged accordingly. But it was tough. That next year and a half -- actually five school quarters -- were very tough.

Q: I believe it. Now, as you resettled here, did you maintain contact with other survivors, or survivor organizations?

A: Locally? That's really the only contact we had, initially. There was a club of German Jews and there was a club of "others". And those were really most of the recreational activities, and social activities were amongst ourselves. There really wasn't that much opportunity to get to know other people.

I have to tell you about an incident that maybe is a little revealing. There weren't many organizations -- probably in other cities, too, but here particularly -- that they tried to do something for the newcomers. There were volunteers who taught English one-on-one. There were classes. Schools had evening classes for new Americans to study English. But there were also volunteers who met with people individually. Jules had a teacher like this, an older lady, who met with him and taught him English individually, and I know others who did, too. I didn't need that. I took a course, an evening class at the University to improve my vocabulary. But those who needed it, for those it was just wonderful.

Then there were some organizations -- there was an organization called, I don't remember the exact name, Minneapolis Council for New Americans, or something like that --that coordinated these things.

And a woman called me one time, shortly after we arrived, and asked if we would be interested in going to the theater. Of course we'd love to, but we couldn't afford it. So she offered free tickets on behalf of a local Jewish women's organization, which we gratefully accepted. And then she kept calling and offering us tickets to the University Theater, to the symphony orchestra. It was just marvelous! And that's really so nice, so I decided one time I should meet her. I had never met her. We just talked on the phone. And so I called her and invited her for lunch on a Sunday. I thought that would be a nice way to meet. Well she couldn't come. That Sunday, she couldn't. I called again the next Sunday. She couldn't. She never could. And suddenly it dawned on me, that I was a charity case as far as she was concerned. I wasn't her equal. She wasn't interested in meeting me.

And I think that's why it was at least five years, before we even had any American friends. True, that we were very busy, going to school and working. That didn't leave much time to join organizations. I finally knew, years later, that we had to make the effort. I'm not being critical! I think this is how it is when you come to a new community. It's really up to you. People who live here have their friends, they have their relatives, they don't need to reach out. They reach out in certain ways, like this woman reached out to us. But socially, they really don't need newcomers. That's why different efforts were made with Russian immigrants, but there was no such effort with us.

Q: That's very interesting. Now Elie Wiesel talks so eloquently about the silence, was it...

A: Deafening silence...

Q: ...of the Holocaust survivor.

A: Yes, there was a deafening silence.

Q: That he was not able to speak or write about the experience for 10 years,

A: That's absolutely correct.

Q: Did you feel the separation from others, because they had not gone through it?

A: Absolutely, absolutely! Nobody wanted to talk about it. Nobody wanted to listen. And we had a real need to talk about it. That's why we were drawn to one another, because we could discuss it among ourselves. But that wasn't the point.

The point was, that survival depended so much on this need to bear witness, because being abandoned, as we were, as we felt, we had to conclude that nobody knew what was going on. We had the need to inform! And nobody wanted to listen.

I'm sure I can think of a lot of reasons that people didn't want to talk about it. I want to be kind. It wasn't to hurt us. I think it was to alleviate their own anxieties, and their own feeling of guilt, perhaps, that they didn't want to talk about it. That there was probably, a feeling of inadequacy in not having done something, or tried, at least, to prevent what was happening. Or not being unformed, although it was obvious by then that there were signs, and there was some knowledge. People simply didn't believe it.

I think that Americans also have an extremely keen sense of privacy, and that people thought that they were intruding on a painful subject, that they didn't want us to get into. That it would hurt us. I know that I have many friends, to this day, who have been friends of mine for 25 years, with whom I never discussed anything specific. They know, basically. They know the basics, but we've never specifically talked.

In fact, it wasn't until 1976, when I went to Poland, and I was flabbergasted when I came back, suddenly a lot of friends wanted to see the slides and wanted to hear me talk about Poland, which at that point, of course, having a lot of slides from Warsaw, and from Auschwitz, I would be touching upon the things that happened to us. It took that long for it to come out into the open!

Q: I wonder how much of that was a fear of invading your privacy, and how much of that was plain and simple denial.

A: Probably a combination of both. I don't know how much. I can't give you percentages. I want to be kind to the people, and say, yes, the element of privacy was definitely there.

Q: Yes, but at the same time, don't you think that listening to the stories of the concentration camps was, in a sense, admitting to yourself that people can be pretty rotten, that there is this bestial element, which...

A: Well, I think the jury's still out on this, and I don't know that we'll ever know, because these people will not be interviewed. If you could interview a few people, and ask them, "Why didn't you want to talk about it? Why didn't you want to listen?" Then we maybe would know. But we really don't. For many years, I used to do a program at the Adath Jeshurun on Friday evening to commemorate the Holocaust, usually in April. And on that Friday night, I could look out on the congregation and not see five of my friends. They stayed away in droves.

Q: And to what do you attribute that?

A: I don't know. I never wanted to come out and ask anybody point-blank. Maybe I should have. But I didn't want to invade their privacy. (Laughs) Maybe some day I really will. I'll just say, "Why didn't you ever come to these programs?"

Q: Well now having gone through all of these experiences, the experiences during the war, and then this amazing silence that followed you when you came to this country, what conclusions did you draw, and do you draw now about human nature?

A: I don't think that there is a single human nature that one can address oneself to. I can understand to some extent the shame of a civilized world, and the need to sort of put it behind. I cannot understand why some people will say, "Why not just forget it and live a normal life?" There is no normal life after the Holocaust. There is no such thing. We have to face the world as it is, and people are uncomfortable with that, because if they have to face the world as it is, they have to do something. They can't just sit back and pretend that life is the same way as it's always been. It isn't. It's a different world -- a world that sowed the Holocaust.

But interestingly, you only really see people concerned with the Holocaust who didn't live through it. It took a whole generation. The younger people, the children of those who are my age, are now very, very interested in it, at least to some extent. I can't say that it is a general interest, but there is a much more general interest than there ever has been. So there had to be some distance, obviously.

Q: What kinds of questions do young people ask you when you go into schools?

A: Well, generally I speak to older students, senior high and students at the university level, and I speak to adult groups. I do this by preference, because I don't think that I'm equipped to deal with very young people. I think I tend to talk frankly about things.

My technique is basically one of being not too emotional. I'm being very factual. And so I don't put people in an uncomfortable position of either myself being emotional, or playing on their emotions. I think that if we talk on a mutual level of objectivity, that we can get a lot more across, a lot more interchange in terms of what I want to get out of this encounter, of my opportunity to speak to these people.

Basically, I talk to them in terms of what we can learn from the Holocaust, touching upon such subjects as direct involvement of those who would be dragged down to the kind of level, or would be the type, that would engage, actually, directly or indirectly, in this type of treatment of other human beings. This is of course, the one extreme. On the other extreme are the victims. And of course,

everybody can become a victim. And you can visualize many, many situations where a group can be victimized. I try to keep it in general terms, so that they could see that the applicability of what happened to the Jews is universal. That it can happen to other groups, and that we have to be on guard from this happening.

If you keep it strictly as a Jewish experience, in my opinion, you're risking an attitude of, "Well, the Jews are a different group," you know, and, "It happened to the Jews."

Q: "And it can't happen to me."

A: But it can, yeah, "It can't happen to me." Or, "it wouldn't be done to any other group." So you have to generalize this, and that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to universalize the problem, in terms of the human condition, of each of these different situations that human beings can find themselves.

And of course I direct my lesson to those who are the uninvolved. The question is, "How could it have happened?" The numbers of those who were actually engaged in the effort to exterminate the Jewish people were small. The numbers of victims was large. But if it could happen in the midst of the very densely populated continent that Europe is...how could it have happened? How could, say, half-a-million people exterminate six million in the midst of 200 million?

And therein is really the lesson of the Holocaust. It could happen because 200 million turned their heads away and pretended it didn't happen. It wasn't happening. They didn't know anything about it. They closed their eyes and their ears and they didn't want to get involved, because they were either afraid, or they simply didn't want to risk the possibilities of repercussions that might come upon them, or they simply didn't care.

And by extension, then, I try to show them that even other countries, such as the United States, were not that close to the continent. They knew about it, too -- the government did, and in fact I cite examples of the fact that there was plenty of it in the press, in the American press. The American people chose not to believe it, because otherwise, if they did, they'd have to act. And, you know, if you don't believe it, you simply dismiss it, then it isn't happening.

And so that's the lesson that I show them, that in our midst, we're playing that every day. This is happening every day on a small scale, where people are abused by others, and most of us turn our heads away. There are very, very few who get involved, and there were very few who did get involved then, too. I point that out to them

I have a slide presentation which I put together that highlights a lot of these things.

Mostly the questions are coming from older audiences -- not meaning really older age-wise, but mature intellectually -- "What can we do as teachers?" for instance. I lecture regularly in the School of Education at St. Cloud State University, and so those are people who are going to be teachers. And I point out to them how important -- what kind of a function they have. That they have these impressionable children that they could do something with. I point out to them how prejudice and stereotyping lead to an awful lot of horrible things which we don't envision. We think that voicing preconceived ideas about groups is really a very innocent pastime, but it isn't because it really ingrains those impressions on you. And therefore the time to act is when you are very young.

It's very interesting how many people react to this. They would say, "Gee, that's right. My grandfather's a real bigot. He's a real anti-Semite!"

Well, first I often ask them to tell me about some of the stereotypes that they're aware of as far as the Jews are concerned. And the same kinds of things always come out. I could just recite them even before they'll say them. "I know this is what you are going to say." And they say it. I say, "How do you know this. Most of you live in rural Minnesota, probably never even met a Jew?" That's true. They admit they've never met a Jew. You get it from your parents, your grandparents. You get it from your church. I don't beat about the bush, but it's unemotional, what I'm saying, it's not accusatory, it's factual. And I'm usually armed with sources, s that if somebody challenges me, I'm able to refer to the sources that are not my sources, that are not Jewish sources.

We frequently get into the question of the Christian-Jewish tension, and this is all in connection with that large mass of people who don't get involved in any way. They're not doing Jews any harm, or blacks or any other group, but they're not doing them any good, either. They're uninvolved. Detached. Disinterested. I say to them, it's natural. We all live in our little milieu, and we live in a fairly safe environment, and we want to please our friends. We don't want to lose our friends. When somebody makes an anti-Semitic or an anti-black remark, we don't want to rock the boat. It's the easiest thing to do, even if we don't approve, to simply keep quiet, because we might lose all our friends if we are too outspoken in defense of minority groups.

But it's here! It exists! And there's plenty of literature, and plenty in the daily press, occasionally, of incidents to illustrate the things that I'm talking about. So I think that I come across as a person who doesn't accuse, but who really tries to teach, and point out the pitfalls of society.

Q: Then you're building toward, I gather, an awareness that something like this could happen here if we are not as vigilant.

A: Exactly. Yes. I don't want them to have the idea that I'm talking about the Holocaust to have them feel sorry for the Jews. It's much too late for that. The

dead will not be brought back to life. I don't need their sympathy, personally, nor does anybody I know, of the people like myself, need anybody's sympathy. But we need to convey to the world what happened, and have something be done to make a little better world. I feel that this is the fulfillment of my role in life. That I have to do something. Having been privileged to survive, I have to make an effort to contribute to a minute improvement.

I set myself a very small goal. I figure if I reach 10% of whatever audience I speak to, I'm very successful, and I've spoken to thousands upon thousands of people in Minnesota and North and South Dakota and Wisconsin, and I feel that if out of, maybe 10,000 that I've spoken to, if I set a goal of a thousand, I think that's no mean accomplishment. If many of those people are teachers or clergy people who have access to other people, and as a result, carry that message a little further, then I've accomplished my function in life.

Q: Some of the young people are hearing your message. Are there particular concerns, fears, preoccupations of the young people that you have dealt with?

A: Well, the young people are not as outspoken, and they're not as...very often, you find in a group only a very few who will share, or who will really deeply probe for certain problems that are involved. One question that often comes up out of that, and I think it comes up with religious people who get very disturbed when the religious issue comes up, "Really, is this Christianity? Can Christians behave like this?" They deep-down feel that Christianity is all good, and so why is there this hatred, and why is there this inaction on the part of Christians when things like that do happen? They tend to dismiss the fact that those who were perpetrating the crimes were Christians. There's often that disturbing thought in their minds, "Those weren't Christians. If they were, they wouldn't be doing it."

Well, the facts of the matter are, that the Church never expelled any of these Nazis. Even Hitler was never really excommunicated from the Catholic Church. So whether they were Christians or not, using the small "c" in an adjective-sort of way, I don't know whether their behavior is Christian or not. But I think a lot of people are deeply disturbed by this, by the knowledge that religion really played a role in the persecution of the Jews. Very often, that's the first time they hear about it. They only hear what is in the Gospels, but that's just accepted as fact. That's not questioned. What that does to your mind, in terms of resentment of the Jews, really very few people realize, and the kind of hatred that this causes, generation after generation, after generation, for some people, this is just a total revelation. They say, "But Jesus was a Jew!" but yet, "The Jews killed our God." So the religious aspect, this is very strong, very disturbing thought to some people. And then the question comes up frequently, "What role did religion play in your life when you were in the camps? and could you believe in God when all this was happening to you?"

Now those are really disturbing questions for some of these people. And they're really very interested to know what that did to me. Am I an atheist now? Do I not believe in God? It's not voiced quite that way, but they do ask that. And I point out to them that from the Jewish perspective, human beings have free will, and that blaming God is not something we do. We don't expect God to be involved in our daily affairs. God gave us free will to do good or evil and it really is up to human beings to carry those out. And if we blame God for letting this happen, then we exonerate the people, and we can't do that. So I'm not sure that a Christian actually follows this, quite. They do know about free will, but I think that they feel that God is involved in every aspect of their lives. But at least it sets them to thinking.

Q: Do you feel that your adherence to Jewish values helped you in any way to survive?

A: I think it helped us all. I think it may not be well-known, but I think the Jewish behavior under these conditions was far above the behavior of other groups. And obviously, it was our moral and ethical framework that made it possible for us not to succumb. Conditions were so horrible, that it was very easy to be dragged down to the level of the common denominator. But I think, by and large, we came out very well.

Q: Well you somehow, for the most part, retained your faith, didn't you, throughout the experience.

A: Well, I'm not sure that that's the case.

Q: Your faith in the future?

A: Yes, I have a thorough commitment to the future. Obviously having children was an expression of that commitment to the future, and a belief in a future, and not giving up on humanity. I entertained the idea of not having children when we came out of the camps, with the idea of, "What kind of a world is this to bring children into?" But obviously, there is a resilience in a human being that helps overcome this, and there has to be. It's a continuation of all that -- those positive expectations -- even in the worst times of the camps, when one could really give up just as easily, or much more easily, than to fight and go on from day-to-day. So I think it's just an extension of that.

Frequently I have to say that I'm very proud of the way we behaved. Now, other cultures may look upon us as being submissive, and often the phrase was used that Jews went to their deaths like sheep. This is another question that comes up very often, and that's the question of resistance, which I'll address in a moment. But the point is that resistance involves some kind of violence, too. And I guess we just were never trained to be very violent. And I would rather go to my death like a sheep, than have to be responsible to myself for violence toward others, even if justified.

Q: So there was this ancient ethical Jewish principle that was being enacted by these people on a daily basis.

A: I think so.

Q: Also, I think in terms of the cohesiveness of the Jewish family, and you illustrated this in your account on so many occasions -- one time when you wanted to die and your mother persuaded you to live, and on other occasions when you lived for your mother or another member of your family.

A: She really mostly lived for me. Well, the question of resistance is one that always comes up, because Americans are a violent people. There's a lot of violence that we live with. And I guess the notion of heroism always has to do with an act of violence. Now that may well be true, but I usually point out to them, we talk about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as an example of the kind of armed resistance that there was, which happened in many of the ghettos and camps. That was the case.. There was armed resistance, to the extent that there were arms! Which of course, there weren't very many in most places. BUT, from the standpoint of now an older woman, who's raised children, I point out that any kind of armed resistance was doomed to failure and failed. And those who carried it out, invariably died. Maybe they died with the knowledge, the satisfaction, that they did something, that they killed some Germans. But they died nevertheless. Somebody asks me, "Why didn't you resist?" And I have been asked this. I say to them, "If I had, I wouldn't be here to talk to you. It was thanks to the fact that I didn't have any means of resisting -- because I didn't have any weapon to resist with, assuming that if I had one I would know what to do with it -- I had that chance to live."

But what I specifically point out to them is the folly of calling resistance only something that's done with your hands, or with a weapon. We resisted every minute. Survival was a minute-to-minute act of resistance. Resisting the despair, where you were ready to give up, because you couldn't go on any longer. Living from day-to-day in those extermination camps was an act of resistance every minute. It was much easier to give up. So to speak of resistance is to speak of the whole spectrum of resistance. Courage, courage of mothers or grandparents or brothers and sisters to follow their members of the family to death. That's courage, too. The easiest thing would have been to send the child alone. The young mother could have survived, probably by virtue of being young. But imagine the terror of that child going off by himself or herself? I think it's just incredible courage to give up living.

So we talk about this sort of thing, you know. I prefer not to address myself to a single question. I sometimes answer single questions, but mostly if a question is asked, I direct it towards a specific topic and make it a lesson in a certain aspect of human nature, of the experience.

Q: So many members of your immediate family, and even in Jules's family survived, you know.

A: Only Jules's mother survived. His 18 year-old sister and his father perished.

Q: Okay, but especially in your family.

A: Well, really not very many. There were only five of us from my whole family who survived. And both my parents had brothers and sisters and they had children. I had a grandmother and a great-grandmother, and they perished.

Q: But the fact that the five of you survived, you must have thought about those on so many occasions. To what do you attribute your survival?

A: (Laughs) Just pure chance -- absolutely. I remember once a nun asking me, and this happened, not once, but more than once, but it's usually somebody who's a religious person, "Don't you think it was God's will, and God's scheme, that you should survive, because you're so articulate, so that you can do the good that you're doing?" and I usually smile or even laugh, and I say, 'I'm sorry, you can think what you want, but I'm not that arrogant. I saw enough people who were much more worthy than I to survive.'" "Well," they'd say, or she would say or he would say, "You can't second guess God. God has his reasons." And I'd say, "Well, I appreciate, and I'm very flattered that you're saying that, but no, I just happen to be very fortunate to have had my mother with me -- the support relationship was very, very important, and I was also lucky that they didn't throw those bombs into the barracks at Bergen-Belsen in that last week, and the same thing with David and Jules and my father, and we just happened to be very fortunate to be where we were when we were there."

I really, I mean, I'm not metaphysical. I cannot conceive of any scheme of things. But then, maybe I'll find out. (Laughs.)

Q: (Laughs) What do you answer to young people who say that they have no faith in the future, that perhaps there's nothing to live for?

A: I have never really encountered that kind of a statement straight out. But my answer to this is, that they can't ask me that question, because I'm the personification of a future. I mean, if somebody said that to me, I'd say, "Well, look at me. I certainly had every reason..." And when I speak of myself, I always make it very clear that I'm just a representative. I'm not any particularly different person. Most people in the same situation that I was in, would have similar thoughts and would have similar experiences, and I just articulate them. So I say, "Look at people like myself. We certainly have every right to give up, and certainly not expect any future, or anything good to come of any future. And look. Here I am. I've had a full life. I've certainly been grateful for every day

that was granted to me, and I still am, and there always is a future. If I ever gave up believing in the potential of human beings for good -- to overcome bad -- then there's nothing to live for.

