Interview with Dr. Sabina Zimering
By Michael Garelick and Rosalyn Smith
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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: It's July 14, 1982. We're sitting here with Mrs. Reuben Zimering. I am Michael Garelick, and Rosalyn Smith is going to be one of the interviewers, also. We are making an oral history for the Anti-Defamation League on the Holocaust and its survivors. What we are going to be doing now is going through a list of general questions, and then we'll get into your experiences, etcetera. Please tell your complete name, including your Jewish name, if it's different at all.

A: My name is Sabina Swarcz Zimering. My Jewish name was Sara Schwartz.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born February 24, 1923, in Warsaw and grew up in Piotrkow, Poland.

Q: What were your parents' names, grandparents' or great grandparents'?

A: My father's name was Bernard Schwartz, my mother's name was Tauba Finkelstein Schwartz. My father's parents lived in Piotrkow, where I grew up, and they were Tauba and Yitzhak Schwartz. My mother's parents -- I didn't know my grandmother, she was dead, but my grandfather was Finkelstein. I don't remember his first name.

Q: The occupation of your parents?

A: My mother was a teacher. My father was a businessman.

Q: As far as languages were spoken at home…which type?

A: Polish and Yiddish. The children spoke Polish mostly, the parents spoke mixed Yiddish and Polish.

Q: You can speak Polish and Yiddish very easily yourself?

A: Well, I can communicate. I didn't use it for a long time, so it's not "easily." But I could

Q: Concerning the family, was it a secular or religious family? If they were religious, were they observant, were they Zionists or were they Hasidic in any way?

A: Well, my father's family, my grandfather was very Hasidic. Very active in a little shul. My father was supposed to grow up to be a rabbi, but he ended up being a socialist (laughter) to my grandmother's great disappointment. In our home, we did not observe, but we definitely knew that we were Jews, and observed the main holidays. As a high school girl I was not politically active, but I knew, and I had some contacts with, Hashomer Hatzair, to which my cousin belonged, and was one of the leaders in town.

Q: Did you have any formal Jewish education, or was it mainly in the home?

A: Well, I went to a Jewish gymnasium, and I had four years of Hebrew language and religious education.

Q: As far as the events from the mid 1930s to, let's say, 1941 -- things that were happening in the world -- at that point did you have knowledge of other events around you -- what was going on -- or just in Poland itself?

A: I was pretty aware of what was going on, and the main reason was that my father was a self educated man who was extremely interested in current events and in politics in general, and he carefully followed the events in Germany and all the political things, so he talked bout it at home and I knew what was going on.

Q: Did he find out, let's say, from the newspapers or radio, or was it mainly word of mouth?

A: No, no, no. Definitely the press. He read several papers every day. There were very few radios, there was no T.V., so the main source of information was the press, the papers.

R.S. Did you hold the press as being real reliable, or…

A: Well, he read the Polish press. A city of our size, we had maybe, oh, 60-70,000 people in the whole city. Minneapolis has only one paper. There were maybe half a dozen various daily papers, and there were several Jewish papers -- depending on the political – and the same Polish. So you had enough information from reading several papers.

Q: Did you find, or did he find to communicate to you, that the newspapers at that point were anti-Semitic?

A: Oh, yes, definitely. A lot of Polish papers. The Socialist, the leftist papers were always very sympathetic, but the official Polish papers, the government or the writers' organizations, were definitely anti-Semitic.

Q: Do you think they were reflecting the opinion of most people in Poland at that point as being anti-Semitic? Was Poland in the 30s -- the average person -- were they anti-Semitic?

A: Yes. They sure were. In fact, there was a difference, I think, between Poland and Germany, from what we remember. In Poland, the average Pole just grew up with the feeling of hating Jews and blaming everything on the Jews, and the government knew enough to try and pretend. They tried not to show it. So it was like a two-faced situation. The true feeling was anti-Jewish, but the official language and the official form was hiding it.

I think in Germany it was the other way around. The average population, for a long time, was very close to Jews and lived with them, and so on. But the regime was, right way, under Hitler, the regime was very anti…

R.S. Do you think in Poland, the anti-Semitism might have been related to the Church at all?

A: Yes. It was. To the Church.

Q: In what setting or settings did you have contact with gentiles?

A: Well we lived in a Polish neighborhood. I grew up with Polish friends. I went to a Polish school. I knew the Polish customs, holidays, and so on. In fact, I remember I was in grade school when some of my friends were saying, "Oh, you're such a fun kid! Why don't you just come with me to church and convert!" (Everyone laughs.) And I came home and told it to my mom and for an answer I got a big laugh. She laughed. She thought it was funny. It made me feel very embarrassed. And that was it. We never talked about it.

Q: Did you family do business with gentiles?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What about bringing gentiles into the home?

A: Oh, yes. We had friends all the time. I don't think that the parents had many formal friends, but they had business associated and neighbors. I guess that's

why I survived the war. I grew up in a Polish neighborhood. My Polish language was very accent free. I was very aware of and familiar with Polish customs, and because of that I was able to pass as a non-Jew during the war.

R.S. In the community that you lived in, would you say the people were more professional people, highly educated? Or were they more…

A: No. It was a mix. There was some of everything.

Q: Prior to the outbreak of the war -- we talked a moment ago about anti-Semitism in the newspapers -- what did you experience, or your family experience, as far as anti-Semitism?

A: (Laughter) Every day. Stones were thrown at us, and we were called names, and there were -- I don't know what you call it -- graffiti. There were signs always written on walls. It was very open. Nobody made any bones about it.

Q: Did this make you hate, in return, the gentiles?

A: That's right. Fear was the first thing, and hate, yeah.

Q: So you saw slogans? There were stonings? What else?

A: For example, we lived in a Polish neighborhood, and my grandfather had a long beard and was wearing the traditional Jewish Hasidic outfit. They didn't dare to come to visit us because they just weren't safe to walk in this part of town to come and see us, because they would be chased by young Polish kids, and attacked, and…you know

R.S. You said your father had a business?

A: Yah.

R.S. Did his business gradually decrease as anti-Semitism worsened?

A: Well, no. It was really not because of the anti-Semitism. It was the economic situation that was bad before the war.

Q: Do you feel that the anti-Semitism that you experienced and your family experienced at that point -- was that typical of what was happening throughout Poland?

A: Yes. Definitely.

Q: So it wasn't isolated in the Warsaw area?

A: No. No-no-no. You hear about Jewish students. First of all they had what they called "numerous clauses." They didn't let in more than a certain small quota of Jewish students to the universities. And the ones that did go, were all so abused and beat up and just bodily attacked, that a lot of wealthy Jewish people sent their kids abroad to universities.

Q: Were they attacked by gangs?

A: No, by their own classmates, by the students. You haven't heard about that?

Q: Yes, we're going to be getting to that in a little greater detail. What I need to know now is, did any of your relatives live outside the community? Any cousins outside the shtetl or the part of Poland that you were in?

A: You mean outside of Piotrkow. My hometown?

Q: Yes, yes.

A: Well my mother's family was from Warsaw. This was the city where my father came from, and all his family, they lived there.

Q: To your knowledge, do you know what happened to them, and when?

A: Well, my mother's family, I know very little, because they lived in Warsaw and I guess they just perished in the Warsaw ghetto. My father's family -- now let's see. He had parents, and there were five children -- I wanted to say he's the only survivor; well, he didn't survive either -- so there was no one out of the aunts and uncles. And out of the grandchildren, there are just four or five.

Q: What age were you at the outbreak of the war? We're looking, probably, a little before 1939.

A: What do you mean?

Q: How old were you at that point?

A: Well, when the war broke out, September 1, 1939, I was sixteen years old. Are you interested in my experiences right the same day?

Q: Yes, I want to know how you received news of the war.

A: Well, for weeks before the war broke out, there was a lot of tension, because Germany and Poland were exchanging all kinds of threatening diplomatic_-- whatever you call it. The population was being prepared for war and for attack and we had to practice covering the windows in case of bombing attacks, and so on. So, September 1st was a Friday, and I remember I went with my mother to a

farmers' market, and we were coming back after the shopping and we heard, again, a siren. And we all assumed it was another, just, trial, preparation for what we hoped would never happen. We were supposed to get off the street and hide in a building. A few minutes after that, bombs were falling. This was September 1, 1939. Piotrkow was bombed and attacked by the Germans. And that was it! It was a very drastic beginning of the war, and the family ran away. My father had an idea of going east. He hoped that Poland will give the German forces enough resistance so that we will have time to go east and possibly to Russia or to the eastern part, because Piotrkow was on the western part of Poland. We all gathered our belongings, went to the grandparents, and the family ran away. But a week later, it was over with.

Q: Before the actual bombing started, did your family have any thoughts or desire about leaving Poland -- before the actual war began?

A: Well, if they did, it wasn't anything that looked like they were going to do it, and it was because of economic situation. It was very expensive and was very involved to leave Poland before the war. I knew very few people.

Q: Did you have to bribe anybody to get out at that point, do you think?

A: Frankly, I didn't know anyone among our friends and relatives. The only thing I remember is some relatives of my mother left for Israel, but this was quite a few years before the war. They were Zionists, and they were just leaving because of the general situation in Poland -- anti-Semitism, and so on.

R.S. Was there kind of a thought, too -- besides economics, and not trying to get out of Poland -- that maybe your city wouldn't be bombed, and that you would be okay?

A: Oh, you mean…

R.S. When you were making preparations for the war.

A: Well, we didn't really make any preparations. We just hoped that it would not happen, and just went along, but I don't remember. Later on, during the war, I remember my father was seriously thinking about crossing over -- you know, Poland was divided, Eastern Poland was Russian -- and a lot of young people that could take off and go, left and went to Russia. They were talking about it, and they were beginning to make serious plans, but I guess he gave up because it was too big a project for a family of five, with three small children, and not enough money, so they didn't do it.

Q: Before the war, there was a lot of anti-Semitism. When the actual war started, do you remember what was the reaction of the Jewish community? What did the neighbors say when the war started, and were there any meetings held in synagogues to act as one -- to come together?

A: Well, I was sixteen, so I was mostly preoccupied with, you know, activities and friends of my own age, so I didn't follow that too well. But I remember there was a great fear, and families were getting together and discussing, and trying to figure out what will happen. But what happened in Piotrkow, that I didn't know then, I found out later, was that we were the very first ghetto under the Nazi-occupied Poland. I think it was the end of October, beginning of November, people that lived outside the Jewish section, like we did, lost their apartments, and had to go in into the restricted area, and our family of five, right away, was put in one room with another family. So you were, right away, together with a lot of other people, and I remember it was in the same building where my grandfather lived, so every evening the parents would get together and just discuss things and talk and try to figure out and look into the future, and hope for the best. As far as any organized meetings, Piotrkow had a good-sized Jewish community before the war, that had…

Q: About how big? Any idea?

A: Oh, I think it must have been 20,000 Jewish people. And they were very well organized. They had like a Jewish community. They had self-rule, and this just continued through the war, during the war. In fact the Germans turned over quite a few of the functions of running the ghetto to the Jewish committee.

Q: Was it like a Jewish Council?

A: Right, something like a council, like that.

Q: What opinions did other people in the Jewish community have of the Council members? Did they think they were collaborators in any way?

A: Well, that depended. Some people were above reproach, some of the Council members. They were very honest, they were very dedicated. And some were doing things that weren't quite right. And things got tougher when the German demands became more and more strict -- difficult -- and the Jewish Council had to execute that, and have to do whatever the Germans wanted them to do. I remember it started out with…let's say, they would come in and say, "We need 20,000 zlotys. We're giving you twenty-four hours. You come up with it, and we don't care from what Jews you get it. If we don't get the money, 200 Jewish men will be shot or sent off." The Jewish Council was left with the job of coming up with the money, so they had to approach various people, and of course, this didn't create any good feelings. Or I remember that they would come and say, "All fur coats, and all fur collars, have to be delivered within forty-eight hours." And again, it was their job to do it. And things got worse as the war got worse, and as they needed more Jews for all kinds of jobs. The Jewish Council had a special department. It was called the Arbeitzung, which means, "the work." I don't know how you translate it. For supplying people for work. And again, the

Germans had a special project, and they said, "We need 5,000 strong men by tomorrow, 8 o'clock in the morning, and you have to provide them." And usually, the 5,000 people that were sent off didn't come back. Either part came back, or they were abused, beaten or whatever. So it was not an easy job to have. I guess the Jewish community was still glad to be able to deal with Jews rather than immediately with the Germans, but it wasn't anything very pleasant for them.

R.S. What kind of communication did you have outside the ghetto? Were you able to get papers then still, or find out what was going on outside of your perimeter?

A: Well not really, not very much. I don't remember when, but within a few months, they gave us armbands with a Mogen David, and you were supposed to wear it all the time when you went outside of the ghetto. You had to wear this. And there were certain hours when you can be out, and other hours you couldn't be out. So the contact was very skimpy.

Q: As far as the Nazi occupation, how quickly did that occur? You said your city was one of the first. Was it within a week, a couple days?

A: Well, let's see. We left the city the night after war broke out, after the bombing. We were going on foot, and you didn't dare to walk in the daytime, because the German planes were so daring that they would come down really low, and they were able to use machine guns, and just shoot at people on the ground. So we were hiding out in the woods in the daytime, and just walked at night. So within a whole week, we put in only 30 miles. And then they overtook us. The Germans were already where we were trying to run away, so we just went back home. So to answer your question, Piotrkow must have been occupied within three or four days after the war broke out.

Q: You mentioned the Jewish Council with the Germans, etcetera. What action did the actual German forces take in the early months of the occupation? Did they do anything else besides set up the Councils? You talked a little about the edicts they were given. Were they patrolling the streets?

A: Oh yes. That's right. Definitely. You could not only see them, but you could hear them. I remember the German soldiers' boots were so heavy, and they always walked, like either two or three soldiers together, and they were -- well. The goose-step, I guess you call it? You could hear them blocks away. It was really terrorizing. They patrolled like that right away, the Polish part as well as the Jewish part. They would come to stores and just take things they liked, and didn't pay for it. It was just pretty scary, right away. And there were the decrees. The orders were given. Practically every other day there was something new.

Q: This is what I want to find out. What kind of legislation or anti-Jewish measures were given at the time of the occupation?

A: Well, one of the first things was to put all the Jews from Piotrkow in a small part, an old part, of the city that was traditionally the Jewish section. So whoever happened to be lucky and lived there all the time, had their own apartment, and stayed, and they weren't much uprooted. But we happened to be in the Polish part, so we had to leave right away. Schools were right away closed. I'd just finished gymnasium, but it was closed immediately. Even grade schools for Jewish children were closed while the Polish ones were kept open. What was most important to me was the schools and where we lived! And this was right away changed and taken from the Jews.

Q: When all this started, when the war started, did you have any knowledge of what was happening in other ghettos, of any concentration camps, or any killings of any kind?

A: Well, as I said at that time I was a teenager, I did not read the daily paper, but my father did, and he used to talk about it, and he wanted us to know that. So we knew that Jews in Germany are being persecuted and are undergoing terrible times. In fact, it seems to me I remember a shipment of German Jews that was brought to Poland. But that was all I knew. I read books that already at that time were writing about the Nazi things.

Q: Did you believe it was happening?

A: Oh yes, definitely. There was no doubt about it.

R.S. Did you have a conceptualization of what the concentration camps really were?

A: That I don't remember. I just remember some articles father read or pointed out to us to read, about individual German Jews -- what was happening in their lives when the Nazis came to power.

Q: Did the Nazis go mainly after the community leaders or they didn't really care when they first came in? To give the rest of the community examples?

A: Well, there were various approached, like, my uncle was very active in the Jewish Council, and he was a very politically active man way back before the war, and very respected. And at one point they rounded up all politically active Jews, and he was one of them. And ay another point, they would just at random, go into a neighborhood and find all the able-bodied men, took them away, and they either didn't come back or came back, you know, beaten up and so on. So there were various things. There wasn't just one.

Q: (To Smith). All right. Did you have any more you want to add to the introduction?

R.S. I just want to ask, when you said people were getting called out of the ghetto. Did many come back? Or, when they left, did you feel that they were maybe going to concentration camps, or going just for labor positions, or…

A: Well, they used to say that they are taking them for work, and they'll be back tomorrow, and so on. But most everyone was very fearful and didn't trust them. And until you saw the person back, you expected the worst, because so many times they never did come back.

R.S. And the few that came back. Did they say what was happening?

A: Well, I suppose they talked to very close people. Our father was taken several times and came back, and I just don't remember him talking to us. I don't know, maybe he talked to my mother or his contemporaries, but I don't recall.

Q: Did people who were taken -- did the Germans try to make them become spies within the community at all? Do you remember anything about that?

A: No. That I don't remember.

Q: All right. What I want to get into right now is a little bit about the hiding and the partisans, etcetera. If you were in hiding, who hid you?

A: I survived the war because of two Polish friends that were my childhood friends. They were daughters of our teacher. (They) supplied me with a Polish false identity card. And after the ghetto was liquidated, when they sent off everybody and kept only a small group, my sister and I survived together. They hid us out in their home. And after that, we went to Germany. We signed up as Polish girls, volunteering for work in Germany.

Q: By "hiding in their home," did you have a secret hiding place, or did you actually become part of the family?

A: Well it was a little unusual situation. These two sisters and the mother, what I didn't know then, they were always very patriotic, and they were in the Polish underground at that time. And that's why they were able to supply us with false papers. Now the father was not in favor of that activity, and he was afraid of the risks, so when they brought us to their home, he didn't know we were there. They were hiding my sister and myself up in the attic where the mother and the two sisters knew and the father did not.

Q: How long did that go on? Before he knew?

A: Well, he never knew. We were there for, I guess, a couple weeks, and then we had to leave because it was too dangerous for them, and we went…

Q: You lived in the attic and the father did not know?

A: Right.

Q: Now the actual arrangements for the hiding, this was done by the mother?

A: And the two daughters.

Q: And the daughters were about the same age as you were?

A: Right.

Q: You were hidden in the house. Did you hide throughout the war, or just part of the time?

A: Oh, no. It was just a short time.

Q: What length of time?

A: Maybe a week or two.

Q: After you were hidden, did you keep in contact with these particular people?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you do that?

A: Well, first of all, in '42, the ghettos were being tightened, and eliminated, and so on. And pretty soon, gossip, or news -- word-of-mouth --was going that the Germans systematically, are exterminating one ghetto after another. That was in '42, and I was 19 years old, and I remember, I began to realize…(pause)…I remember when it was pretty obvious that it's just a matter of time when the Piotrkow ghetto will be liquidated --what they did was they would surround the ghetto and sort out and maybe keep 2,000 out of the 22,000 people, and the rest were sent off to Treblinka -- and when I realized that this is like the <u>end</u> for me, I got very upset, and I had a feeling of inner revolt. I said, "I don't want to die, and I don't want to let the Germans kill me. Not now." And I began to nag my mother, "what can be done? We should do something about it." My father was the only one that was saved, because he had a job that made him useful to the Germans, but the rest of us were just…I remember my mother said, "Don't bother me. Whatever will happen to everybody else, will happen to us." The parents, from hunger and from the war, they just didn't have energy to think about anything but one day at a time. But I guess I made enough of a nuisance of myself, and she began to think, what could be done to do something about it. And she said, "Well why don't we approach our friends and see if they can do something for us?" She said the only hope would be to approach our friends and

see if they can help us. And what she had in mind was to ask one of the sisters to give me her passport and give me a chance to save myself. So we contacted them. They came to the ghetto, and we told them what's what. So they said, "Well, we'll go home, think about it and come back and tell you." A few days later they came back and they said, "We can give you three papers for all of your women." Men in Poland had no chance of pretending not to be Jews because no one else was circumcised, only Jewish men. So she offered a passport to my mother, my sister, and myself, and we just couldn't believe it. And no money -- it was unbelievable! My name was Schwartz, and this was considered a Jewish name, so she said, "Pick any Polish name, and have a picture ready, and we'll be back in a few days." So that's how we got the papers. And when the Germans came and surrounded the ghetto, it was, I remember, midnight. We were able to run out, just a few hours before it would have been too late, and that's how we stayed outside of the ghetto and then went to Germany. Worked there as Polish girls. My mother didn't make it because somebody caught her right in our hometown -- although she looked much less Jewish and her Polish was even…

Q: So the three passports you did receive. One was for you, one was for your sister, and one for your mother.

A: Yes. We all had different names. My mother -- this was her idea -- she said, "the two of you, even if you plan to be together, have different names. In case one gets caught, you can pretend you just have nothing to do with each other, so you don't automatically destroy or point to the other one.

Q: After you left the Polish friends, because you had a passport, saying you were Polish, did you make any attempt to contact any resistance groups? Any Jewish groups at all? Or would that be too risky?

A: Well, the only contact that I had with a resistance group was during the war in the ghetto. It must have been maybe '41 or '42. Most Jewish kids, as I said, couldn't continue their education officially, because all the Jewish schools were closed, but there was a lot of informal education going on. Like I was teaching Jewish grade school kids. And some of the Jewish professors that came from other towns or from our town that were laid off -- had no work -- had…You were not supposed to be meeting. No Jewish groups were allowed, but we were illegally meeting with our teachers and just were studying, just as if it was in high school. And at one point, we had a group of maybe fifteen, twenty young people that were getting together just like, maybe, a literary club or a historical club. And one of the leaders of the club who was a Hashomer Hatzair leader in town, brought up the idea. He said, "We know what's happening. We know what the Germans are doing to us. Why don't we resist? Why don't we do something about it?" I remember this was such a <u>surprising</u> thought, and we were just so shocked (laughter) and surprised about it. For example, my parents didn't know that I belonged to that group because they would have been afraid.

Q: Was it mostly a Jewish group?

A: It was all Jewish.

R.S. In the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto, right. But when he brought up the idea, we all began to think about it. And apparently, later on, I found out, he had contacts with Warsaw's underground Hashomer Hatzair, and he was going to organize something, and this was the group of people that he felt would be right for it. But before we had any chance to do anything, the ghetto was exterminated. It was just too late.

R.S. How much support was there? Was it just your young group?

A: Well, all these things were strictly secret, so it could be that things like that were going on among other groups of young people, and we just didn't know about it. But I remember personally, that this was something that was contemplated, and never came off, because it was too late.

Q: Did you act at all during the war as a partisan?

A: No. No. I didn't have a chance. No.

Q: All right. I want to go into a little bit more about the hiding area. I want a physical description of what it was like.

A: Well, it was a private home. The parents of my friends were well-to-do, both professional teachers that had their own home, a lot of land. This was outside of the city, and they had like a little shed in the garden. And I remember the very first night when we ran away, we slept there -- the two friends and my sister and I. And we could hear the shots coming out of the ghetto, which was some miles away. But the actual hiding was a private home where we were kept upstairs in the attic. And we had to be there, very quietly, when the father of the girls was at home, but when he went away to work, we were allowed to come down and have breakfast or sit in the kitchen and visit with them and so on. And also, what I found out when they were here two years ago visiting me, was that the reason why they told us they couldn't keep us any longer…Apparently, at the same time they had, in their home, a very important member of the Polish underground -- a man who was from somewhere out of town. And he heard us. And he apparently knew what was going on, and he told the lady of the house, "I know whom you have here. This is very risky. You're endangering not only yourself, but our whole organization. They have to go. If you won't do it, I will." And she just told us that we couldn't stay any longer, and at that time we left for Germany.

R.S. When you first asked if you could hide in their home, were you afraid that maybe they might have gone and turned you in?

A: No.

Q: When they told you to leave, what were your thoughts?

A: Well, I didn't suspect it. I thought that they just couldn't go on any longer, because the father didn't know, and he was against it, and we knew at that time it was very risky for the Poles to do that. There was a death penalty for any Pole helping a Jew during the war. So we really didn't expect to be there that long. It was just a temporary thing.

Q: So while you were in the attic hiding, you lived a normal life when he did go to work?

A: Right.

Q: While he was up there, while you were in the attic and he was home, were you restricted on any movement or talking…

A: Oh, definitely! (Laughter0

Q: I want you to talk about that some.

A: You couldn't move, you couldn't cough, you just had to be practically, completely frozen, because the attic was above the kitchen, and every move would be heard downstairs. And I'm sure that the mother and the two daughters tried to distract him, and if there was, by accident, some suspicious noise, they tried to, you know, get his attention from it.

R.S. How much space was there? Could you stand up or was it just enough that you had to lie down flat?

A: I don't remember that.

Q: It was a small area.

A: Yea. It was a small area. I think we could stand up. I don't think we had to lie down, but there was nothing to sleep on.

Q: Your sister was there? You were there? Was your mother in the attic too?

A: No. We split up. There were four of us. My mother and my little brother were hiding out with other Polish friends, and my sister and myself were with them. And the original hope was that when the extermination commander was done, and left and went to the next city, father hoped that he would be able to add us on to the legally left group that was working for the Germans. So that's why we

originally hoped to just make it in the city, to wait it out, and then join him. In fact, he told us, "Don't go to the main office in our town," because people knew us too well. He said, "Go on foot." He was directing all our moves. He made the plans for us. "Don't take a train out, or a bus or whatever, go on foot to the next small town, and sign up. Show 'em the papers, and…" They were looking very much for people to work in Germany.

R.S. When your mother was caught, did you know where she was taken?

A: She was taken to Treblinka.

Q: Did you know what was happening there?

A: We pretty well knew, yah. Towards the end people knew that Treblinka was just a place where there were crematoria, and just no one came back.

R.S. Was your little brother with your mother when she was caught?

A: Yah. It was a very sad story. She was with him together, and we kept in touch. Father was in the ghetto, working officially. So my mother sent my brother -- he was then maybe ten years old -- to the ghetto with some message, and he was supposed to come back and tell her what father said. And as he was coming back, some Polish kids recognized him, and started to run after him, and call him "Jew!" Jew! Jew!" And police followed, and he, in his big panic, went to where my mother was. So when the police came, they right away arrested her. But in the big commotion, she told him, "Hide and run!" So he was able to escape and get away. They got her and took her to the main synagogue, which at that time, was the place where they were accumulating people, and sending them off to Treblinka.

Q: Do you feel that the average Polish person knew what the death camps were early in the war?

A: Frankly, I don't know.

Q: When did you understand them to be death camps?

A: Well that was during the war in the ghetto when we heard people talk about what was happening, and where they were going, and so on.

Q: That would have been in the early '40s?

A: '41, probably. We knew what was going on in the Warsaw ghetto -- the great extermination, the hunger, and the sending off people, and so on. But Treblinka and other places…I guess we did know about concentration camps before,

because I remember when my uncle was arrested as a political leader, people were afraid that that's where he will end up going, but he was released.

Q: You were hiding for a little bit. You were given false passports. Did you spend the rest of the war in Germany working?

A: Right.

Q: And at the end you just left Germany when the war was over?

A: Right.

Q: While the war was going on, did you have any encounter with gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, any Soviet prisoners of war, or any baptized Jews?

A: No, none of those. I have seen prisoners of war, like French prisoners, and Czech, and I ran into a lot of nationalities, but I don't remember seeing any gypsies. There were a lot of gypsies in Poland, but I don't remember them in Germany.

Q: Yourself. What did you witness, or what were you aware of, about any systematic killings, or fatalities from other causes? What did you witness as far as what the Germans did to the Jews? Any violent acts?

A: Oh, yea. There were plenty. (Sardonic laughter). One, for example, I remember there was a very feared SS officer who would come to the ghetto every day or every other day with a huge German Shepherd dog, and let him loose on the Jewish children. And when you saw that guy, the street would immediately empty. Or he would go into the best bakery and just have the Jewish woman put a whole bunch of the best tortes and pastries, and the dog would eat. So, these things you could see all the time. Or just abuse and violence. My grandfather had a beautiful, white, clean beard, and for a long time he was afraid to walk, because Germans -- if they were more civilized and polite, they would take pictures of him, because he was so unique and unusual to them -- and other friends with beards would come back, beaten up, and the beard cut off, by them. And all kinds of just inhuman things. That was pretty much just a daily routine.

Q: How did that affect you? Did you become angry? Did you want to do something back?

A: Yah. I remember when (laughter) I was a child, or a young teenager, I remember my parents were saying that I was talking in sleep. And shortly after the war broke out before we even left our regular place, I guess I was saying in the middle of the night, "Why?" and "What will happen?" and apparently, this expressed my resentment and my fear, but well, there was hatred! You saw a German or you heard a German walk, and you couldn't stand the sight of them! But it wasn't possible to think or plan any systematic resistance, to do anything against them.

Q: While you were "passing", did you have any contact at that time with any Jews or relatives?

A: "Passing" for…

Q: "Passing" once you were in Germany.

A: Well we signed up and were included in a transport of Polish young people that were going to Germany. And we ended up in Thuringen which is in central Germany, in a big work camp that had hundreds and hundreds of -- there was one camp for men, one for women -- we were in the camp for women -- and they were from all over Europe. My sister and I had different passports, but there was resemblance, so we couldn't say we were strangers, so for a while we were saying we were cousins. And we could see, with each new transport, there were one or two girls that looked to us, like they were just like we were. They were not Polish, they were Jewish. And I was telling my sister that the situation is getting risky. We should get out of there while we can. And we did. We got caught, but then we made it again. We got out of there. And apparently after we got arrested, the other Polish women openly were saying, "These two cousins were not Polish. They are Jewish." So is that what you meant? That's what you asked me? This was the contact, where we could spot other Jewish women, but we tried to avoid them. They were avoiding us.

Q: Were there ever any attempts of secretly, that you could meet one another, try to establish some kind of…

A: Well, no. There were a few incidents that I remember during Christmas time. They celebrated in the camp, and part of the custom, as you break off a piece of the -- I don't remember how you call it, but it's a special Christmas bread -- and you wish each other a good year, and the girl that gave it to me, I broke it off, and she whispered in my ear, "You broke off too big a piece." She was Jewish and I didn't know, and she was just giving me a very quick advice. Then when we ran away and got caught and were brought back to the camp -- she worked on a different shift, so she was in the camp in the daytime when we came -- she told us, "Run, run. Ever since you were caught, everybody in the camp was saying you are Jewish. You cannot be here another minute." So we ran away. These were the contacts, you know. She didn't say, "I'm Jewish, too," but it was obvious.

R.S. What kind of work did you do?

A: We worked in a factory that was manufacturing great road machinery, and big…

R.S. Did they make weapons, too?

A: This particular one did not make weapons. I happened to work in the office. I had German in gymnasium before the war, so my German to them, was quite valuable, so I was put in better work. Oh, what's also interesting, in that factory, the German workers, the German men, some of them were very friendly to us. We suspected that they knew we were Jewish -- they were either communists or socialists -- but they invited us to their homes, they gave us clothes. The wives gave us food, shoes, things like that.

Q: Did anybody ever say, on the job, "You're Jewish?"

A: No. Well, yes! After we ran away from the factory, we went south and ended up working in a hotel in Regensburg, and I remember I was cleaning a big room after a big meeting -- this was the main hotel for the city that had all the high ranking German military people -- and as I was cleaning, he called me over, and he said, "Where are you from?" And I told him. And he said, "Did you have any Jews in your family?" (Everyone laughs) Just like that. No warning, nothing! I was shocked, but I pretended I'm offended! I said, "What do you mean! I'm Polish! I never had -- not as far as I know!" And he said, "Well, the reason I'm asking, is that," he said, "I'm in anthropology. I'm interested in the shape of your head." (laughter) I remember at that time I had my hair behind my ears, so my ears were showing. Ever since then I have covered them. (laughter) He apparently was looking at me from the profile. He said, 'Your ears and your whole structure of your face, there must have been some Jews in your family, because there's a lot of resemblance to Jews." So I just exchanged a few words with him, and left. I said, "I'm too busy. I don't have time. And I don't know of any Jews." But I remember, I went to my sister, and I said, "Well, let's be prepared. This man said such and such a thing to me, and something might happen." But it didn't.

R.S. Was your sister older than you?

A: Younger.

R.S. How much younger?

A: Two years.

Q: Do you recall any specific units of the Nazi police or the German Army? Any particular numbers that they might have had? Division numbers?

A: No. I remember different groups. One was strictly military Germans, and the other ones were the SS. They were the real Nazis, the people that were doing all the atrocities. And there was a difference between them, because SS were all just tyrannical, and inhumane, while the German soldiers, once in a while, you could run into someone who seemed decent, or just, really, not comfortable with what they were doing. But after we were in the ghetto, there was hardly any contact with them – except for these scary visits. They came and knocked on peoples'

doors and just…although, even most of these things were done by the Jewish police. The Jewish Council had their own Jewish police that had to round up people and just…

Q: And give them to the Germans?

A: Yea. There was a lot of bad feelings.

Q: Do you think they did it under the guise: If they don't do it, they're going to go themselves?

A: That's right.

Q: Going a little bit towards the end of the war -- or when the war was over -- you were in Germany at that point. Did you know that Germany was losing the war?

A: Yes. By that time -- too bad my father didn't see what an avid paper reader I turned out to be, because he was always so interested in politics, and couldn't understand why I didn't read papers -–- well I followed it very carefully, and I knew what was going on. And I knew that Germans were retreating in Russia and that after D-Day, when the western nations attacked, so it was just a matter of time. I was scrubbing the basement floor when I heard the great, "happy" news -- on their radio -- that Roosevelt died. And they said, "That's it. The war will turn around and we will win." It was just a few weeks before we were liberated!

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the liberation. Did the war end for you when soldiers came into your town? American or Russian soldiers?

A: American soldiers, yea. The war ended on April 27, 1945. And before that, for maybe a week or so, the city was being shelled by heavy artillery. It was bombed before, so there was chaos, and you could see for months, retreating German soldiers, coming from east and west, and just sleeping everywhere -- in hallways -- and wounded and it was very obvious that they were collapsing. At that time -- I remember the owner of the hotel where I worked was a very aristocratic family, and they had coffee every day, and I was the one that would bring the coffee in -- and when I came in, they would stop talking.

Q: Which town were you in?

A: In Regensburg, near Munich, north of Munich. And once I overheard them saying, "Well, we know it's over with. Let's hope that we don't get the Russians, that we get the Americans to liberate us," so it was pretty obvious that they just losing, and it was a matter of time. And we all hoped that it wouldn't be the Russians that would come to liberate us.

Q: You hoped that, too?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: When the Americans came into town, was it at that point that you felt liberated, or had many of the German units left the city already?

A: Well, when the shelling was becoming very heavy, we all hid out. And we hid out with Polish friends that even then didn't know that we were Jews. That was also interesting. There was a small group of Jewish men that were wearing concentration camp outfits. There was one unit of Jewish concentration camp inmates that were brought to the city to clean up the debris of the bombing of the main railroad station. They were walking by the hotel, and I remember every day when I knew they were coming, I looked at them in hope that maybe I see my father there. And the last few days before the city was liberated, we all hid out in a hospital -- in the basement. And the concentration camp Jews were there, too. And at one point I wanted to go and visit with them, and see who's there. And my Polish friends, one of my Polish friends, said, "Don't go to them! They're Jews! Didn't you know that?" So I didn't go.

Q: How soon after the Americans came in did you start admitting to other people you were Jewish?

A: Well, (laughs) this was interesting. How could we tell that the war was over -- it got quiet. There was no more shelling, and just a very, very unusual quiet over the city. And people started to go out, out of the hiding, and could see that the Germans are gone and the Americans are there! And we went out too, and there were truckfulls of American soldiers driving through the city and shouting, "Hitler kaput!" and "Fraulein!" and throwing cigarettes and throwing candy! I resented them being so friendly to the German population, because I remember when the Germans came and occupied us, it was a completely different picture. When the Germans soldiers walked in, into that town, the way they walked, the way they looked and behaved was sheer terror, the boots and the stomping and the big rifles. And one thing I couldn't believe was the American soldiers looked like kids! Like just civilians. They had very soft-soled shoes. You couldn't hear them walk! There was no terror when you saw soldiers that walked just like civilians! And so they were right away very friendly to the population, and very nice, and even the Germans responded to them with friendliness. And yes, right away. I wanted to make sure that I go back to my original identity. We seeked out the CIC, the military intelligence, and I remember I talked to one man who was German-speaking -- they placed, in those positions, Americans that knew German – I remember I told that man who I am, how I survived, and this is my paper, but it's false, I like to go back to my original name, and I'm Jewish, and so on.

Q: Did he interrogate you at all?

A: Right! This man was very unsympathetic! And it was a very scary experience! He began to quiz me and ask me, "Where did you get the false paper? You know that's not legal!" And, "who are you?'" and so on. And I was just frightened, and very disappointed! And he told me, come back the next day. So we came back the next day, and we ran into someone completely different! And that man was apparently a Jew, because it was a completely different approach! He was so excited, and he was so happy to run into two Jewish girls that survived the war. He asked me, "What can I do for you? Where did you work? Do they owe you money? Can I do anything for you?" And I said, "Well, we like a couple of suitcases. We'd like to go back to Poland and see who survived the war." And he asked me, "How were you treated?" And I told him that the owner of the hotel was not very nice. She sent me to Gestapo at one point, and so on. So he sent for her right away, and put her in jail, because of us. So it was unbelievable to see two American official people that responded like day and night to us. Well, he was taking care of us, and tried to help us, and so on, and then he was transferred. We never saw him again.

Q: As far as other family members, who survived the war?

A: My sister, myself, and my little brother. My father was in Buchenwald and he perished a day before they were liberated.

Q: How did you find that out?

A: My brother was with him and he said how it happened. He was in a special barrack for young children that were treated a little better -- better food and so on --and my father just knew what was going on. They listened to radio -- illegal radio -- and he knew. In fact, he told my uncle, he said, "Well, we made it. We made it through the war." And he knew where we were because we were corresponding with my father in Poland through these Polish friends. We'd write letters to them, and they would deliver it to him, and vice versa. He would send letters through them to us. So he knew where we were. He thought that he already made it, and just a few hours before they -- my brother was hiding him -- and he just ran out to, I guess, look for a paper or listen to a radio or something and got caught, and took off, and we never knew where and what.

Q: After the war, did you go back to Poland?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you go back to your town, mainly to find out who survived?

A: Right.

Q: And how long did you stay there?

A: Oh, maybe a couple of months. It was in the summer of '45. The only person we found was that uncle and his daughter, and we brought them to Germany, and never went back again.

Q: How long were you in Germany?

A: I was in Germany until 1950, to when we immigrated to the U.S.

Q: Was there any question in your mind between, let's say, choosing the United States or Palestine?

A: Yes. There was.

Q: Tell me about it.

A: I was a student at the university over there in Munich, in Germany, and the Jewish students had an organization, and we were quite interested in what was going on in Israel. In fact, I remember when Israel was declared independent, it was a big…

Q: What organization were you in?

A: In 1948, it wasn't a political organization, it was an organization of Jewish students, survivors.

Q: Did it have a name of any kind? Do you remember that?

A: I guess it was the Jewish Organization of Students in Munich. It was supported by the Joint. It was nothing political. But people were discussing it all the time, and trying to make a choice, and I <u>was</u> thinking about Israel, seriously, but my sister was married, and she came here, and my uncle came here, and it was just more-or-less family ties. I hated to be separated, so I came here, too.

Q: Did the other family members come to Minnesota? How did you arrive here/

A: Well, there weren't too many family members. There was my sister, myself, uncle and his daughter. The uncle had a sister in Milwaukee that lived here for 20 or 30 years and had established a family, so she brought him over -- him and his daughter. And then we tried to be close to where <u>he</u> is. My sister came first. I was there in medical school and I wanted to finish, so I stayed on. So she came here first, and then I followed. We didn't know…

Q: That was Minneapolis then?

A: Right. We came right away.

Q: Did you finish medical school?

A: Yes.

Q: Are you practicing as a doctor now?

A: Yes.

Q: Where do you practice?

A: I'm an ophthalmologist. I work at a Columbia Heights office.

Q: All right. I want you to tell me, a little about how the people who were hiding you, how they came here, and what happened the last couple of years when you did bring them to the United States.

A: Well, when the war was over, we went back to Poland to see who survived. We didn't find too many people. We visited with our friends. Their mother was in a concentration camp, herself. Her underground activities were discovered -- the Polish underground activities -- and she was in a concentration camp. One of the sisters was on the Gestapo (list) and almost exterminated at Warsaw, but she was saved. We came back to Germany, but we kept in touch. We corresponded all the time, and I was sending them packages and medicine -- one of the sisters developed T.B. They are still very deep patriots. I get letters from them all the time, even now. So we kept in touch, and I felt that I wanted to do something to show my appreciation for what they did for us and the risk they took. I brought them over here, and I had Yad Vashem issue a certificate of gratitude and a medal for them, and the ceremony was performed at the Israeli Consulate in New York. And they were also honored by Rabbi Goodman in our synagogue (Adath Jeshurun) they were present at one Friday night sermon.

Q: Did you have <u>much</u> contact with them after the war, or was it really just intermittent?

A: Well it was steady, but not very frequent. Like I would send a package a couple of times a year, and we would write maybe four or five times a year, exchange letters and pictures and so on. So we kept in touch, but it wasn't anything very, very frequent.

R.S. Can I go back and ask a question? When you went back to Poland and then you went back to Germany to study, what was the climate of the people like then? Was there still underlying anti-Semitism?

A: (Laughter) That's a good question! The medical school was overcrowded, because during the years of the war, I guess they couldn't go on, and a lot of German students -- men -- were in the war. So when the war ended, there was a

great influx, and there were hundreds of students, and they were all crowded. And the Jewish students resented it very much that we had to be together with them, because they were all, you know, just out of the Front, and we felt that they were doing terrible things to us, and here we are sitting on the same bench and listening to the same professor. So we kept to ourselves, although we had to be together with them. But there was a definite coolness, and a definite distrust. There was one incident that I remember. It was very shocking. It was a psychiatry class, and the professor presented a patient, a schizophrenic or whatever the woman's problem was, and he was going to demonstrate how her thinking is distorted, and so on, and he started to ask her something, and she just came out with anti-Semitic…just tirades!

Q: This was the doctor?

A: This was the patient that was interviewed by the German professor of psychiatry in front of hundreds of students, mostly German, and some of us Jewish students, together. And the woman said, "All these Jews are buying out our best chicken. They get all the good food. They just have everything." And all the hundreds of German students were applauding1 And whistling! And yelling! And this was 1945 or '46. Way after the war. They were defeated, you know, so…

R.S. Were there still, like small groups, of what you might call at that point, neo-Nazis -- or do you think they were trying to re-establish or keep struggling?

A:" Well, we didn't trust most of them, because whenever you talked to a German, they all said, "Oh! We didn't know anything about it! And that's terrible!" and so on and so forth. But it was very difficult to believe. You could tell that some were genuinely sorry, but the majority just…and another thing, too, that they all said, "Well, I had nothing to do with it." But I also remember there was a very outstanding anatomy professor that was just a very known and famous man, and he would lecture, and one day he didn't show up, and we asked, "Where is Professor von So-and-so?" Oh, he got arrested. He was a Nazi active. He won't be teaching anymore. Here is his substitute." (laughter)

Q: Let's talk a little about Judaism and how your thoughts might have changed after the war. You saw what happened to the Jewish people. Because of what happened to you and what you witnessed, did your faith in God diminish at all? Do you still consider yourself a believer after you saw what happened?

A: Well, (sigh). I was never very religious in the sense of a person that had religious beliefs. I don't know how to express it. I had my own feelings, but we didn't have a kosher home, and I didn't especially go with the established religious. Well, to answer your question, it did not change, really. It did not make me a disbeliever while before I was a believer. I still believed in the human race, and I still thought that this was a terrible thing, but it doesn't mean that everybody's like that, and that the world will be like that again.

Q: Do you have any contact now with the Jewish community, besides the synagogue, to be involved in?

A: Oh yes, definitely. Most of our friends are Jewish. We moved to St. Louis Park so that the kids would grow up in a Jewish surrounding. They went to Talmud Torah. And we are extremely interested in what's going on in Israel. So we are "good" Jews, even though we don't feel that in order to be a good Jew you have to be a very practicing Jew. In fact, in Poland, there were a lot of very devoted Jews that had very little to do with the synagogue.

Q: As far as contact with other survivors or survivor organizations after the war, what did you do with that?

A: Well we were a very active part of the student body in Munich. It was the largest group of surviving youth in Europe. Germany was a place where a lot of survivors of other nations, and Jews, too, concentrated. And Munich happened to be the largest center. So we kept in touch the five or six years that we were there. When I came to Minneapolis there was a small organization of survivors, that somehow fell apart, but informally we do meet with survivors. We have a lot of friends that used to go to school with me, together in Chicago. They have a very active group, but it's more just close friends or professional ties, rather than specifically a survivor or political orientation.

Q: As far as your thoughts now about Germans. Do you have a very negative feel towards people who say they are Germans, or do you differentiate between the German leaders and the German people?

A: No. It's difficult for me to make a blanket statement that all Germans are no good, and they are Nazis, and so on. I remember there were instances when I was there working and pretending not to be a Jew, and scared of being found out -- I was mixing with German people, with the population -- and I witnessed several scenes where they were very moving to me. And I felt for the German people what they are going through. I remember…

Q: You mean the suffering they were…

A: That's right. I remember we got together in a factory for a coffee break, and one German mother was just in tears because she got a letter from her son, that he got wounded in the war, or something like that. And it was very painful to witness, and she was talking about it.

Q: All right. Tell me how you met your husband?

A: Oh, okay. (Laughter) We met in Munich after the war. He's an electrical engineer, so he was studying in a technical college, and I was in medical school.

Q: How soon after the war did you get married then"

A: Well, we got married here in 1950, after we were done with our studies.

Q: Can you tell me, with a deep feeling, what it means to be a survivor? Is it a special type of person? Do you feel you survived to have a mission now?

A: (Laughs) Well, I think to me, it seems like a combination of things. First of all was this very strong will to make it -- not to give in -- and do something to survive. And the other one was just circumstances and luck, and so on. Every so often I think about it, but I think it's difficult to say. It's probably a combination of things. You had to have the will and the desire and the drive, and then the conditions had to be such that it became possible, because there were a lot of people that wanted to survive, and never made it,

Q: So a lot of it was luck, but the under-riding thing was the strong will.

A: Well, first you had to have the will and the drive and the persistence and it took some planning, and to be quick with it. There were several instances where I was almost caught, and just, by a quick presence of mind…I was taken to Gestapo, and they found something on me that I didn't know I had, some papers that showed I ran away from another place, and they asked me what it is, and I just in a couple seconds came up with an excuse. So there were close calls.

Q: In the world today, there are some people going around the country who are listened to, saying that the Holocaust didn't happen. How would you respond to someone like that/

A: It's just frightening to hear something like that. And everything has to be done to prove it to the world. These people are vicious. I don't think they're ignorant, I think they're just plain vicious.

Q: The way the Holocaust's being portrayed now through television shows. Do you feel that is a valid interpretation? Is it being glorified in any way? What do you think should be brought out? if you were to sit with somebody who is young right now and say that this happened to you, and they say to you, "How and why did this happen?" What would you say?

A: You mean the whole Holocaust?

Q: Yeah.

A: Why it happened?

Q: What would you say to a young child who is Jewish?

A: Well (laughter) that happened because the Nazis and Hitler succeeded in getting his terrible, crazy ideas across to the German people, forcing them into doing what he wanted them to do. And it's hard to believe now, but I guess there were all kinds of conditions that made it possible for him to achieve what he did and for the war to go along with it.

Q: Let's talk about conditions for a minute. Do you see any kind of parallel between what happened then, and what's happening here now, as far as the economics -- the way people are thinking -- becoming more conservative? Can a Holocaust happen here?

A: Well, it's possible. I think it <u>is</u> possible, given the right circumstances and combination of things. It's probably not <u>nearly</u> as possible as it was in Poland where there were always anti-Semitic elements, or in Germany where the regime was so very fanatically anti-Jewish. It might not be as easy, but I would say it is not impossible for us here.

Q: Do you see any correlation, let's say, between the right wing of Jerry Falwell to the Nazi party?

A: Yes.

Q: How do you see a similarity?

A: Well, it's the same -- the same narrow minded and self -righteous and hateful group of people that's trying to impose their philosophy on the rest of the population. All they lack now, that Hitler didn't, is the power to terrorize the rest of the population. It's one thing to have a political view, and it's another thing to have the power to force the rest of the population to do what you want them to do. It usually takes only a small number of people to terrorize the large nation, or large group of people. That's what happened there.

R.S. Will the same thing follow, though, and encompass a large number of people? Is the psychology, is it right for it? Do you think they would need the terrorism? Or maybe just the psychology?

A: No, no. Psychology alone, I don't think, would do it. It takes organization. You have to subdue a lot of people that are maybe either slightly sympathetic or neutral or even against you, but they're afraid of speaking up and doing anything different. I think that's the way it happened in Germany. There were a lot of decent Germans that were just afraid for their own skin, and they went along with it.

Q: In the last few months, there have been articles published that Roosevelt, and many other people who were high in the United States government, knew of the

concentration camps, and they chose not to bomb the railways. Their rationale was that it wasn't important for us to bomb this. We should concentrate on the military, or whatever. What kind of thoughts do you have?

A: I think it was wrong. It was very wrong. This country was very powerful, very strong -- it's true, they were fighting the war and they were trying to get Hitler in a military way, to subdue him -- but if they knew, which I understand they did, it would have taken very little extra effort to save a lot of Jews. Jews were being shipped for hundreds of miles in trains, across countries. All it would have taken was a few bombs thrown in some strategic places. They could have thrown that plan into disarray, and liberated a lot of people.

Q: As a person who has experienced this, to a young Jew who's growing up…

A: Like my kids? (Laughter)

Q: Like your kids. Do they have the knowledge of what you experienced? Have you sat down with them? And when you sat down with them, the first time, was this one of the hardest things you could tell them?

A: Well we were talking about it. When the children were small and were at home, it was hard for me to talk about it, because it was very painful, it was very fresh. As my daughter said, "We hated to ask you because whenever you started to talk about it, you would cry, and we hated to see you cry, so we just never brought it up." And now later, as things became less difficult to talk about, the children grew up and they were away at school, colleges. Now we do talk about it, but we don't formally plan a session and sit down and say, 'Well, this is the hour we will spend on Holocaust, and ask me and I will answer you." It just happens. In a daily routine, something comes up that brings back a memory, or they ask. That's how we talk about it, in a way that's more or less spontaneous, not really planned.

Q: This is the 11th of August. 1982. This is tape two with Mrs. Zimering. What I would like to do, maybe before we get into the tape, is review these articles. Why don't you just explain them.

A: Alright. This snapshot is of the two Polish friends of mine who were visiting in Minneapolis in '79. They are Danuta and Maria. Right now the younger one is a medical doctor, the older one is an accountant. These are the two people that saved my life by giving me the false documents and hiding me out in their own home for a while.

Q: In the years that preceded the war, how much communication did you have with them?

A: Well, when we were small children, we grew up playing together. We lived not too far from each other. And then during grade school years, their mother was my

teacher. But then when we went to gymnasium, I went to a Jewish gymnasium, they went to a Polish, and the contact was not quite as close as before. But we still kept in touch. We visited each other, and during the summer in the country. And then of course, when the war broke out, we just reached out to them as the only ones that we felt we could trust and hope for help, and they came through.

R.S: And there was no hesitancy on their part?

A: No.

Q: What about your contact after the war? Had you seen them?

A: After the war, in 1945, I went back to Poland to look for survivors. I hoped that my father survived, I hoped to find more family. And I did go to their home, and I did visit with them, but this was in late summer of 1945. It was a very short visit. Their mother, who was my teacher -- she ended up in a concentration camp. In fact, they all were. Their job during the war, the younger one was smuggling information between various fighting groups of underground Polish, and the older one was smuggling weapons. In fact, when they were here, they told me that several times the mission took them right near the Warsaw ghetto, and they were going by on a street car, and they could see the ruins and the terrible despair. And she said, "We just couldn't look. We just had to keep going." So anyway, she was caught by Gestapo and was in jail and she was pretty close to being executed. Lucky for her, the war ended, and she was free. But what happened was, she came down with T.B. And shortly after the war, we re-established contact. I was in Germany. I wrote to them. And I was sending them packages and medication, and we kept in touch ever since

Q: So it was your idea for them to come to visit you?

A: Well, yah. How the whole thing started was, the older sister's son spent a year at M.I.T. as post graduate. He's an engineer. And my son was at Harvard then, and they got together, and we met him there at my son Mark's graduation. And this somehow opened up my eyes. If her son can be here, why couldn't the mother and the sister come? And that's how we got started.

Q: Sure. What did you feel when you saw them at the graduation?

A: No, no. I saw the <u>son</u>. The boy was born after the war.

Q: When they did come here, how did you feel?

A: Well, it was…it was…it was very moving. Of course we all looked different (laughing). When they got off the plane, well, they called me from New York. There was a whole complication. Whoever was going to pick them up didn't show up, so my son went there. They couldn't communicate. He didn't speak

Polish, they didn't speak English. But when they got here, it was…very moving. And I found out a lot of things that I didn't know during the war, what they were involved with. Like why they were able to supply us with the papers. Came out now that they were in the Polish underground, and they themselves were on false papers.

Q: And the father had no knowledge of what was going on…

A: Well, the father knew that the mother and the daughters are in it, and he was very much against. He was very afraid. In fact they told me that the mother always told him, "Don't worry. If they come for me, I will tell them you had nothing to do with it. So you're not in any danger." And sure enough, one night,, the Gestapo did come and arrested mother, and they didn't touch him. They apparently had good enough information to know who was involved and who was not. And the daughters were already hiding out because they were warned, so they weren't caught then. So they went through a lot themselves. In fact, I just sent off a package again to them, and the son, an engineer, wrote me a postcard from France -- he's at a meeting -- and he says, "That's the only time we can write freely." Apparently the two sisters are active in Solidarity! (laughter) In the underground movement! So they…no matter what comes! (laughter)

R.S. It's in their blood. (laughter)

A: Right. They loved this country. They were very impressed, but they said, "Our place is Poland. This is our country, and we have to help it the best we can." So we were just lucky to have had, for friends, such unusual human beings as they were. At that time, they were only children, so they did whatever their mother decided should be done, but she was quite exceptional.

Q: It's quite a role model for them. When the war was going on…any more you'd like to tell about the family that was hiding you, or what happened to them?

A: Well one thing that came out that I didn't realize, also, was that when things were getting very, very crucial, during the liquidation of the ghetto, apparently, my mother came to their mother, and begged her to save us! (a short break to regain composure)…This always happens, But anyway, what they said, they had an older brother who was an epileptic, a very sick child. And before the war, they had a special maid that watched over the boy. And we played together in a park that was close to our business, and whenever the boy got an attack of epilepsy, the young maid couldn't handle that, so our mother came and helped out. So apparently, their mother felt very indebted and very thankful to her. And she told her girls that, "I have to help her, for what she has done for me." So that's how she took the risk, and hid us out, and did all the things she did for us. That's something I didn't know. I had no idea. It just came out during their visit here.

Q: How long ago was the visit?

A: In October of ’79.

Q: Okay. Tell me what happened when they did come here. There were some newspaper articles written, also. Maybe we can go over that a little bit.

A: Right, right. Well, when they came, it was strictly for a private visit, a reunion between us, and for them to have a chance to get out of Poland, and have a vacation. But I talked to Rabbi Goodman about it, and he was very interested in it, and he said, “Why don’t you bring them over for a Friday evening service, and we will honor them in front of the whole congregation.” We did that. And it was a very moving occasion. I have this little writing from the synagogue paper. Rabbi Goodman took my letter to Yad Vashem when he was there on a trip. And I reported to Yad Vashem about what they had done, and I asked for recognition. And Yad Vashem had a meeting, and they approved, and they sent out a certificate and a medal that they were given in a very official ceremony at the New York Israeli Consulate. I wanted them there, because our children were out east, and I wanted to make sure that they meet the children and my children meet them. And this was written up in several Jewish papers, and English papers. Some friends of mine in Israel were sending me clippings, little notices about it, even in Israel, because unfortunately, there weren’t too many instances like that.

Q: So what they did, you feel was something that happened on a very exceptional level.

A: That’s right. In fact, one of the reporters that was present at the New York ceremony was a Polish reporter from a Polish press, and he apparently forwarded the news to Poland. And when they came back, they were big heroes! They were written up in Polish papers. The news was on T.V. and their husbands said, “At home we were getting phone calls, and telegrams!” (laughter)

Q: Have they told anybody, before the publicity, what they had done? Or was it a secret?

A: Well, that’s a good question. I don’t know. I remember after, I think it was the ’67 War -- I think she came up with the idea -- where Israeli representatives were in Poland, and they were honoring some Polish people like they were, for saving Jews. And she was sending me the clippings -- one of the sisters. And I guess that’s how she got the idea, and I got the idea, that we could somehow bring this into the open. But I don’t know whether they were privately talking to their friends about it, or just keeping it quiet. I don’t know.

Q: Let’s talk a little about the article that was written. Was it in the synagogue newspaper?

A: Yea,

Q: Maybe that could even be read into the record.

A: So much red tape before they allowed them to come here! Well, this is just a short article, and it's really good.

A: The article is from the Clarion publication of Adath Jeshurun Synagogue as of October 17, 1979. And it says:
"Yad Vashem Letter Lauds Aides of Polish Friends. On Saturday evening, October 19, two Polish sisters who were instrumental in saving Dr. Sabina Zimering and members of her family during the Holocaust, will be at Shabbat Eve services.

Below is Sabina Zimering's letter:

Dear Rabbi Goodman,

The following is a Summary of a letter I sent to Yad Yashem.

Mrs. Danula Trybus, a 56 year-old accountant and Maria Spiewak, a 54 year-old medical doctor, of Piotrkow, Poland, are two sisters who were my childhood friends, and their mother my grade school teacher.

In 1942, when we were threatened by the Nazis with deportation to Treblinka, we turned to them with a plea for help, and they provided my mother, my sister, and myself with false Polish documents, without any compensation. These documents enabled us to escape from the ghetto a few hours before the extermination brigade surrounded it on October 20, 1942.

Our friends and their mother, without the knowledge of their father, who was against it, were hiding us out in their home until we left for work in Germany as Polish girls. The penalty for helping Poles at that time, as far as I recall, was death.

Our mother was caught and sent to Treblinka where she perished. Our father and younger brother remained in Piotrkow in a forced labor camp. From the end of 1942 until the beginning of 1945, when the camp was liquidated, my sister and I were able to communicate with our father and our young brother from Germany to Piotrkow by sending letters and occasional food packages, to our Polish friends, which they delivered to them. His letters to us were transmitted the same way.

This continued contact was a great moral support to all of us. Our friends understandably were taking great risks for our sake. My father perished in Buchenwald in April, 1945, two days before the liberation.

I have kept touch with my friends since the end of the war, trying to help them in various ways. The two sisters and the mother during the war, were actively participating in a Polish underground which was fighting the Nazis. Their activities were uncovered and the mother was sent to a concentration camp, Ravensbruck, in Germany, after which she spent several months recuperating in Sweden, and returned in poor health back to Poland.

The older sister, Mrs. Trybus, after her release from Polish jail, came down with tuberculosis. For a while I supplied her with streptomycin, not available in Poland at that time, food packages and warm clothes to help her recover.

I expect them in Minneapolis the second week of October. I appreciate your interest very much.

Yours truly

Sabina Zimering.

So this was the letter that I sent to Yad Vashem, and as I was explaining to Rabbi what I was doing, he just wrote the whole letter in the Clarion, and this was sent out to the congregation, and then read again during the service. It was very moving. It was part of the regular Shabbat evening sermon, and they read the letter, and then the older sister, Danuta, she felt she wanted to express her appreciation for being honored. They have never been to a synagogue before…this was the first time in their lives.

Q: Did they have any religion?

A: Oh, they are very devout Catholics! They were observant. They were very religious. But, the rabbi explained to them that in a synagogue, no matter what goes on, however moving the sermons are, there is no applause -- ever. And when the thing was winding down, she got up and said a few words, thanking the congregation and the rabbi about what a moving experience it was. She knows no English. So we wrote it out. She told me what she wants to say, and I wrote it

out in Polish, English sounding words. And there she got up in front of hundreds of strange people, and gave this speech, and you could tell right away she did not understand, because the accent was on the wrong…and the synagogue just broke out in applause! And Rabbi Goodman said this was the very first time that he remembers a response like that! And a few minutes before, he told her, "Don't expect applause." (Laughter) so it was extremely moving. And there is another thing, with the strikes -- which was a week later -- he had a comment about it in the Clarion, too. (Looking at papers). So I was so happy that this thing came off, because they really deserved so much more, but they don't want to leave their home town.

Q: Do they still live in the same house that you were…

A: That's right. That's right. The younger sister lives there. The older sister lives in another…(Still looking at papers). This is what this looked like. This was sent special mail, special delivery, to the Consulate. There are some pictures, you wanted to know, of some concentration camps. Would you like to look at other things?

Q: Yea. Let's do.

A: Oh, here. This is the Rabbi's study. Let's see, where the part about the…"Last Friday, it came out together in response to the Polish sisters…"

Q: I think it might be good for you just to read that one or two paragraphs, and explain what it is.

A: Yea. This is another issue of the Clarion. It was the issue a couple weeks after the honoring of my friends at the Adath. And the Rabbi writes, among other things: "During the Friday night service of October 19, it all came together with the presence of two Polish sisters, Mrs. Danuta Trybus and Mrs. Maria Spiewak, who during the Holocaust had risked their lives to save Sabina Zimering's family

It was only during the past week that we learned that Yad Vashem had accepted Sabina's deposition, testifying to the heroism of the women. They are now recognized by the State of Israel and the Jewish people as Chesed B'Shalom, "The Righteous of the Gentiles."

In their honor, trees will be planted in Yad Vashem grounds on the special path called the Walk of the Righteous. Their presence in our midst was a reminder that not all humanity stands indicted because of the Holocaust. There were men and women of good will and rare courage who somehow restore our faith in human kind.

When these two women were asked to rise, the congregation strained to get a glimpse of them. When they were called to the pulpit to respond to Dora

Zaidenweber's beautiful greetings in English and Polish, a hush fell upon the entire congregation.

Danuta and Maria ascended to the pulpit to the joyous singing of "Shalom Aleichem!" In their brief English response, they emphasized their belief that they were not heroes. They just did what any decent human being should do.

We, of course, know how rare such people were, and how great was their risk. Following their response, an unprecedented wave of applause swept the congregation.

At the Oneg Shabbat, Maria and Danuta were surrounded by dozens of men and women, eager to have more contact with them. Although these women spoke no English, and few of our members spoke Polish, it was amazing how much communication did take place. Hearts responded to hearts. We who were there felt privileged.

Q: Is there anything else related to them, or do we go on to something else now?

A: Well, this is the speech of the Israeli Consul, during the ceremony, but I don't think we need to read this, unless you want to. It's pretty much the summary of what was said in the other one. But this was given at the Consulate in the presence of all kinds of officials of survivors, and Jewish organizations, and reporters.

Q: When we finish the interview, I think this last page would be very good to finish it with. You can read that into the record.

A: And there were various articles that came out in the papers. They were interviewed and written up in Poland. Now this was the picture, the only picture we have of the mother.

Q: How was this reported in Poland? You said the people refer to them as heroes. Is that the customary thing, like, appearing that sometimes the Polish press is anti-Semitic…

A: Right! We were very surprised. It probably isn't like that any more, but a few years ago, this created quite an impression. We were getting a lot of positive publicity. In fact, they were considered heroes. They were interviewed, and every letter I got, they said there was another interview. Somebody came from Lodz, somebody came from Warsaw, and they were constantly being written about and talked about.

R.S. Is there any reason that they were quiet for so long, besides being modest in the things that they did!

A: No.

R.S. Do you think they were quiet because of the feelings after the war of anti-Semitism and…

A: Probably, probably. And I think it so happened that the political situation at that time was more liberal and more favorable. "Cause things in Poland over the years have been changing and u think it was just more probably the right time for something like that to surface. Maybe the fact that the Polish reporter from New York sent it on as an important mission, they picked it up as something that -- she was telling me that they usually listen to the news in the States, and if there's anything that pertains to Poles, like, for example, they knew that we had a Polish symphony director, they knew about Skrowaczewski -- laughter -- apparently they like to know what's happening. Any Polish-related events in the States are reported over there. So when this came through, and they knew its women that lived there, they just made a big fuss over it. Now I have some pictures brought to me from my hometown. This is the house where we were hiding out.

Q: And you hid in the attic?

A: Yes. Way up there. Before they left, I asked them to take pictures of things that would be of interest to me, and they have, like the Jewish cemetery. This was a common grave of the Jews. Several hundred Jews were led out of town and shot, and I guess, after the war, they erected this special monument.

Q: Were there any names put in this spot, or is it just a memorial?

A: I think they did. She was saying that she was going every year and putting fresh flowers on that. This is the house where we lived then. This is the street where my father's business was, but she just cut off a little piece, so…I recognize the street, but the actual business doesn't show up. And that's an inscription. And she magnified what was on this.

Q: Okay. The tomb is somewhat in disarray. Does the Polish government keep it up, or is it the responsibility of the citizens?

A: I think it was official. I don't remember for sure. Whenever there was anything good going on in Poland after the war, that's related to Jews, she was quick to write to me about it. She was very proud. There was one old Jewish doctor that survived in town, and apparently he was active in the underground, and she kept writing me that he's so admired by all the Poles, and he's so loved, and so on and so forth.

R.S: Did they ever do censorship of her letters?

A: (Laughter) She was always very brash. In fact, when we corresponded from Poland to Germany where I was, I remember at one point she wrote me about the

heroism of the Warsaw ghetto, at the time when it was going on. And I was petrified! I thought, "All anybody had to do was open the letter to me! Why would a Polish girl care about the heroism of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto?" And I immediately destroyed it. But I was still very happy and proud to see that she wrote about it. I guess then this would be all about them. Unless you have any questions.

Q: Just a little more in depth with what was actually happening in the ghetto, if you can give us some idea. Your impressions of, let's say, life in the ghetto. How did the people actually survive? Is it mainly will power? Or were they actually given any assistance from the underground?

A: Well, everybody was for themselves, I remember financially. We were right away refugees, as I told you. We happened to live in a Polish part of town. And a few weeks after the war broke out, we were displaced, and our hardships began immediately. My father's business was very shortly liquidated, so I guess we just survived on saved-up money and selling off our household goods and so on. Certain businesses were able to go on. Like if, let's say a bakery happened to be in this part of the city before the war, the same bakery went on and they baked.

R.S. Even if it was owned by a Jew?

A: Right. Right. Because this was the ghetto, so the Germans or the Poles didn't mix into it. It was running pretty autonomous. So some people were able to continue their work, like all kinds of craftsmen, tailors and shoemakers, and so on. But the majority was right away thrown into very great financial crisis. And food was rationed, so there wasn't very much to be bought. There was a black market, and you had to have a lot of money for anything you needed. So it was tough, right away. And after maybe two years of being in a ghetto, where epidemics of typhus were very rampant, people were dying, it was just a mess. There were obvious pictures of hunger. You could see children with big stomachs and the typical undernourished child with rickets, and people sitting around in the streets that couldn't move, and they were just slowly dying. So it was very obvious that the population was just dying out for whatever reason, either hunger, or disease, or just being shot or executed by the Germans. And it was very constant and on a high level that extermination was going on.

Q: To the degree that the underground helped to get supplies, do you know anything about that?

A: Well I really didn't know much about the underground except at this one point when we were asked by one Hashomer Hatzair leader to form an underground group, and he indicated that there are, but I had no knowledge of anything official. These things I'm sure, were done in great secret, and only people that were active knew about it, and I was a young teenager. I had no access to any of these things.

Q: The community of Poland, the Jewish community, was very religious, from what I can understand…

A: Not true.

Q: Not true?

A: No, no, no. in fact, the thing that I noticed that's different in the Jewish communities in this country as compared to what I grew up in Poland, there were many, many factions. Some were religious and they were from extreme, very orthodox, to less orthodox, and so on. In the city of Piotrkow, there was one official synagogue. I was in a Jewish gymnasium, and every Saturday the whole class was expected to go to the synagogue and listen to the official rabbi in a sermon. And it was a beautiful, huge building. They made it into a library now, my friends told me. But there were always two Polish military men present during each sermon, to check up on the rabbi, what he's preaching about. But to answer your question, there were a lot of people that were completely not affiliated with any religion. Didn't belong to synagogue, didn't go to services, but they sure knew and felt as Jews. And I think you have still more of that in Israel, now. There are quite a few non-observing Jews that know darn well who they are, and fight for the country, and so on. And there were a very few assimilated Jews that were hated by the rest if us with a passion. We had maybe two families. They were usually very well off, aristocratic, educated abroad, and had all their social and business contacts only with high-class Poles. And they considered it below their standing to identify with the rest of us. Some of them did intermarry, but that was very rare. And they were just hated with a passion. (chuckle) There were very few. The majority were either observing Jews or non-observing, but very Jewish.

Q: Were there large Hasidic communities?

A: Yes. My grandfather was very, very Hasidic.

Q: Alright. When the violence did come to the ghetto, did he convey to you any reason, or any thoughts on. Why is God doing this to us?

A: He had a very, very definite way of looking at it. I remember we used to congregate in the grandfather's kitchen, and this was the pastime. People would get together and review what were the rumors. There was no press, nobody had a radio, so all the news was word by mouth. And you would hear that Lodz expelled so many Jews, and we were getting a trickling of them in, and they would tell their horror stories. Or some other town, or whatever happens right in our town! There was plenty of horror stories. Whenever grandfather was present, he didn't allow anybody to talk about it. He said, "I don't believe in it! God wouldn't allow it! This is not true!"

Q: Is that typical of the whole Hasidic community, do you think?

A: Well, I don't remember having contact with other people. Grandfather was a small man, but a very strong personality, and when he said, "I don't want to hear about it!", nobody talked about it in his presence. And it was so obvious that he was not in touch with reality, because this sure was true!

Q: Did he make a change, though? Did he come to admit that there was a problem?

A: No. To the very last minute. In fact, later on, or maybe already then, I felt that this was his way of coping with the situation. He probably knew that it's just terrible, and how can something like this happen, how can God allow it, so this was his way of denying that this is happening. And he said, "I don't want to hear about it! It's not true! And nothing will happen to us," and so on.

Q: When you were in the ghetto, was there any fear of the Jewish police?

A: Oh, yes,

Q: …who were conspiring with the Nazis?

A: Well, I don't know whether they were "conspiring" with them. They were just carrying out their orders, which was a terrible task. But because they were the people that knocked on the door and came -- and I remember once in the middle of the night, pulled out my father -- you have to be afraid of them, and you had to dislike them. There were some rumors that sometimes they did more than they had to and needed to, but most of the time, people understood, because they tried to save their own skin, and they happened to be picked for the job, and they did it.

R.S. When you tried to practice like a Shabbat observance or a holiday within the ghetto, was there fear of doing that?

A: Well, as I say, my family was not too observing. I don't remember whether grandfather was going to his little shul or not. I think he was. But it was illegal for Jews to assemble. Any group that was larger then five or six people, was considered dangerous to the Germans, and they didn't allow it.

R.S. Even within your own house, couldn't you practice…

A: Oh, yea. In a home you could. I don't think anybody would come and look and see what you're doing.

R.S. And there was no fear of the Jewish patrol, either?

A: No. The Jewish police wouldn't spy on that, no. But it was very beautifully run --the administration of the ghetto-- it was just very amazing to see what a group of people that are just devoid of any external help. How they were running the everyday business of the Judenrat, and all the branches. Like how the food was distributed, how the hospital functioned, how sick people were taken to a hospital and families were put in quarantine for typhus, and all kinds of things. That's a tremendous job.

R.S. The leaders just emerged kind of on their own?

A: Well some continued, like my uncle, who was a political leader and active before the war. He just stayed on. He was an elected official and he just was respected by the community, so he stayed on. He was in charge of supplying people for work. (Laughter) I heard his daughter say that every so often somebody would come in and try to bribe his wife. And she was so happy to accept a present from somebody until he came home. He said," Why did you take this from such-and-such! I want to send that back! He doesn't want his son to go and be taken to work just because he's rich, and I have to take all the poor boys! I won't accept it!" So it was really a complicated life, and it functioned just great. I'm bringing it up because, remember John Hersey, that wrote The Wall? That was -- whew, I'm getting all excited (chuckle) -- my youngest daughter is a friend and roommate of their daughter, and we became friends, and we see them every summer when we go east. And one summer I asked him how he came about to write the book, because they're not Jewish, you know. Hersey isn't Jewish. He said at that time, he was a reporter for Life magazine and he was in Russia, and he traveled through Poland, and he ran across a Jewish survivor from some small town in Lithuania, and he talked to him and was interested how he survived, and so on. And what he said was, "What intrigued me the most was how these ghettos functioned, where they were just all on their own without any outside help, just a group of Jews that were so oppressed by the whole world." And he decided to find Warsaw ghetto survivors, and that's how the book came about. He followed them to Israel. He lived in Israel for a while interviewing people. To him, for some reason, this was the most interesting part of the Holocaust -- how the ghettos could function.

Q: When the war was going on, you were very young.

AL Right. I was sixteen when the war broke out.

Q: Do you feel that, because of that, you missed a lot in life, in a normal growing up situation. Were you able to have any kind of relationships while you were growing up under those particular circumstances?

A: Yes. I think when you don't have something, you really don't know whether you miss it or not. I mean you make the best of whatever situation you live in. I remember I used to be hungry continuously, and now I feel hungry and I know

how it will feel one hour from now, and two hours from now, and so on. But we had friends, and we were getting together, and we somehow managed to live like eighteen and nineteen-year-olds, or seventeen year olds. Even though there was constant fear and oppression, I think when you're young, there's somehow so much strength and normal fun for life, that you create it no matter where you are.

R.S. But you were so limited, though, in what you could do…

A: Right, we were limited. Our house was right on the edge of the ghetto, and there was a constant curfew. After eight o'clock, you had to be inside. And in the building where we lived, there were families from Lodz and other towns, and they had teenaged boys, and it was very exciting to meet the boys, and talk to them, and joke with them and get together. So I wasn't looking at it, "Oh, how great it would have been if the war wasn't here." We just made the best of what we could.

R.S. So you're not resentful or…

A: No, not in that sense, no.

Q: Did you feel envious at all, after the war, to people who had not gone through what you had? Was there any jealousy?

A: Well, I guess that the most thing that I was unhappy over was that I lost my family, and my education was interrupted, and that people who were close to me, friends and relatives and so on, suffered so immensely. But just to think of it as missing fun, I don't remember thinking of it that way.

R.S. It isn't so much missing fun, but like growing up, the experiences of an adolescent

A: Well, I don't think I missed it. As I said, I remember we had friends, and we dated, and we had long walk with my friends, and talked about boys or talked about how wonderful it would be -- or will be -- when we make it. So somehow, we just adjusted to the situation. We were still acting like young people.

Q: Did you feel guilty that you survived?

A: Umm. That's something that I guess everybody has. You feel that it's such a random thing! There's, let's say, a whole family! And after it's over with, some people that you considered very valuable, and very worthwhile, and very deserving are gone, and I am here -- or among friends! That was always a very strong feeling! It was guilt and embarrassment, and you just felt awkward about it.

R.S. It was obvious you had such strong desire and determination. Do you ever feel that the people who didn't survive -- are you ever angry with them that they didn't have the will, maybe? Or the…

A: Or that they didn't try? Well, I don't remember thinking about anyone in particular like that. It's hard to explain why some people make it and others don't, but determination was one of the factors. And some people, that's right, just gave up and didn't care.

Q: What I would like to do is get a statement from you on what you would say to future generations. And then I want to have you read this particular article as the conclusion. To your grandchildren, (Zimerman sighs) what would you say to them, what should they be aware of, what should they fear and not fear?

A: Well, first of all I think it starts with every single human being. You would hope and try to eliminate the hatred in people that would create a situation that happened during the Holocaust. But that's, of course, Utopia. It's not possible. People will fight each other, and hate each other, and so on. So, as Jews, a lot of us are still a minority surrounded by powerful majorities in whatever countries we live. It's very important to be aware of any signs of anti-Semitism, be more courageous and speak up and act in our own defense, and not make the mistakes that, unfortunately, were done during the Holocaust. It's not a…

Q: What was the biggest mistake?

A: Well, I think there were many. First of all, the Jews at that time were strictly people of the Book. And they considered everything physical below their level. They thought, "this is for goyim -- to go into sports, or to be strong, or to be able to take care of yourselves -- that's for the very ordinary goyim. We are people of the mind, we are learned people. We don't need that." And when we got confronted with anything that required fighting back in just an ordinary way, we were very weak. We just ran instead of fighting back. This was one thing. And another thing was that psychologically, we really were brought up just in a completely different, unfortunately unrealistic way. We thought, "All we need to do is just stick to our business, be good Jews and believe in God, and everything will be fine." And then when we had to take care of ourselves, we were unable to. Plus, because we were psychologically not geared to that, we haven't done anything to be physically in the right shape, too. We had no weapons, we had no contacts, and we were completely caught, surrounded by the majority that wasn't friendly. It was a pretty desperate situation to begin with. Because not only did we have the occupying Nazis that were just set to destroy us for who knows why, but our immediate neighbors, the hosts of the country where we grew up and where we were for generations, were gladly cooperating with them, and were against us. And there were many instances where young Jewish people went into the woods and tried to create an underground movement. I lost my cousin like that, one young woman who was a Hashomer Hatzair leader. She ran into the

woods and joined a Jewish underground -- I guess they had contacts with Warsaw, they had money, they had weapons -- and they were found out by Polish underground. The Polish underground, by the way, had two main factions. One was the Rightist, nationalist group that was very anti-Semitic, and whenever they found any Jew trying to either join them or fight, they would catch them and either finish them off themselves, or turn them over to the Nazis. And there was another faction that was Socialist, and they were much more sympathetic and helpful to the Jews. So if you went into the woods, and you happened to run into the Socialist Polish group, you were fine. They took you in and you were part of a group, and you could do something. If you happened to run into the Rightists, the Nationalist group, you were finished. And that's what happened to my cousin. So the situation was just helpless from any point of view. We weren't ready psychologically, physically. We were surrounded by enemies -- double enemies. So it was hopeless. So what I would tell my grandchildren is to least avoid the mistakes we have made. And what I see now is much better. Jewish kids are good athletes, they are tackling physical tasks, and they are just as able. And now looking at Israel -- you know (laughs), they have the best army in the world, like Begin said, and he's right! So at least this will be not again the same. And we have to hope that humanity will make progress, and if not, that we will just try to fight back and take care of ourselves.

R.S. Where were we politically, and where will we be now?

A: Well, I think that's pretty unpredictable. I guess, at least during Hitler's time, the whole thing started with very bad economic situation where people were out of jobs and disillusioned, and they were easy prey for Hitler's rhetoric. So I suppose this is possible again, here, if things get very, very bad, and some demagogue gets hold of the nation. I guess there are always gullible people, or that it's always easy to convince someone that it's somebody else's fault, and to create a hatred. That's what you meant?

R.S. Do you think that war retributions really are enough, and there's a sense of, like penance? Or should there be other kinds of retributions?

A: Retribution? You mean punishing?

Q: Well, money given to survivors. (She means "reparations," not "retributions.")

R.S. Is money really a way of kind of paying off/

A: No, no. It's not a way of paying off. I think it was Ben Gurion who accepted the offer by Germany after the war. For a long time, Israel didn't want to have anything to do with German restitution payments, and then he said, "Well, they will not undo what they have done, but whatever we lost economically and financially, we have it coming, and why not accept it?" So I would look at it the same way. I don't think that they even hoped to undo by the restitution, by the

"Wieder gut machen" (reparations) for what they have done. But they tried to, somehow, lessen their guilt feelings, I guess, and help the surviving Jews.

Q: What I'd like you to do is tell us a little about when this was read, and to read it to us.

A: Okay. This was (opening envelope) the ceremony in New York City on October 29, 1979, when the Consul General of the Israeli Embassy in New York, Mr. Kadar, read the speech to the present guests and officials, and he said:

"Mrs. Trybus and Mrs. Spiewak, distinguished representatives of various organizations of Jewish Nazi fighters, dear friends:

It is with a feeling of awe, but also with a feeling of great pride, that I award, on behalf of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Medal of the Righteous Gentile to two ladies from Poland who are with us here today.

If it may seem odd to some outsider that an event that occurred thirty-eight years ago to a handful of people in a distant country should create such a commotion and generate such interest today, the answer lies in the fact that it is both of human and of historical significance, the human side of the simple story of how one family helped the other in the time of mortal danger as a matter of course, and without demand for compensation of any kind…"

Oh, the medal that they got, by the way -- Yad Vashem has various degrees of honoring people -- the fact that they didn't ask for any compensation made them eligible for the highest degree. Apparently quite a few people survived because they were able to pay and buy their papers, but they did not ask for anything, and that's why he is stressing that here,

"The story as told by Dr. Sabina Zimering of Minneapolis, who is present in this room, is the following;

Danuta and Maria Eustina and I were childhood friends in Piotrkow before the war, and while during the Nazi occupation my family was threatened with deportation to Treblinka, they provided us with Polish documents without any compensation. The documents allowed us to escape from the ghetto a few hours before the extermination brigade surrounded it on October 20, 1942.

The two sisters and their mother provided shelter and food for us for several days without the knowledge of their father, who was against it. The penalty for Poles helping Jews, at that time, was death.

Our mother was caught and sent to Treblinka where she perished. My sister and myself survived in Germany, posing and working as Polish girls. Our father and youngest brother remained in Piotrkow in a forced labor camp.

From the end of 1942 until the beginning of 1945 when the camp was liquidated, we were able to communicate with our father and brother by sending letters and occasional food packages to our Polish friends, which they delivered to them. My father's letters to us in Germany were transmitted the same way. This continued contact was of great moral support for all of us.

My father perished in Buchenwald in April of 1945, two days before the liberation of the camp.

Our friends, understandably, were taking great risks for our sake. They and their mother became involved in the Polish underground, fighting the Nazis. They were discovered. The mother was sent to Ravensbruck camp and Bergen-Belsen, from where she returned in poor health. Danuta was arrested and jailed in Czestochowa, and upon liberation came down with a dangerous illness. (He meant tuberculosis.) As a doctor, I was fortunate and able to provide them with rare medication after the war.

It is a story of human kindness and love, and great tragedy as well, but although only a few people were involved, it brings to mind the Talmudic saying. 'He who saved one human being, only, saved the entire world."

But this simple story of kindness, love and heroism, assumes much, much greater proportions when it is set against the background of cruelty, inhumanity and murder of millions which prevailed at that time. This is a matter whose impact, not only at thirty-eight, but at a thousand years, cannot diminish, and whose significance and importance for us as Jews, and for the world as a whole, will never wane.

We cannot forget, and we <u>will</u> not forget. And therefore, when we discover, even at this late hour, an act of decency and devotion that shines like a bright candle in that world of darkness that was the Holocaust, it is an occasion for celebration and expression of thanks.

In the name of the Jewish people, I thank you Danuta Trybus and Maria Spiewak, for the act of humanity and heroism you performed in those dark days, and wish you a happy, prosperous and long life.

That's when he handed them their certificate and their medal.

Q: All right. (Sigh) thank you. It is something which I'm afraid we all must be aware of. Michael Garelick, Rosalyn Smith. Thank you, Dr. Zimering.

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