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Interview with Sylvia Murawski
June 5, 1992
Annandale, Virginia

Q: The date is Friday, June 5, 1992 and we are talking with Mrs. Sylvia Murawski in Annandale, Virginia. Mrs. Murawski, could you please --

A: Call me Sylvia.

Q: Okay, Sylvia, could you please tell me your name, your name that you were given in Poland and that you used during the war, your date of birth, your place of birth and anything you possibly can about your childhood and your family, growing up.

A: Okay. I was born on July 10, of 1928. My name is Sylvia, was, my name was Sylwia Ann Winawer but I was never, ever called by this name. I was Dzidzia, called Dzidzia home and I ---

Q: How do you spell that?

A: Let me write it down. It was a nickname, Dzidzia, something like this. It was quite popular nickname in Poland and I was known as Dzidzia from my schooldays till before the war. For a long time, I was an only child and I loved the status of being the only child and loved by everyone, the center of attention, of course. I had a small puppy that I loved but she passed away as a puppy. But later on I had a sister. My sister was, in my life, played a special role because she was nine years younger than me. I treated her something between my toy and between my child. It was very, very, very nice feeling. My mother was wise enough to keep me believing that I'm the one who is responsible for my sister. My friends at school were very jealous. Nobody had such a small sister or brother around. I could tell you about my childhood. It was a very happy childhood, nothing ---

Q: Did you live in a suburb of Warsaw or in the city?

A: No, I lived in the center of Warsaw. My father was a lawyer and we lived in a big, big apartment. Those old days, everybody had maids, everybody who -- middle-class people had maids. It's such a distant and different life.

Q: Your parents -- you came from a Jewish family?

A: It's very, very hard to say about -- that my family was a Jewish family. We were Jewish because my parents were converts. So it wasn't strictly Jewish family. I was raised more in Christian traditions than Jewish tradition.

Q: Your family --your parents had both converted to Catholicism?

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A: My father was Catholic, my mother was Protestant. On my father's family was a family of assimilators. Is that the right word?

Q: Were they assimilated? But the father's parents were Jewish?

A: Well, it takes some more explaining. They were, by faith they were Jewish, my father's family. My father's family was quite known and I would even say my famous father in Poland. My ---

Q: The name was Winawer?

A: Winawer. My father's cousin was a very well known writer, a play writer My father's grandfather was, oh my goodness, famous chess player. He won a --, He was best in Europe. He won a tournament -- how do you say it? He was a ---.

Q: Champion?

A: Champion, maybe once, maybe. But he was a European champion. But he felt Polish because in those old years, it was a very strong movement of assimilation. Jewish intelligentsia, you know the word? -- was very Polonized

Q: Right.

A: So on my father's side it was very natural that he felt more Polish than Jewish and his change of -- conversion didn't bother anybody. I think. But on my mother's side, it was a different story because her family was more Jewish, more traditional and more Jewish. There were some misunderstandings between my mother and her mother but ---

Q: Did you ever see them?

A: Well, I, yes. My grandmother lived in Lodz. It's a big, big city.

Q: Oh, sure I know Lodz.

A: Big Jewish and German population. She used to come over for to visit us twice a year. Stay for a few weeks. There was always some misunderstanding about synagogue, about Christmas, about something. I felt it. It wasn't very open but I felt there was some tension about religion.

Q: Did you have any religious instruction, any formal --?

A: No, because my parents weren't very religious people. They -- it's really hard to understand in America why people change the faith. Only to show that the sort of belonging to Polish society or something.

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Q: I think it was in Europe and in Poland especially, it was a form of social mobility.

A: Maybe.

Q Definitely, definitely.

A: For my father, it was sort of patriotism. Maybe, he was very young, it was very naïve, it wasn't very wise, what he did. On my mother's side, it was because she -- my father wasn't Jew. I don't how the situation was between Jewish and not Jewish marriage but I think that my mother wanted to -- wanted some change, wanted to confirm to my father's standards or something like this.

Q: But it's interesting then, that number one, that she chose Protestant, and number two, that he wasn't a Polish Pole, he was formerly of a Jewish --. You know they still had --.

A: Difference of religion, yes.

Q: They still came from that background and that's --.

A: It was some but it --. The times were utmost political, atmosphere and social atmosphere changed do quickly in Poland so some things that in 1921 or 1920 were appropriate might be less appropriate in 1927 when my mother got married. I never asked my parents; I just accepted the situation that my father was Catholic, my mother was Protestant and children were Protestant too. So I --. We had two Jewish, two Jewish girls in our class. They were taught religion by a rabbi and I was taught religion by pastor. Jews didn't, Jewish girls didn't feel, felt ill at ease being Jewish. It was such an atmosphere in Poland. I don't know why it was like this but it was like this. We used to go to Protestant school.

Q: And you didn't feel different? I spoke with Jana in Boston. She said even though she was raised with these Catholic parents, she knew they were different. She knew something about her family was different than all the other Catholic people, you know. Did you have a sense of that?

A: Well, something was different but it wasn't different because of religion. It was different because of, I don't know, because of what. Because I think that my parents were more independent people than most people around. More free-thinking, free- thinkers, more -- well, better educated or something like this. More open mind.

Q: What was your mother's education

A: My mother's formal education wasn't very, very high. She was an orphan, well not complete orphan. Her father died when she was thirteen. My grandmother married at the age of sixteen with no education at all so when she widowed, she

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was widowed at the age of 33 with three teenager, or two teenagers and one small girl. It was the end of the war, end of the First World War in 1917 and they went through a real terrible poverty. My mother was extremely brave and industrious and ambitious and beautiful. You can see now that she was a --. She didn't accept -- she was more like American women, not Polish. She was -- she didn't accept the whole situation of being poor and poorly educated and living in lower middle class family. She, as an extern, she tried to -- she got a high school diploma but she didn't finish high school. She had diploma, went for exams, extern, is this the right word? No, you don't say this.

Q: External student or something --?

A: Something like you can say. She took any chance she had in life to be among interesting people, to learn things and to see the world. She spent few years in France.

Q: How did she do that? She just --?

A: She was a student. She gave lessons, she taught, she worked as a tutor, she sometimes -- she was a tutor, living with a family, she was very popular with people, very, very easy to make friends. When she married my father, she had some few years of college but she didn't finish college. But she had many talents, many interests. She was interested in art. She was a -- she became a real -- she got a real knowledge in art, especially in china, in oriental rugs. During the war, when we were alone and my father went to the army, she started buying and selling things. She sort of entered, this is how we survived the war because she was able to earn money. After the war when it was forbidden and very, very dangerous, she did the same. So my parents were well-to-do people. I never went through, never is not the right word, but most of the war, most of the time, the wartime, we were well to do. We were well-to-do in the sense that we weren't hungry. We and friends of my parents and relatives of my parents had always at least one meal fixed at my parent's table.

Q: Can we back up a little bit? I have --.

A: Yeah, sure because I --. It's the -- if you start the story of your life, you are extremely poorly organized, unorganized.

Q: That's fine because we'll just jump a little, no problem. What about your schooling? Where did you go to school? Did you go to private school?

A: I went -- it was a private school and the name of the school was -- very long name. It was a private school supported and -- not supported by --

Q: It was run or founded by --?

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A: Founded from and something more.

Q: You want to look it up?

A: No, I can't because I don't remember even in Polish, the right word. Under the help, under the supervision and help of Lutheran, Lutheran Church. There were two schools, one Rey school, that school was old, very well known in Poland, in Warsaw for boys. After the First World War, there was parallel school for girls opened by the same Lutheran Church, Ana Vasa School. She was a sister of Polish king from 16th century. They were Protestants and they patronized, the patron of the school was that Protestant princess of the past. The school, Rey High School was very well established and often very high -- highly accepted school. The Vasa School was more for girls but it was okay, was okay. The atmosphere was very liberal. Everybody was well bred, tactful and I didn't feel I felt at home there. I didn't feel any of that I didn't belong; I belonged. I belonged perfectly well.

Q: The education there, was it equivalent or better than a gymnasium? Or is it at the level of a gymnasium?

A: I didn't go that far because when the --.

Q: When the war broke out?

A: Yes, I finished -- I was in elementary school. It was fifth grade, I finished fifth grade and I started sixth grade. Then the trouble started.

Q: Now, can I ask --? Did you have any -- did you take ballet lessons, or any music lessons or anything like that?

A: Music lessons, not ballet because I had no talents.

Q: Me either.

A: Very poor ear for music, no talents for dance, nothing for drawing. I had only very bad marks in all of those subjects.

Q: Did you enjoy to read or --?

A: Read, yes. I was good in reading, in history, in writing.

Q: Okay, well--.

A: I had extremely nice, sweet teacher of religion. She was a saint. She never, ever --. Sometimes Christianity is in conflict with Judaism but it wasn't the case. I never felt that something against Jews in my teaching of religion, what I learned

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in my religion lessons. I didn't feel anything, anything wrong about my double person, my double personality at school.

Q: You didn't even feel that it was a double one, it was --?

A: No, I knew it wasn't a secret. It wasn't a secret, it wasn't anything to keep in hiding, the past. My family was very proud of being part of -- of being one of the Winawers. It was very special thing that my father tried to explain me before he -- when he visited me before he died. It was a last visit like saying goodbye, and we were very open with each other. He told me, it's very hard to explain but I felt more Polish than Jewish. It didn't have anything to do with my religion.

Q: That's understandable.

A: It wasn't like trying to hide whatever you were. My parents were Jewish friends and the best friends didn't feel like my parents. They felt very, how to say it --, rebellious. They felt Jewish and rebellious. It wasn't to conform to Polish standards. It wasn't done to conform to anything, it was sort of emotional attitude.

Q: Did your family ever -- your parents' best friends then were Jewish? Did they ever spend any holidays or anything like that with them?

A: No, they weren't that religious, no.

Q: Oh, okay. I see.

A: It was young generation. You never, ever saw in Poland any Jewish holiday, any Seder, any Passover or anything like this. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I wish I knew more about Jewish tradition but I had no chance to. People, young people weren't religious.

Q: They were being progressive.

A: They were progressive.

Q: Okay, I understand. We've established a little bit about your childhood. Did you play with your friends? Your sister was so much younger, I assume she was just a baby when most of this started.

A: She was a baby. I had a grandaunt, takes long time.

Q: I just keep an eye on it so when I need to switch it --.

A: Don't let people talk. When they start talking, they can't stop.

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Q: That's what I want. I want you to talk. I have five tapes here. If you want to fill them up, go ahead.

A: I talk --. I had an aunt in Warsaw suburbs, in Podkowa Lesna. It was something like _________place we are living here. Every Sunday, she wasn't married, she lived with her old charming father. I was the only child in the family and I used to go to visit her from almost every Saturday and Sunday. From Saturday to Sunday evening, and I had friends over there. We played together. Of course, I had other friends in the town too but it wasn't like American suburban life. Visiting friends was a big happening because big city, long distance to go everywhere. So it was always planned, planned event. Mostly planned for two days, usually from Saturday to Sunday with -- oh, it was very exciting. I had some friends in my building too. We played together. Before the war, there wasn't --. I didn't go downstairs to play in the yard but I visited my friends in my building. It was such a typical life of a child, nothing --.

Q: Nothing out of the ordinary?

A: No.

QL Would you like to discuss then about what happened to your family when -- in 1939 when the war broke out?

A: The first thing happened it was raining like this, just before the -- like today, the night before the war, maybe two nights earlier, maybe three nights earlier. I was stupid enough to leave a book that I was reading, to leave my book outside and the rain damaged the book. The book didn't belong to me; it belonged to my mother's friend's daughter and I was so scared, I didn't know what to do to hide the book but those people didn't let me go without returning the book, I knew that. They were very strict. So war broke out and I was so happy now, I'm saved, I'm saved. And no school, no school because --.

Q: That was good, you liked that?

A: Oh, it was great! It was fantastic! It was extremely exciting happening but before this great, fantastic thing happened, some bad things happened before. In August 1939, last month before the war broke out, my parents went for vacation for a week or two. Left my grandmother, the grandmother that I told you about, from Lodz, me, my little daughter and --.

Q: Your little sister.

A: My little sister and some, oh, some maid who worked for --. But my mother had a younger sister. She lived in France. My mother always worried about her because she married very young. She didn't finish any school. She was very unbalanced, emotionally unbalanced. She had a very bad marriage. They were --

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her husband was communist and they were deported from France to Poland. My mother's sister with her small son, Claude came to stay with us for two weeks, for three weeks. Part of the time my parents were out. This was the only time in my life, I met my cousin Claude. He came from France. He hated everything Polish. He -- looking at them I had a premonition of what will happen to us because they were so poor, so -- they were deportees. They had no work -- his; Claude's parents, had no work. They didn't belong anywhere because they didn't belong to France, they didn't belong to Poland. They were victim of some social forces that we became later. They perished in the, perished in Holocaust. They were in Lodz ghetto and they perished and they probably were the first to die from hunger because they were not able to work. They were not able to work in normal conditions not only in Lodz ghetto which was terrible place to live in. That small child, that Claude and my aunt, whom I didn't like and I didn't know well; I hardly knew them, never -- are still with me. I -- did you see the picture of Mr. Lanzmann from Shoah?

Q: Oh yes, Shoah.

A: Shoah and they look --. His name is Claude and he looks exactly like my cousin Claude because they were the same age, the same family, the same -- very similar kind of family, Polish emigrants. It's such a similarity between them. I can't ever forget them. My grandmother lived with is in Warsaw and during the time, wartime, she didn't get any letter from her daughter in Lodz ghetto. It was sort of constant, constant tragedy that was killing her.

Q: Can I ask you what type of awareness did you have of the rise of Nazism in Germany and Austria? Did you have a sense of danger?

A: I had something before my aunt Helenka and Claude came to visit us. I had another experience with Nazism, not with Germans but Nazi Germany deported Jews who were born in Poland in 1937. It was sort of obligation, sort of moral obligation of everybody who belonged to the Jewish, somehow to Jewish community, to help them. My mother took a young girl, was maybe 19, maybe 20, gave her a job of teaching me in German and sort of like being governess. It wasn't exactly governess but something like teacher and governess, something in between. She was boring, stupid and I didn't want to learn German but she was -- on the other hand, I knew she was so poor, she was so troubled. She didn't feel happy, she was so out of place. It was bad experience but I thought that it's my fault.

Q: Did she live in your home with you?

A: No, she used to come over well, twice a week or so. That -- our relation didn't last long because we didn't -- it didn't work at all. She didn't, she wasn't born to be teacher or governess or anything like this. She wasn't any companion to me either. I didn't -- but I know that was something, always sort of talking about

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helping those people. I had, in my school, the school wasn't anti-Semitic, in my school, there was a girl -- too long?

Q: No, a few more minutes and I'll flip it.

A: There was a girl from -- deported from Austria. Her name was Ingeborga. Her parents didn't speak Polish at all; they spoke German. She was very poor and during the war, I had a special relation with her but this is the story later. I will tell you later on. It was only two people I knew, two deportees I knew from Germany. I didn't know, I didn't, we didn't, we children didn't take German seriously. There was something so -- Poland was strong and prepared for war and the whole world was supposed to help Poland. No, Germans were something to make fun of. I was only ten and eleven.

Q: Did you know, did your parents have a sense of the German racial laws and things like that?

A: You are kidding! Of course they did!

Q: I mean, they felt -- they knew that the extreme danger that was posed by --?

A: They knew but somehow people didn't know -- there was some blockage in the heads. Your imagination can't go that far. You have to have some experience to imagine things. If you don't experience things like that, you can't --. They knew that life would be very hard but there was always hope that the war won't break out. There was always hope that Hitler will stop. This was sort of loyalty. You can't escape from place where the others have to live, you know. This is something not honorable. My father was, it was so romantic generation, not --.

Q: Well, I'm going to put the tape over and --.
(End of Side A, Tape 1)

A: Away from returning the book because my father, try to think of, the war broke out, my father was in Warsaw because we were on vacation in the suburbs in Podkowa Lesna and my father used to come over for, in the evening or sometimes for weekends only. On the 4th of September, my father came over in his small, very, very small car, small Fiat, very small.

Q: You had a car? That's a sign of affluence.

A: Yes, yes. My parents were, my father was a lawyer. It was -- he was in his late thirties at the time. He was born in 1899 so he was forty the time. He was in peak of his career; he was very well --. He had big clientele, he was very well known lawyer, hard working lawyer and very clever. My father said we have to go back to Warsaw. Things are getting dangerous. So he packed all of us into the small car. We left everything that we had at home. Wasn't anything very valuable and

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we went back to Warsaw. Next day, my father said to my mother, I love you all but I love my country more; or something like this. He kissed us goodbye and went to fight for the country. He left my mother with two years old and me and everything -- no money because somehow people weren't prepared. If he had anything, he didn't have it home -- maybe in bank, maybe clients were --. It was a normal, regular life like every day, day like every day from financial point of view. It was a -- the war started this way for almost everybody with not mentally prepared for it, for the change. My mother and -- the bombardment started and there was no food in the stores. The stores were shut closed. Well, every day was worse than the day before. My sister became ill, sick and she got a very high fever and she was dying. She was dying and I don't know how far you want to go into gossip, into small things.

Q: This is fine, this is fine.

A: We lived on, I didn't give you my address. But you don't want it --.

Q: I'm sure. Why don't you tell me? Tell it on the tape.

A: It was Kapucynska Street. I lived on Kapucynska 15 in Warsaw. It was a very small street with dead end so the traffic was limited. It was inhabited mostly by lawyers because the court was very close --- the court and a land registry. I don't know how you -- or whatever it is the place I --. Can you stop?

Q: Yeah, sure.

A: There was a --. Can you stop again? I have this --.

Q: Sure. . . . Okay so you were telling me about --?

A: About that strange street we lived on with historic monuments, with monastery, Capuchin. Capuchin monastery with big, big garden; so it was very quiet place. I don't remember why I told you that. I had some idea but I forgot so you can forget what --. But we came back home and -- oh, I know. On the first floor of the same building, lived our aunt, my father's aunt. She was old lady with, widow with two daughters. They had no children because she didn't like children and when my small sister, Kieia; she had nickname Kieia. Kieia became ill and we lived on the third floor and bombardment became very frequent, we were forbidden to live upstairs. We couldn't stay in the basement all the time because of the small sick child so we asked that aunt to let us stay with her. She lived on the second floor and she said no because I don't like children and sick children is something that I really hate. I couldn't believe she was my father's aunt.

Q: Nice lady.

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A: But before the war, she was extremely nice. She became -- she was very nice as long as everything was planned and organized. She loved guests from five till seven every Tuesday and that's it. My mother was absolutely astonished .It was something unbelievable so we went down to the first floor to the neighbors who were very unfriendly but he couldn't; he had no guts to say no. We spent part of the September of 1939, this terrible -- you know what was September of '39 in Poland, in Warsaw?

Q: It was the beginning of the war.

A: It was the beginning of the war. It was the bombardment of Warsaw. We spent in -- partly in the basement, partly in that neighbor's apartment. In the basement, people prayed all the time and there I felt very tension between my mother and my grandmother. She was strongly against accepting and being part of the prayers. She felt it was a time of trial and she felt that she is Jewish and she didn't want to stay with these praying people. When the -- after the -- after Warsaw came into hands of Germans, my grandmother went back to Lodz. She came, she was evacuated, deported in very brutal manner. She, some, not all Jews, but some, I don't know why my grandmother, maybe old people, were deported from Lodz, took to small towns. Because she had Jewish -- gmina, Judenrat, you know the word Judenrat?

Q: Yeah, the Jewish council.

Q: The Jewish council used to find place for those deportees but my grandmother didn't need any place because she had her daughter in Warsaw. She came to us. But when she was in Radom, she had such an experience, that it's worth telling and worth remembering. Those poor ,poor deportees were placed among people by Jewish council. There were many in one building. In the evening, one of the German, captain or lieutenant or something, used to gather them. They stayed there for a few days. He gathered, the German captain gathered them and wrote Bible to them and told them that monster and anti-Christ will be punished by God and that something will happen. You know who I am talking in, anti-Christ and monster was Hitler in his --.

Q: His theology.

A: Yes. That he will be punished and that everybody has to keep faith and hope. He gave them extreme consolation. He was sort of saint but he was taken next day. Some evening he didn't come and those people asked what happened to him. Some were told that better not to ask because he was --.

Q: He was a German officer?

A: A German officer.

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Q: I see.

A: So it was something that doesn't happen very often and something that shouldn't be forgotten. My grandmother came to us and stayed with us and went to ghetto with us.

Q: You were sent to the --?

A: We went to ghetto in October of 1940.

Q: How did that happen? You were deported to the ghetto?

A: No, because it wasn't deportation or anything like this. The ghetto was built, the place was, the place for Jewish population was --.

Q: It was marked out?

A: Was marked out. The wall was started to be built and the deadline was set. We were in trouble because my parents had beautiful apartment with beautiful furniture and charming place and everything. Somehow they couldn't find anybody to --. Jewish population outside the ghetto had to find place in the ghetto district. People from Polish population from ghetto used to trade their apartments. It was very unpleasant time because it was time for very easy quick bucks for, mostly for Polish people who lived in ghetto quarters. It was big, big, tension, big, big -- the deadline was very close and we didn't have place to live. But at last, in last minute, in the court, one of the -- well, clerks, law clerks told my father, this judge who lives in ghetto, one of judges who lives in ghetto and who is in the same situation. He has to go out of ghetto and he has no place to live. He was very impractical man. We quickly changed apartments -- traded apartments among ourselves. We moved into Nowolipie 48.

Q: Did your parents ever consider trying not to go?

A: They were -- do you have my parents', my father's picture? He looks like, absolutely, he's the quintessence of Jewish --.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: More than me. I'm Jewish enough but he was more than me. He had too many acquaintances. He was well known among the people and it was too risky, absolutely. They didn't take the -- it was a chance. They considered it but they decided not. At the same time, my grandmother, I have two grandmothers; one from Lodz that I told you about, and the other is my father's mother. She lost her mind, she was very seriously mentally ill, very dangerous for herself. It was something very, very acute, acute illness. She -- you ask me about family?

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Q: Yeah, this is important.

A: Well, on my father's side, his mother's family was manufacturers. Her father, because of -- it's too long story to go that far.

Q: Well, whatever you want to tell me.

A: He had to quit Poland because of -- as a young boy fourteen years old or in some cases eleven years old, in others fourteen years old because the Russians deported Jewish young boys to make them -- young, strong, healthy boys to make them, to take them to army and make them something, of special guards, special, completely, well -- I don't even understand it myself. It was something very dangerous and he had to escape at night, go through border. He lived in a small town, the borders with Austria. His father got information by policeman that that night there will be hunting for Jewish boys. In 15 minutes he left home with a few rubles, whatever he had, they had at home. He went through the border and he started his independent life and he worked for farmers. He works -- at last he worked in a manufacture of ribbons. When he grew up at the age of twenty and something, he returned home. But he didn't speak Polish, I don't know about his Jewish but he spoke only German that time. My grandmother's family was bilingual. They spoke German at home and my grandmother was very, very fluent in German. Being so sick and out of mind, she used to open the windows and start the very, very convincing speeches to German people, to get rid of Hitler.

Q: Oh my God.

A: It was very dangerous. It was very dangerous so my parents need to get to wire the windows and she had to be put under constant supervision. But she didn't trust anybody except me so I stayed with her day and night.

Q: Was she dangerous? I mean, was she --?

A: She was dangerous, she was dangerous.

Q: I mean physically dangerous?

A: Physically dangerous. She had hallucinations. She had some -- when something came into her mind, she was dangerous because she believed that -- like seriously, mentally ill people, she was very --. It happened very sudden. After the whole --. Because my father went for a war and there was no information what happened to him for long time. My grandmother was pledged not to eat until he comes back. I don't know if she was sick then or she became sick because of emotions and -- or of her pain but we had --. We stayed with grandmother. We had to keep her separated from the world and at last, we had to put her into a hospital because the place we got in, in ghetto, we divided with other relatives; another family of five

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people. We had no room to keep grandmother safely. She went to hospital in Sofiowka. It was in suburbs of Warsaw, Jewish hospital for mentally ill. Before the hospital was --.

Q: Liquidated?

A: Liquidated, she took away her life. She died in December of 1940. We went to ghetto. The first year of war was still normal life for me. I used to go underground, no it wasn't even underground, to school. Because children in that time were -- there was no statute to forbid children, Jewish children, to go to school so I used to go to regular school. From 1940, from the summer of 1940, the real war life started to me. Because everything changed. First with illness of my grandmother, later in ghetto everything was completely different. In ghetto, when it came to ghetto, we started our -- went to the -- started meeting people from over there. We learned that that judge who lived in, who we traded apartments, was a special person and his family was very, very unusual. They were owners of the possession, of the land, owners of the building. They were owners of the lumber that was in, behind the building. It was very unusual and it's important to the part of my story. We moved Nowolipie. Around, we have regular buildings, three-four-story buildings like in crowded city streets but our building was completely different. We had three courts, very long three courts. It was very old part of farm, of plantation that existed in Warsaw few hundred years ago. The people, the owners who were owners of plantation; they had plantation in the eastern part of Poland but they lost everything because of revolution, the Russian revolution in 1917, they returned to Warsaw and they treated the place they lived like their plantation. They took care of people who lived there. They didn't expect to be paid for rent because they treated them like --.

Q: Serfs?

A: Like serfs, no, they didn't expect any work. They had mentality of people of plantation. In the best sense of that word. You take care, they are your people, you take care of them. They teach them, they give them help they need. If they need medication, the mistress is there to --. They were absolutely crazy people. They lived in poverty. Their apartment was never painted, nothing was repaired for probably -- oh more than years. There was plenty of space but on the right side of those courts were sort of buildings two, three-story buildings; very primitive but buildings. On the left side was sort of barracks. Like in the country, in the poor country dwellings. Keep it in mind because this is important. Lumber factory in the back. When my father learned who the place belonged to; saint people who took care of all poor, terribly poor Jewish, the poorest of the poor who lived in this building, was sort of obligation, sort of challenge for us. In the same apartment with us lived our, moved into the same apartment, moved our family. Two doctors, my father, two doctors and my father organized sort of community association you can say it. It wasn't association but he was so convincing that everybody tried to take care in improving our life in our building.

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He built some grass, some places to play for children. He organized kitchens soup-kitchens soup.

Q: Soup kitchens.

A: Soup kitchens for poor people. There was one prostitute who lived in the attic of --. Because it wasn't a building, it was something like rural, like rural house. The prostitute came once, I remember, she said, I earn money very easily so I can have money easily too but I can't have people to feed them. Because I work at my apartment; this is my place of work. I will give money, whatever you need, but I can't take people to, for dinners. Because people first sort of obligation and my father was -- gave initiative to that everybody has to give once a week dinner for at least one person.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Or give money, they can do it. I taught children, two girls from the -- I taught program of third class. I was then in high school. I should be in high school. So I told them some, gave them some elementary program teaching. We became very, very friendly with -- very, very close to those people in our building, in our neighborhood. We had books or some young people used to come over to borrow books. Doctors used to give medical help to people who lived in those barracks.

Q: About how many people was this altogether?

A: I tried to figure out but it is impossible. There were at least two parts of one -- maybe 12 apartments, 12 regular apartments, middle-sized, three, four rooms. Probably about 10 small apartments, one room, one kitchen in the barracks for ten families. Maybe, one or two small stores or -- but people were crowded. There were many, many people.

Q: Probably couple hundred people, I would say.

A: Probably couple hundred people but there weren't that many apartments. One of those girls that I taught, her name was Fajga but I didn't feel Jewish. I, my mission was to keep those kids Polish. I didn't know Yiddish, I didn't, so one of the girls promised to teach me Yiddish because some people didn't speak Polish.

Q: They speak Yiddish?

A: They speak Yiddish because they were very, very poor. Poor Jewish population of uneducated Jewish populations. Some blahas (?) or I remember but I don't know what the word -- let me check. They discussed politics and everything in Yiddish and they were different type than I knew before because they were real Jewish population, Jewish proletarian. We were very, very close friends especially with that girl, Fajga. Tinsmiths's work, tinsmiths, we don't, tin man,

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zinc, I don't know what the, they probably fixed pots, something like this, this kind of people.

Q: So not a full-fledged tinsmith?

A: No, no. They were extremely poor, extremely smelly, extremely ----. They were always hungry, I know. I remember that my student, my pupil Fajga, how hungry she was. How thin she was, how pale.

Q: How did you manage to get food in the Warsaw ghetto?

A: It was, if you had money, it wasn't hard to get food. My mother was a business woman.

Q: So she managed?

A She managed and she didn't have any other ambition. She didn't have ambition to gather money; she had ambition to buy food and let people, let people, help some people with feeding them. We had three meals daily. Not everybody was hungry in ghetto. There were people who were very rich in ghetto too. So we had three meals and we had always two, three, four people who were regular boarders. Two uncles of my mother and I don't remember all of them because it changed but we had always 12 people for every meal. Most of them were regular boarders. They didn't live with us but they used to eat with us. It was sort of help because it was fixed and it was -- they could trust.

Q: They could rely on it?

A They could rely but there were tragic situations. Behind every jolly and cheerful meal that we tried to keep, there was always tragedy. One of my mother's uncles had grown-up son who was mentally ill and not able to work and to do anything. He had a -- my uncle had a girlfriend, not a wife, but sort of wife. He had a, we call it, common-law-wife.

Q: Common-law?

A: She didn't come over for meals with us. I don't know -- it was impossible to feed everything, just impossible. It was very, very unpleasant situation of making choices. It was a very bad part because my grandmother had bad feelings. Give this, give him for Vera. Vera was the common-law wife. Give some food for Julek, his son. So whoever used to eat at our table had many people who should be fed too. It was absolutely, it was absolutely impossible. It was always a choice of every day. One day you could give them and other day you couldn't. It wasn't pleasant situation. It wasn't pleasant situation even for my mother's uncle because he wasn't hungry. I don't know but the art of life, of living in those days, was not to talk about everything, to avoid negative talking.

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Q: What type of goods were available though? You said that food was available, I assume --.

A: Of course, it wasn't any problem if you had money. It was a big market. The problem was to get food in the nearest store. We had a very small store. In our home, or maybe in the neighboring homes but the problem was, the art, the challenge was, to buy a loaf of bread and take it home. Because the moment, the very moment you left your -- the store, the beggars, the hungry people tried to ---.

Q: Take it away?

A: Take it away and they did. Most of the time, they did.

Q: I assume that you did go out of this little enclave during your time in the ghetto. Do you want to discuss any of the things you might have seen? I mean anything you witnessed while you were there?

A: In the ghetto?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, I want to tell you about two things. One about Fajga, I called her Frania but she accepted it. I felt Polish and I tried to -- well I didn't understand the Jewish-Polish problems in those days. Eventually because her uncle was so poor, she had to be taken to Korczak Orphanage. I was over there and visited her. They didn't -- it was the most, most remembered by me experience, very, very touching thing to do. I don't know, I don't use the right word but something very inspiring going to Korczak Orphanage and taking --.

Q: It was worth it.

A: It was absolutely -- it was the place like a -- well, how do you call the place where Eve and --.

Q: Garden of Eden.

A: Garden of Eden, Garden of Eden. So it was the last time I saw my Fajga, was in the orphanage. Another thing I wanted to tell you was the girl from Austria. The girl from Austria somehow lost her parents in, during the, in ghetto. She was my classmate before the war. Her name was Ingeborga. We had friends, a few friends who lived in ghetto tried to help her by making cigarettes and selling cigarettes and giving money to her. But any time I saw her, she was more like ghost than not like living person. She didn't look like a living person. She went though typhus, she went through hunger like it was in ghetto, it wasn't in a camp. But there were places where people lived like, looked like skeletons. Her mind

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was almost gone. But otherwise, there were some people who lived regular life more or less.

Q: I want to change tapes if that's okay with you.

A: Okay.

(End of Tape 1, Side B)

A: There were stores full of food but food was very expensive. When I tell you that we have three meals doesn't mean that we have meat every day. We didn't --.

Q: That's what I was wondering.

A: It was a very simple food like -- but, well, comparing to people in the wartime, it was food. There was always soup, there was some kasha, there was bread. You could eat as much bread, as many slices as you like to. There was milk and butter only for my father who had tuberculosis and for my small sister. But nobody was hungry, nobody was hungry and you had very, very --. From my point of view, the life was very, very --. I can't say it because it can be misunderstood by people but I enjoyed life. I was thirteen years old, twelve, thirteen, fourteen. I turned 14 in July of 1942 and those two years were very happy years for me. I had the best friend across the street. We spent most of the time together.

Q: The images that I've heard from anybody who's in the Warsaw ghetto was of leaving bodies out in the street, covered with newspaper and all that, I mean --?

A: If you kept, well if you hear --. You ask the same question as my sons. How could you say you were happy? I was happy. If you see something every day, every minute, you are smart enough to turn your head away. The people who live in Washington, who get out of Metro every day are unhappy because they look at homeless people? Are you unhappy because of that? It doesn't -- it make --. You learn to keep your mind away from unpleasant things and think of that only on special occasions. You do whatever you can do but you don't torture yourself thinking about it all the time. It was the same with me. I -- that's not that I was neutral, that I didn't see things. I see them all the time. I hear voices; I still hear voices from beggars from ghetto and small dying children but at the same time I was a happy child, very happy. I had my sister who was left to me and I used to take her on long walks to discover the town. Ghetto was like Jerusalem. Ghetto was very exotic place if you had some imagination, you were very young. You saw so many different quarters, different people, different language that people spoke. I used to take her to very dangerous place, to Jewish cemetery. There was place of trade between Aryan part of the town and Jewish part of the town, that was what people called "szmugiel". You know what's that --?

Q: What is that? No.

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A: It's a word that I probably won't find here. It's a trade between, illegal trade between --.

Q: Like the English word, smuggle?

A: Smuggle, yes, oh the same word. But it was a very dangerous smuggle because was constant shots with police, Jewish police and Polish police and German gendarmes chasing people. It was very dangerous but I didn't tell anybody and I used to take her. We had a great time, it was sort of excitement, of danger, of excitement. We had a great time but one day she came home and she told. He was taken to the Russian --.

Q: We're talking about your father now. I just want to make it clear on the tape.

A: Okay, okay. Now this is -- I will explain what happened. The history of my father. He went to the army, he was in reserve. He didn't have to go but he wanted to. He was taken by Russian army in the eastern part of Poland and when he was in convoy, the guard, the Russian officer or soldier, I don't remember who, told him; you look Jewish to me. There's one thing I want you to know. This is not Russia. Russia comes POW? (Intent is to say that it was the Russian guard who told my father that Russian authority was prejudiced against Jews and therefore helped my father escape the convoy.)

Q: POW, the labor camps?

A: No, for soldiers, for army people.

Q: I believe there are POW camps.

A: POW camps. He had something to this effect in very, very short words because he was -- my father was in convoy and he was a person who had kept convoy in order. In very few words, he said, you better escape. Go slower, slower and escape. So my father escaped and he --. We learned about that. He sent a letter to us and he stay on the Russian side of occupied Poland, in Lvov, in some places in that -- that were taken by Soviet Union. But he was very unhappy and very, very lonely and in New Year's Night of 1939, he returned home. He went through, illegally through the border, passed the border and he returned home. When he came in into our apartment. My mother, instead of being happy, almost passed away from fear. Because it was the worst place to be for my father, was Warsaw. That night, or maybe the night before, eighty lawyers were arrested and sent to the concentration camp. In the beginning they arrested people from lists not from --. My father came back and couldn't go out in street because his features were so Jewish. He didn't want to wear Jewish armband. Every Jew was obligated to wear the armband. So he mostly stayed home and was very, very depressed, extremely depressed. But coming back to my father, when we were in

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--.Well, there's nothing more to tell you about the life in the ghetto because I would go on --.

Q: How about if I ask you?

A: If you ask, I will answer, of course.

Q: Are there any other episodes or incidents beside from the two that you, the specific two, that you told me that made such an impression on you? Any other image that sand out in your mind of the time that you spent there.

A: Well, once --. There were many but if I try to --. Well, the wailing of dying people on the street; some beggars that were more -- they appealed more to my imagination. There was a father and two girls, two small girls and they begged together. They danced and they --. He looked like a well- educated person and sort of desperation. There were many things but I --. I remember my last birthday party. My last birthday party was on July 10. It was 16 days before the information of, before the decision of the liquidation of ghetto. But somehow most people who came for my birthday party, my parents' friends, were fully, fully aware of things that will happen very soon. It was very nice, very quiet, very friendly, the real party.

Q: Was it your 14th birthday?

A: Yes, but it was, first time I notice that people talk about things that they usually didn't talk. They talk about our last meeting, about things that were nice in life, about --. It was something like you go for burial and you are in funeral home, and you are smiling but everything is very, very --. If you go for a funeral, a very sad funeral, you know that it was not a regular funeral, but something like special tragedy. You try to pretend that everything will be okay. It was my last birthday party. I was, then, I was treated like a grown-up person. First time in my life, I remembered that they didn't treat me like a child. It was then, no --. few days later, my mother had a friend from her childhood. That friend had a younger sister who was paralyzed after that influenza.

Q: Typhus?

A: No. Childhood, you know --.

Q: Oh, polio.

A: Polio. In ghetto and she constantly had to eat something, to bite on something constantly. She had some very, sort of --. She couldn't keep her mouth shut. It was something that they had to put something into her mouth. They didn't have anything. They were three women; mother, that friend of my mother, and that sick sister. They decided that since you get a loaf of bread for every, for each

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person if you go from your own will to Umschlagplatz for so-called deportation, how did they call it, not deportations, they called it change of place.

Q: Yes, relocation.

A: Relocation, she will do that. She came to say goodbye because we never see each other again. Because she couldn't leave that sister without food so she had to eat until she died. She put it very openly and said, oh my dear what are you talking. Why are you talking such a nonsense? Everything will be okay. She looked at my eyes and she treating me like a grown up person and she said, Dzidzia, don't be a child, don't be stupid. She tried to push me to do something, to open my eyes to the real life. From that time on, I remember that very well. I know that we have always lived with open eyes because if you let our eyes to be naïve, the life is so terrible. Things are happening everywhere, it's so terrible. It doesn't matter if it was in Holocaust. It might happen in China, everywhere.

Q: Yugoslavia?

A: Yugoslavia, everywhere. Well, there are many, many things, of course that I remember but some -- they come and they go away. They don't stay with me all the time.

Q Do you want to discuss what __

A: And what happened, what happened? The great, great action started in ghetto. My father didn't come back home in the evening of August 3, or maybe -- because I'm not sure.

Q: In '42?

A: Forty-two. I'm not sure about dates. This is one thing. I read that book. It was a -- this is a -- it was written in when the things happened.

Q: Yes, do you want to mention it in the tape?

A: No, oh no. You don't have to, no. This is to tell you that I can't, he gives different dates than I remember. He's probably right because he used to write day after day and I --. But in my memory, I'm talking about things that happened on August 3. My father didn't come back home. That evening, people on our street were surrounded, rounded up and taken to Umschlagplatz but only people from street. They didn't go to houses, they didn't pick up people from the buildings, just from the street.

Q: Took them off the street?

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A: From the street. It was the beginnings, it was the sort of --. It was the tenth day of "great action". They call it in English, great action?

Q: No, but I know what you're --.

A: Because in Polish, it's -- has it's name. My father didn't come home. My mother was devastated. The whole night she waited and packed things and knew things are going to the end. The end is very close. Next morning, my father came back. The same thing happened to him when he was in a column. He was caught and he was directed to Umschlagplatz in column of other people. When he passed the last building, the street in front of him was deserted and he was close to pass the last building; he decided to escape. I think there was sort of discussion between him and the Jewish policeman. The Jewish policeman helped him. He closed his eyes and my father escaped. He came back home and there was day almost like any other day. We started, was 2:00 or 2:30 in the afternoon and our house, or maybe more houses but I know only about our house, was surrounded by --. There was a whistle, very, very loud whistle in the courtyard and voice very, very harsh, and very, very loud ordering people to take his belongings, to take small belongings, going down to the court. My father said that absolutely --. My father, when he came home, he had some conversation with my mother that I picked up; that this is obviously the end. This is no, there is no doubt, they don't, the destination of people is this. What I saw yesterday was like hell, it was obviously something --. People can't, you can't get caught and --. Well, we were ordered to go down. My father was very quick not -- to call everybody in the house, all the relatives and tell to follow him. He started to -- but most of the people, they were old people and there were at least ten people in the household. They didn't want to be sent over to my father. They had good "ausweisses", good documents or they didn't want to take any risk. They didn't go with us but my father took mother, me, my mother, my sister, my grandmother and we all started to get out of the stairs. We met a Jewish policeman. Jewish policeman wanted to follow him, asked us to follow him. Asked ! well I call it asked. He gave orders and my father said something brutal, in brutal way, fuck off or something like this. He tried to pretend to be strong man and my father said I will kill you right here if you don't let me pass you and he gave up. But it was only the beginning of hunting. There were one or two policemen in this building; the rest was coming but they weren't there. So my father took us to those barracks. I told you that in the same courtyard were small, small barracks. There was a ceiling, underground ceiling, like in the peasants' homes in old days. We all -- he opened the _____. Opening in the floor. The floor was wooden. He opened it.

Q: A trap door?

A: A trap door, yes. He tried to put us into that cellar. Was very, very small; of course, very small. There were 16 people already so it was --. People started to fight back. They didn't want us but my father was so determined with them like with the policeman before. So we all went down and we settled down. My

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grandmother was sick; she had asthma. She couldn't -- they were so, so crowded and no ventilation at all, no fresh air. My grandmother said, no I can't. I can't stand any moment longer, no more. She left the place but everything was decided in a second. It's much shorter period of time, moments. So grandmother went out, the trap went back. Somebody, I don't know who, I don't know if, somebody was supposed to put a rug on top of that door trap. We stayed there, the air was stale. Little by little, people fainted. My sister fainted, my mother almost fainted. We heard voices, we heard shots. It was long, long day. After many, many hours, it was quiet. My mother with her head, opened the trap a little bit to let the air come in. We spent there six or seven hours and in the evening somebody came and started to call us to get out because everything is over. The building was empty, almost nobody survived, everybody was taken. We went upstairs and the whole apartment was looted. There was no food. My mother had some food stocked but there was no food. The prospects weren't very bright. This manner, we spent three weeks. We had the last telephone in our -- well, this is what I know about. This is not what I find in different --.

Q: Accounts?

A: Yes. But -- oh, something happened very important to us in history of our surviving. One day there was telephone from telephone company. Young girl with very small, shy low voice told my father she wanted to talk to my father. She told him somebody has to pay a bill. If the bill won't be paid today, I will have to turn off the telephone. The bill, it was sort of interesting thing for history of ghetto, the bills were not paid from ghetto because the post office didn't exist anymore. So it was a trap, Catch 22. My father called his friend out of ghetto and he went and paid the bill so we had a telephone. The telephone saved the life of many people. Because people could contact the outside world and make contacts, make arrangements and save their life. It saved our loves too by -- just by sheer accident. Somebody called -- people made the meeting place in our house. Meeting place and they waited for message from outside world that were supposed to come through our telephone. It was crowded, our house became very crowded then. Nobody from our family except us were still living but new people came from all over ghetto, whoever knew that there's such an apartment with telephone. So we lived with strangers and once somebody called to -- somebody called somebody who was supposed to be in our home but he weren't and talked to my father. They were old colleagues, old friends, lawyer friends. That father's old friend told my father, if you get, find a way to get out of the ghetto, the rest leave to me. I will give you a helping hand but I can't help you to get out of ghetto. It was some hope for my father who looked like 100 Jews in one, you know, in person. Little by little, we left the ghetto through groups who worked outside the ghetto. They were counted by people and they were able to manage, to leave somebody outside. They bribed Polish policemen or whoever, I don't know exactly. It was a big business. They made, it was a way of making money in those days. First they took my sister, One worker who worked outside, in the

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group outside the ghetto, took my sister as his daughter. Then I left. That's the end of my life in ghetto.

Q: Where did you go?

A: Where I -- I think --.

Q: This was all in August, 1942?

A: I left on August 16. It was August 16. I am sure about the date, My sister left a few days earlier, Any time there was -- the Germans, not the Germans, mostly the --. Close the --. From raids, there were raids on the big scale, at least three in those days between August 4 and August 16 when I left. In the beginning, we used to go to the same ceiling where we stayed first time. Later on it was, oh, later on, we, for some reason, I don't remember why, those small ceilings became dangerous. My father, maybe there was no time. We spent nights at home without light, only in the dark to wash ourselves, to get something to eat. In daytime, we didn't stay in our apartment. We stayed in the lumber factory. The lumber factory was in the back of the courtyard, our lot. Whoever survived those first -- whoever was alive stayed there. People talked and people -- I met very, very interesting people over there. They were always in love, I was fourteen and I was always in love. Since young men were mostly militia men so I was always in love with some militia man. I found, since I was only 14 and not a woman but a child, we were very good friends. They used to talk to me about this all. They were very strange people. You don't know how far hypocrisy can go into the soul of people, they were murderers. They were helping hands of murderers. Every day they murdered hundreds of people but they didn't feel guilty. They always did it for some better reason, to save their mother, to save their somebody, to help someone survive. It was interesting experience to talk to those people. One day I was very close to death, the closest in my life, I never was so close o be caught like that. The raid came suddenly with no -- we had no time to hide. Somebody took my sister, a four- year old child with me and put lumber in front; put me between lumber, between boards, lumber boards. The Germans or Ukrainians whoever they were, chasers, came and one board after another, they took away. They were very, very close and my sister didn't, she fell asleep. She could wake up any second and they were so -- only one board was between us and them. They went away and it was over. Once one of those, I don't know who were, who exactly who were, nationality is the wrong way to tell about them because they were from many, many nationalities. There were, most of the time there were non-Germans but from some groups from different, many, many countries. Sort of, do you know something about who they were?

Q: Yes, these fascist groups, well I imagine many of them were Ukrainians.

A: But not all of them, not all of them. This one whom I will talking about was probably German, was probably some German soldier. He found, this was a very,

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red-haired, big blue-eyed girl who survived the first round-ups. She hid in a special kind of folding bed that don't exist any more. He opened the bed and the eyes met, big blue eyes and nobody was in close vicinity. He shut that bed closed and said nobody's there and went away. It was interesting happening too. She didn't know why, she couldn't understand. It was she herself who told us the story. It was something she couldn't understand. So, now I'm out of the ghetto.

Q: Okay, I would like to know what happened for the rest of the war.

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A: Rest of the war. For next few months, I changed places. Nobody -- it was hard to find any place to be safe for longer than a few weeks, or a few months, there was always something. January 17 of 1943, our friends found places for us with a family who kept us from -- till the end of the war. So we spent there two years. I lived like Anne Frank, in the hiding. I didn't go out, I didn't see; we saw only people who -- very, very, selected people who could come over and visit us. Our contact with the outside world was very limited. We had one room, we lived together in one room, my parents and me. My sister was with foster family if you can call it. Some friends of our family took my sister and she lived like -- almost normal life in the suburban, in Milanowek, in the suburbs of Warsaw. With small children around because her foster parents had small children. First six months that I lived out of ghetto --. The worst thing was my contact, my encounter with the Aryan world, with the Warsaw that didn't exist for me, with the normal people, normal life, normal life. People who had different scale value and different needs. I couldn't, it was very hard to adjust. People who took me, the first people who took me and I spend few weeks with them, were cousins of my --, the nearest cousin of my mother. But they were transformed, they were different people. They pretended not to be Jewish; they still pretend. They were completely different people. I had nothing in common with them. Everything turned, our friendship, our love, didn't survive the war. We didn't, we are not friends any more. It's hard to say what happened, what happened was that they tried to become like other people. They tried to live in petty, small, petty problems. I left my parents in ghetto and I didn't know if they were still alive. I couldn't care for small things, I was one important burden that I --.Well, I wasn't alone over there because cousins, our cousin took another cousin who was young; I was 14, he was 17. Since the life, normal life and sun and smiling people and chitchat and things like that didn't -- were so distant to us, we used to keep together. We tried to be, well, there was --. They lived in the attic, they had very nice apartment in the upper --.

Q: Penthouse, for instance?

A: Yes, for, for --.

(End of Side A, Tape II)

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A: I will finish with that story about our cousins. There was an attic and we used to go up to that attic. We didn't talk much but we just stayed, sit and be quiet. I don't remember any conversation, any special conversation with him. My cousin, my aunt or my cousin told me that this is a very inappropriate thing for a young girl to be alone with a young man with no --. It was such a stupid thing. I was really -- I felt terribly isolated. I felt terribly isolated because I didn't belong to the world that she wanted to belong. Her father was in ghetto and he was one of those constant boarders who always used to spend days with us. She never asked about him. She wasn't interested. It was sort of self -- self defense. I am sure now she wanted to be like other people. She didn't want to have father in ghetto dying in there, or maybe already dead, or in a transport in a - to Treblinka. She didn't want it but I didn't want to listen about her new dress or a new fur or something like this. So I was very, very unhappy. I was unhappy but I don't think I had the courage to say something. I really don't know. A few weeks later, they found a place for me to stay. It was in the Warsaw suburbs; I don't remember even the name of the -- I forgot the name but it doesn't matter. The man who took me, took me only for money. He was an alcoholic. He treated his family very badly. They lived in very bad -- they were very primitive people. But I don't think they were -- they weren't brutal, they didn't do anything bad, anything cruel for me. They were such a simpleton. My mother visited me there. My mother didn't talk _______ and didn't trust, instinctively didn't trust our cousins. She noticed the transformation; they were different people and she didn't know how far they are able to go. Something opened, something different; they were very close relatives and very close friends. But something strange, strange feelings and mistrust, opened between my mother and my cousins. So they didn't want to tell my mother where I am. At last my mother came. I have to tell you about how my mother left ghetto. I will finish this, okay?

Q: Okay.

A: My mother came and I went to meet her. It was only three weeks after I left ghetto, three or four, very short time. We met on the road and I was like dead inside. I couldn't even be happy. It was -- I didn't feel my mother was coming. I was like a living -- like somebody sucked away my feelings. It took some time, not very long, maybe half an hour, maybe 15 minutes, before I started to feel happiness and then it was absolutely great feeling to have my mother again. Because I didn't think that we could survive. I left, no. This is something that I never told anybody. It's something that I'm not sure if it's very loyal to tell about other people. To tell how disaster makes people, divide people, divide close people --. When I was in my cousins' apartment, it wasn't -- not very big apartment; other people helped my parents to get out -- of ghetto. They -- the telephone -- I said that the telephone was still working. The ghetto almost didn't exist but the telephone was working. So one of my father's, my parents' friends came over and told me Dzidzia please, I want to talk in private with Lilusia. Lilusia was cousin. I don't want you to be here because I have to tell something. We have some things that grown-up people have to talk. I left the room but I

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knew that it was about my parents. I put my ear into a lock and I heard everything. He told, Mr. ---- I am saying his words. He said "Wladek, (my father) he's crazy. They don't have any valuables, they don't have any valuable things. They have little money, he looks like he looks and he want to leave the ghetto. He's absolutely crazy. I don't know what, I can't figure out the way of his thinking." It was quite cruel but it was the -- his intentions were good. He didn't say this because he had something against my father's survival but he knew it was unrealistic. At least I knew my father, my parents were alive. By the same way, the same groups who worked outside ghetto, were still working outside ghetto, were working for quite a long time, few months longer. First my mother, then my father were transported through ghetto borders and they were also in the working place outside the ghetto. Some friends of my parents came over and took them to their house. It was act of courage like absolute heroism. They were heroes because it was obvious for people outside the ghetto, who my parents were -- the way they looked and the sort of the way they were dressed, it was absolutely obvious. But from where my parents were outside in the safe place, the other friend made first contact, who talk on the phone with my father and who gave him the idea that there's a chance for my father, took things in his hands and found a place in Milanowek, in Warsaw suburbs. My parents were in Milanowek; I moved from one place to another for a few months. Some people were nice, some people were scared; some people had tried but couldn't manage, it was too risky Sometime people around started to talk about me; that there is something strange with me, who I am, it's obvious who I am. It was obvious who I am. At last, from January 17, 1943, we were together for two years, together with my parents. Those two years weren't bad.

Q: Where were you?

A: In Milanowek, in Warsaw suburbs. We spent two years in relative quiet, quiet environment, relatively quiet. We --.

Q: Your sister was there too?

A: No. My sister was --.

Q: Oh, she was with the other people?

A: The other people. On some occasions when there was some danger around, other people used to take my sister to our place because it was in the same small town. But it was rather rare. Most of the time, my sister was with, in the other place. We weren't -- the people, Mr. and Mrs. Sokolowski is this name, they are both dead by now, only their daughter is alive. Their daughter was my friend. She4 was -- we were of the same age so we --. Mr. and Mrs. Sokolowski put some conditions. They took us under some conditions. We were not supposed to have guests, nobody was supposed to know our address and we were not supposed to

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leave the place. We had some false documents but my father when he got his -- you know what kennkarte was?

Q: Yes, passport.

A: When my father got his passport, his kennkarte, that was very hard to get one. At last he received one, he had to sign it. He signed Wladyslew Winawer. His kennkarte was for different name but he -- it was disaster. But at the same time, we knew that my father couldn't use that kennkarte, he simply couldn't use it. Nobody would believe he was --.

Q: Now this is a personal --. Was he circumcised?

A: Yes, he was.

Q: He was? So that would have been a problem?

A: No, it couldn't have been any problem to know that more. It was sort of, really, no false hope. It's obvious that we can't lead any official life. There's no way for us to pretend that we live here, live there as tenants or something like that. But our Mr. and Mrs. Sokolowski didn't believe, didn't, took us knowing that we are a -- wait a second -- it was a death sentence. So thy built something sort of, the same thing that we had in our small barracks. They built sort of trap with covered entrance and any time they kept the house gated. The gate was always locked and any time somebody suspicious appeared at the gate, we're supposed to hide in the trap. We did it; we learned how to do it very quickly. It was like a drill, like a military drill. They were, they weren't like Polish people, Polish people are emotional, poorly organized. This is typical, this is what is typical in Polish culture and Polish --. But they were completely different. They had a very strong sense of responsibility and they knew the risk they taking and everything was perfectly well organized. Little by little, we had more and more things to take with us, a radio and arms and many, many things because we were the safest people to keep dangerous things. Because we weren't supposed to be taken to Gestapo or to be tortured because Jews were killed on the spot. Since we, little by little we had more important things to hide with us, we felt more -- our life had more value. We did something, we did something more than try to save our lives. Comparing to the other people our life in hiding was very, very quiet and uneventful.

Q: Were you in hiding, did you have any part in the Warsaw uprising towards the end or --?

A: No, because we were in hiding.

Q: So what happened? How were you liberated?

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A: When we liberated; we --. A few days later, my father was very sick. Well, those -- my father was depressed. He, in his character, he was able to do heroic acts but he had no discipline like my mother, to stay quiet, to wait, to do routine things; he became depressed, he became so depressed, he didn't get up, he stayed in bed for weeks on. What turned out to be great, great help for his tuberculosis because this is the way that tuberculosis can be cured. So he survived. There were some bad times, sometimes he was very sick but all in all he, in the end of the war, he was much better than a few years earlier. He survived; I think what he did, he opened sort of Jewish ;place of Jewish, not council; Jewish, not gathering place; place that you learn about other people who survived.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Something, it wasn't any, it was spontaneous, it was something, it wasn't any organization in -- but it was the place where many people --. We moved from that, our hiding place. We found an apartment very, very close, close by. People who came from Russia, people who was leaving the hiding places, people who came from camps, they came en masse to our place to talk about the way they survived, what happened to them, to ask about other people. It was unfortunate, we didn't have anything like tape recorders, tape recorders like now. I didn't, I don't remember --. Most of those exciting stories got lost.

Q: The Russians are the ones who liberated you?

A: The Russians on exact date, I'm telling you the date because the date was very important, very, very meaningful in Poland. Because on January 17 of 1945, the Russians came. It's questionable if they liberated Poland but they liberated us, that's for sure. It was exactly two years of living in the Mr. and Mrs. Sokolowski's house.

Q: After having escaped the ghetto. What about the Jewish uprising in the ghetto? Did you have any knowledge of that?

A: Well, only I saw the fire and heard shots but --.

Q: You didn't know anything about it?

A: I didn't know because I lived in suburbs. It wasn't close. It wasn't -- so people, my husband, who wasn't Jewish, who lived next to ghetto and the neighboring street, to walls so his knowledge about uprising in ghetto is much more precise than mine. Because he heard voices, he saw things that I didn't. I know it was, according to his memory, it was something you can't forget.

Q: Maybe he'd like to talk about it some time.

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A: But well, this is nothing, nothing special because he didn't, he's contacted his --. He doesn't know that much to make the story special. You have to listen, to talk to people who have some, who helped or who --.

Q: There really aren't that many who survived it altogether, that's why the problem. I mean I know there are --.

A: Well, maybe. I will --. People who helped Jews are heroes. I really think of it.

Q: In any event, are there other things in that period after the ghetto period that you might want to fill in for your story.

A: After the -- well --.

Q: Just the time in hiding and --.

A: After time in hiding. When I left my hiding place, I wasn't normal girl. I wasn't like the other girls. Because after two years of being isolated, I was strange. I was almost half-crazy, stupid, extremely naïve, extremely stupid. I wanted to be like other girls, I didn't want to be so wise and experienced and remember. I didn't want to remember anything for years.

Q: You didn't talk about it afterwards?

A: Well, I talked. I didn't -- I talked. I didn't like to talk about our disappointments of our relatives or something that our friends said, not knowing that I heard it because they were very good people. They had good intentions, they didn't want to hurt anybody. No, I don't have any --. I don't feel different than other people. I don't feel that I survived, that I had tragic experience because my experience was very, very --. Comparing to other people, my life, my war experience was --.

Q: I wouldn't call it mild though. I would say --?

A: Mild, I would say mild. Comparing --.

Q: Yeah, compared to the people who were in the camps, it was --.

A: Absolutely mild. I would say it was mild comparing to the others. Comparing to American girl, living in American suburb, it was tragedy but you have to always, always compare to something. It was mild. I didn't know a fear of death. Since I didn't, I had only a fear of being alone, not being with my parents. I was afraid of brutal people, of primitive people more than of execution. I remember that moment close to death, it wasn't a moment of fear. It was sort of moment of expectation, not of fear. I don't know if I hadn't -- if execution squad will shot me, I will be hero, I don't know. As far as I know, I wasn't afraid of death and in some way, I was prepared. We knew that there's no chance to survive. We had

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no money, we lived from month to month. My father had some lots in Warsaw. They were un-built lots; they were very difficult to be sold but our friends managed somehow to find buyers. Well, for low price. We lived selling those lots. My parents didn't have, didn't have, really didn't have any money to live on. It was almost day-to-day survival. We didn't have much hope but we --. I can tell about my father because my father helped us out of his difficult streak in him; but my mother and me were quiet. We were always quiet. My father was a hero but couldn't stand the passive life.

Q: Do you want to discuss any of your experiences after the war? Your studies or anything, or your life, or coming to America, or anything?

A: My life.

Q: Only if you'd like to.

A: Well, okay. Can we take some break.

Q: Sure.

A: Okay, our life after war was difficult to me because I didn't go to school during the war. My education was shattered. I learned something, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. My parents tried to teach me but wasn't organized, disciplined way of teaching so I was two years behind my peers. I thought at the age of 17, if you are two years older than your classmates, you feel terrible.(?) It's completely different, different world. With my experience, I was more distant, more different than -- to my peers than even if I were two years older but --. I couldn't find a place. I didn't belong anywhere. In those days, it was only once in my years that I found the victim of anti-Semitism. After the war, there was very strong anti-Semitic attitude, especially among the young people, among kid at school. Maybe not only, but I felt it at school.

Q: You still didn't really feel Jewish or did you by this time?

A: Well, I felt the same. No, I didn't, I didn't. I didn't feel different, I felt prosecuted or hurt but no, hurt by stupid idiots. But the school was anti-Semitic, not only kids, teachers too. The atmosphere was very unpleasant. I wanted to go to a special school for grown-ups. There were such schools after the war, to make evening classes for working people. But my parents didn't accept it and I was -- I was, somehow, I depended on my family more than seventeen-year-old depends in normal times. If they say no, I accepted it and I used to go to regular school. The school was so bad and they treated me so unfairly that I moved to another school. I changed schools and in that school, in another place, another town, I felt --. It was a good school and everybody liked me and everything was okay. Little by little, I returned to normal life. When I finished school, I started to study law and the new calamities, how do you say it in English, disaster came?

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Q: Calamities.

A: The calamities came, Stalinism, communism. Whatever happened during the Hitler era had some good followers during the Stalin era. Little by little, I was more involved in rebellion against Stalinism than thinking about my past.

Q: Did your parents consider leaving Poland after the war?

A: My -- many friends begged them to leave Poland. But my father was sick with the tuberculosis that was much better but when he started working and he was -- worked with such an energy, he became ill again. My father had no -- this is not profession to --.

Q: To just go to another country, right.

A: At the age of 44 or 45, sick with -- and the world didn't like, wasn't open for refugees. It was very bad time for the -- the only immigration could be to -- even that was before Israel was formed

Q: Oh, right. I know it was difficult. I just wondered if they tried to so they didn't --

A: They didn't, they thought it wouldn't be reasonable.

Q: So you studied law and got a law degree and practiced law in Poland?

A: And got married. No I, for a few years, I worked as a judge, as a judge something. Then I started to practice law. Not a regular judge, sort of judge. Was administration, sort of -- well, doesn't matter. Interesting?

Q: To me.

A: I will tell you because I forgot the word today. New Socialistic organization that was supposed to judge, to settle the cases between public sector because courts were too conservative and the communist wants special court for organizations, for whatever. I'm getting tired and I --.

Q: I don't want to press you any more.

A: So, whatever you hear, you hear only my eh, eh, eh.

Q: No, that's not true.

A: So it was a very quiet place. There was, the place was built by communism, by communists but it turned out to be less political than they expected it to be. I spend there five years and during the Gomulka rebellion, a renovation in 1957, I

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decide to change profession and be a lawyer. My first husband was a lawyer and my father was very prominent lawyer. He was in the council in the town.

Q: I think now we're getting tired so we will stop now but perhaps another time we could talk about the rest of this. I want to thank you very much for your time and your very interesting story.

A: Oh, thank you, thank you.

Note:
[Some additions/deletions as well as corrections were made to the original transcript. Therefore some aspects of this copy may differ from the taped interview.]

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