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Interview with Irene Shapiro
March 27, 1992
Ipsmont, New York

Q: Today is March 27, 1992. I'm Anthony Di Iorio and I'm at the home of Mrs. Irene Shapiro in Ipsmont, New York and I'm here on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington to interview Mrs. Shapiro about her experiences and those of her family during the Holocaust. Good afternoon.

A: Good afternoon to you.

Q: I thought perhaps we could begin by having you tell us where you were born.

A: I was born in the small Ukrainian town, Brezany. It was part of what's now known as the Polish Ukraine and the breadbasket of both Poland and the Ukraine and later the Soviet Union.

Q: And when were you born there?

A: 1925, which was ancient history of course, and well, I was born there as I explained to you. It was almost accidental, certainly not historically awaited, and that is, I was -- my parents were at that time living in a town on the Vistula River before it goes into the Gdansk Bay. The name is Gludjan. However that time there were no, very few Jewish people, perhaps, and no rabbis and no moyels and so my mother in her eighth or ninth month of pregnancy went by train two days back to Brezany where a midwife would deliver just a girl.

Q: Just a girl?

A: Just a girl.

Q: Were you an only child?

A: No. At that point I was the one and only, but later on another "just a girl" came along but she was born in Gludjan.

Q: So you were born in Brezany when it was part of Poland.

A: Brezany became part of Poland in 1918 with the Treaty of Versailles.

Q: And you grew up not in Brezany but in Gludjan?

A: Gludjan. Until 1938 I lived in that part. It was known as the corridor. It was everybody's transit point since ancient times, since the Teutonic orders yet. And in 1938 my family was forced to leave the corridor or ____ and went to Bialystok, and that was an entirely different part of Poland. It was the formerly Russian part. Poland was under occupation for 150 years, and that part of Poland was a czarist part. So everybody spoke Russian and it had the looks of a Russian part. It was poorly maintained streets, whereas Gludjan was a western German, typically German town, and in 1938 for one year I attended the 4th grade of junior high school, Polish junior high school in the so-called Druszki Gymnasium which was the most expensive but very modern academically very advanced junior high school and high school. And then I

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entered the high school in 1939 but the high school became in the Soviet 10th year school ____. The Soviets occupied as part of Poland. This was the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement. It was fortunate for us as I told you before. The Germans did come to Belsic for one week and promised us a proper, final solution even then, but the Soviets intervened and so we lived under Soviet occupation and most ordinary people, and especially from the viewpoint of a child we had a very good time. This was the time when they sort of tried to schmaltz up to us kids, tried to get us to the Pioneer Organization and the Counselor Organization and politicized us and etc., etc., etc. I'll never forget myself screaming at our landlord: 'if you don't fix that toilet I'm going to tell on you.' This was the time, but generally it was a normal time.

Q: You're talking about the Russian occupation?

A: The Russian occupation. I wanted to set the record straight. People are expecting us to say all bad things about the Soviets. Not at that time. They were very careful about anti-Semitism. They put people in jail for anti-Semitic expression, so I saw absolutely, I saw nothing, but of course my friends whose fathers were factory owners and such were sent to Siberia.

Q: And what was their crime? Being a class enemy?

A: Bring class enemy having employed and not having workers testifying for them. Apparently if the workers testified and intervened they might have been given some jail sentence but their family was not removed and otherwise they were removed especially if they were very wealthy and didn't get out. Most people who had that kind of money could also get out because Lithuania at the beginning was not yet a Soviet republic until 1940. There were quite a few months and many people did go through Lithuania, Romania and such. Some even got to Palestine at that time. Many had gone to China and so forth.

Q: Did any members of your family go to Palestine?

A: My uncle left Poland much before that as a young law student from Lember Wolf as a Zionist and --

Q: That's your father's brother?

A: That's my father's brother and he was in Israel until very recently. In fact, I did not know, he adopted me. You see, I was nineteen and a half when the war finished and was still adoptable. I think it was still until twenty-one. And he adopted me. But I didn't know and I went to the United States and he was just heartbroken, and I would have been his daughter in Israel while I was already in the United States.

Q: Could you tell us more about growing up in Poland, as a little girl and then as a young adult?

A: Well, the times I had in Grujan were not particularly happy for me personally because I had a very strict father, still the Austrian school where you've got to be home on time, you can't go -- you can't pal around with somebody whom we don't know. And that let out most of the Jewish boys and girls that I knew. They were all daughters and sons of lower merchants and merchants and as I'm told by a friend whom I know now, my parents were stuck up. And I missed on this and I interpreted all this as it was I who wasn't popular, nobody liked me, I had no friends and so forth. And I became --I was very bright, and excellent student, so I didn't suffer any anti-

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Semitism. This was a Polish girls' Gymnasium; I was the only Jewish child in class, but so good a student that I was always at the top of the list all the time. But I wasn't very happy as very young teenager. Also most of the kids, they were a little older than I was and looked down upon me. But when I went to Bialystople, that made my day. I was in a Jewish school with all Jewish girls and boys who all loved me. I became not only popular but I was voted in a an S.O.G.O. whatever, students' organization president prior to the coming of the Soviets, and then after that when the Soviets marched in I ran into a problem because they voted me in but the Soviets didn't want to have a non-Communist, and I proudly announced that I was a Zionist. Well, that was the worst thing you should have stated. They were forced by my colleagues to let me be, to be the president of their Utchcom the student committee, but at home my mother packed my valise and waited for the NKVV then -- the KGB now -- to come and take me away cause nobody ever heard for a little pipsqueak of a teenager pronouncing proudly -- that I defended -- that was a left-wing Zionism and very close to Marxism. In fact, Marxists, the Zionists and we the Jews have the same right to feel proud of our nationality, as did the other Soviet republics. I in essence negated the Jewish question of Stalin, the little pamphlet, that the Jews are not really a nation because they don't have a land of their own.

Q: Sounds like your heart belongs to your uncle in Palestine.

A: It sort of disappeared on me. I was very easily swayed to look the other way and then I joined the Pioneers, you know, which wasn't much of a plan either, and I sort of had the left-winger's leniency because of my revolt against my parents and my grandparents. I played with daughters of supers in the house and working kids and so forth. So, in Soviet Bialystok I was very busy with political affairs of the school. I was on the committee and I was in charge of the newspaper and what not, very, very involved with that. Very little time for my poor mother, and it was the first time in her life that she didn't have a servant. You had to have a doctor's certificate to be entitled to a maid and she didn't have. I feel very guilty about that.

Q: Your activities as a student and with this paper, was this always in Polish or Yiddish?

A: No, no the school became a Russian school, a school with a Russian language of instruction. I am fluent, or was at least till the --.

Q: You're fluent in Russian?

A: Oh, absolutely. I was a so-called otlichnica which means I had all "A"s and therefore I could enter the university without an exam. And based on that I was able to get my Regents, my graduation diploma because the list of these otlichnica was kept somewhere. I came here to the Soviet consulate, where they piously tried to say to me what are you doing in America, you should go back to the Soviet Union. But they did get me testimony of so-and-so, I gave the name of my director that I was a very good student ---- otlichnica.

Q: You were conducting your own pro-Zionist activity?

A: Oh, no, I knew better within a month. This was in the beginning. After people started disappearing and after my friends came to school crying, I knew better. It was just the beginning; no, after that I never owned up to anything other, oh, I fervently, I very much -- I really enjoyed what was happening. You have to understand this. They made us, as kids feel very important. I discussed this with the people who survived that. We all had the same

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feeling. Who cared what they did to the grownups, or the capitalists. I mean we were kids and they had all kinds of things for the kids. They had a way of getting us.

Q: You're referring now to the Communists?

A: Yes. And, well, we were too young. You couldn't even think of being a Communist. In fact, that isn't what they were interested in. They wanted us to be supportive, and we were, some of us at least. I was one of them.

Q: How would you describe or summarize the political information of the Jewish community?

A: You see, Bialystok always had a left-wing population. They were not Communists; they were ----. It was the second international. I don't know, besides the leaders who were sent out, some of them, most of them I think, switched. They had a large workers population that possibly support them and the rest were as anybody else. I was very opportunistic. That was the way to get a job. That was the way to get ahead and my father had a warm feeling about the Soviets because really they saved his life, you know. He was caught up in the revolution. He was captured as an Austrian prisoner of war and when they took him out of that prison, it was going from whites to reds, from whites to reds, and the reds ---

Q: You're talking about World War I and then the Revolution?

A: 1917 -- that's right, and he was when the reds came, he was pronounced to be a white, or was it the other way around, one way or the other. No, no, no. So they were supposed to execute him, and they did apparently, but one of the ladies there whom my father was in love with traded his freedom for some money or what and he became -- they liberated him and he was able to go home, so he was very, very thankful to them.

Q: How did your father get to be a judge?

A: He was the bandleader in the army. He was, I think, an officer. I have a feeling that the bandleaders had to be. Yes, yes.

Q: In the Polish army?

A: Polish army. He was at that time, when he was, after the Revolution, he was offered the freedom of joining of them forming Siberian legions of --- which he did and via the Far East through China, Hong Kong, he went around through Persia, I would say, through the Persian Gulf and so forth, and Suez I would say and came back home, in the legion. And stayed in the Polish army till much after Poland was formed and still was fighting with the Soviet Union. He was in the middle of the Battle of Warsaw, the famous battle, and christened forever by that fact and had difficulties with the Soviet people because of that.

Q: What was he by vocation?

A: My father was a violinist. He was desperately trying to play in the Huberman Symphony Orchestra in Palestine at that time and somehow couldn't get out, but he was an excellent violinist. He was an excellent violinist but there was absolutely no making a living that way in Poland for a Jew. And he might have tried other symphony orchestras too, and he couldn't get

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in; he couldn't get out, get out. As a matter of fact, my father had an American visa. As late as 1939 a visa was waiting for him in Warsaw, but not for us and not for my mother.

Q: Just for your father …

A: And he refused to go.

Q: Had he tried to get it?

A: Yes. My uncle here in California got him the visa but refused get it for his family. That was the way it was done in the days past. The husband would come and then bring his family, but my father knew better. He knew the war was coming and so he didn't go.

Q: Now where did your father grow up? He was born in Brezany?

A: He was born in the same town, Brezany and that's where he grew up. He was the oldest of three children of my grandfather who always impressed me as an Austrian sergeant who marches through town and everybody would bow to him and that again was an old Austrian household with a very strict father and I guess my father perpetuated this. I think I broke the vicious cycle. I became the democratic parent.

Q: Your father was strict.

A: My father was extremely strict. I think that he realized what he was doing when he was taking his exams in pedagogy. He would tell me "Hmm, now I know why you always say no and never yes." And I guess he had an idea he was not raising us properly.

Q: When he spoke to you when he was being strict, did he speak to you in Polish or German?

A: No, only in Polish. We spoke Polish at home.

Q: Was he strict when it came to religious matters?

A: No. We were not religious. Most westernized Jews were really once a year, one day or two days Jews, so called and that is they'd go to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. My parents were keeping tradition in a modern sense. All these modern children's holidays were maintained. The little community in --- maintained all the holidays and they had a Zionist organization to which I was not allowed to belong but nevertheless I was taught Hebrew. They imported a teacher from Warsaw, a young man who taught us boys and girls Modern Hebrew and religion with it. To that extent we were Jewish, with all the holidays maintained more or less the way American Jews, those who are not Orthodox, the sort of social life centering around the suburban synagogue, the reform temple. That is more or less what it was like.

Q: How about your grandparents?

A: My grandparents were modern too, but a little less, because they still kept a kosher house and I had the most miserable time to remember which knife went where and why I shouldn't take butter with the same knife or fork. I was just flabbergasted but to that extent they were more religious, but my grandmother did not have the wig, and again they didn't go to, they did not,

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they maintained, they lit candles for Sabbath. We didn't, not very much, no.

Q: Did they live in Brezany?

A: They lived in Brezany, yes.

Q: How did your father get to _____?

A: Again another not very large town that nobody ever heard of. Another accident. His army unit was sent to, this was a very big army and air force base. I think it was the 67th -- Polish army something, and that's where he stayed and that's where he was discharged and he fell in love with this little town. He played at that time in cafes, and they had a French-style café where you would sit and have coffee and eat a very fine piece of cake and listen to some nice Viennese violin playing.

Q: He was a violinist.

A: Yah. And the orchestra leader.

Q: Oh, orchestra leader?

A: Yes.

Q: He had his own violin? What type of music did he ---

A: (Cough) I'm sorry. Almost any kind, but I would surmise that if it was a café it was chamber music of the lightest type, Viennese, Schubert. Ours was a very musical home; I played the piano, my father played the violin, my sister danced, and this was our trio. We had Friday coffee hours with German friends of my father would be invited for "café mit zamen" which meant coffee with cream, and the children and the father would perform.

Q: How about your mother? Did she …

A: My mother refrained. She was an operetta and an opera buff from her Viennese times and she would sing a little but she did not perform, no. She was a very sweet, soft, very kind person. I will never forget my mother giving bread in a concentration camp to a child. That was not done.

Q: What did your father do for a living once he left the army?

A: He was playing in the café for a while and met some people and drank with those musicians ---- because when I went back to Poland in 1956 I called up some people who said to me, "Ah, that was a musician; they don't make them nowadays this way.' So he was still known.

Q: I recall when we were looking at photos of your father --- he was a teacher, wasn't he?

A: He was having memory loss spells when he was giving concerts --- Well that's what he was doing in Gdansk; he probably went to give concerts, and he was in the middle of something _____ and he would take bromides to be able to play, and finally the doctors told him "Sir, you

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better give it up." So he did. He went back to Lumber____ and whatever pedagogy classes and music appreciation and whatever else he had to do and took exams with everybody at home frightened out of their wits while he was studying and took the exams one or two or three evenings and passed and got his license. And he started teaching music in a German school, Folkschule and Gymnasium which is the high school, more than a high school. A high school plus. And that's how he finished his career. He was always a musician; once a musician, always a musician. So he still entertained for the Jewish community, and he gave of himself or organized a mandolin orchestra; he was an extremely gifted musician. He played one, two, three, four, maybe five instruments besides the violin. He orchestrated his own music. He wrote excellent scores for the silent movies. This was a gift. He was an excellent conductor also, a very --- I watch some and I see -- very sad -- when I think of my father; that's the kind he was, and very gifted, wrote his own music, orchestrated almost anything and he performed all through his life with the children. Kids were very fond of him; he was very handsome. Now I have friends who would say "Hah, well of course he looked at me once or twice!"

Q: These friends who were students…

A: Yes, they were having a crush on him, and he conducted choral groups in all languages. We spoke about Yiddish; in Bialystok this was a literary Yiddish not just a jargon, a beautiful language, and somehow he mastered it. He must have been able to read it -- the Yiddish alphabet -- and he taught the students Yiddish folk songs which I sing to this day with my guitar. And just a very gifted person; that's how he died. I was told by people who got out of ___ Majdanek in October, that they'd seen him in camp orchestra. So they must have gotten him a violin; his was taken right away.

Q: These friends who were students …

A: Yes, they were having a crush on him and he conducted

Q: In November of 1943?

A: '43. And I am told that the orchestra people were the last to go.

Q: So he went to his martyrdom because --- yet in the 1930's he was teaching music to German students.

A: How he got to teaching Germans -- I think he started with the Germans because he spoke German. My teachers -- all my music teachers were German. We palled around with many____; they were very lovely people. They were all Socialists by the way__. He dealt not with the Deutsche Reich. He dealt with the Volkdeutsche. They were much less anti-Semitic than were the Poles. And those were our friends and they, I am told, behaved very, very nobly, by my friends in ____ today. And these were his friends and I guess they lined up some kind of contact for him both for ___ and here and then next step was to become a teacher for the high school, for the elementary and the high school. I doubt if the Polish high school would have had a Jew. There wasn't a single Jewish teacher there, no. But they did.

Q: But he got along well with German community in Brezany?

A: Until '35, 6, 7, whenever, when the students started wearing their swastikas. What do you

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mean, you have a Jew?! Not everybody knew he was a Jew. H-A-S-S, S-F as it is written in German is not a Jewish name, and Adolph was not.

Q: ---name in Germany.

A: So they got to know it when it was important to know and when the director of the school, whose name was Hildebrand, I couldn't forget, wrote the most beautiful letter, "I am ashamed to have to dismiss you, but such are the times, and I wish you the best of luck, and you are a fine, fine musician, and so forth." He cherished that letter. Those were the Volkdeutsche. The few who were ashamed of what was happening, but times were changing, and it was in Poland. They weren't free to march as Nazis; it was all hidden.

Q: When was he dismissed?

A: 1938. That was after the Anschluss of Czechoslovakia.

Q: After the Sudeten …

A: The Sudeten, right. So at that point it was obvious that Poland was on it's way to becoming the next customer.

Q: And he was dismissed because he was Jewish. And who ran, who financed the school?

A: That school was financed from Germany. This is why they had to dismiss him. Perhaps if it was a Polish school they would not have -- no, they couldn't have dismissed him on that -- that, the principal made sure that he'd know that he wasn't being dismissed because he was an incompetent teacher but that he was ---

Q: The mandate came from Berlin?

A: Yes. ___. On racial grounds.

Q: How were your father and mother's relations with Poles in that ---?

A: Very good. She was a good neighbor, 'cause when we went to my apartment the neighbors would say, "Ach, that was a house where you could always borrow a glass of vinegar." And I remember going to funerals of people, and it was a very good relationship, and once again, this was a non-Jewish town, and until this anti-Jewish sensitization happened via students, the National Democratic Polish Party where they had picket lines in front of stores -- "Don't buy here, buy ___," there wasn't any anti-Semitism. It was completely unknown.

Q: Did you have any non-Jewish friends?

A: Yes. All of my -- I was the only Jewish student in my class, so since I was not allowed very often to meet with my Jewish friends, because they were freer and they could do things on their own, they weren't – it was important, it was described in my home as a ____ you see, "upbringing", the proper one, how to sit at the table, and what to say, and when to say, and how to say thank you, when to come home, and --- the Polish Jews, coming from Poland proper didn't quite, it was the nouveau riche sort of atmosphere as opposed to the grandfather to father

to daughter Austrian upbringing and so my parents were afraid that I would learn bad things. So, yes, I was allowed to play with the daughters and sons, daughters, no sons, daughters of the Polish officers and so forth who went to my school.

Q: No Jewish friends …

A: Yes, a Jewish friend and she's alive and in Rhode Island and I just discovered her. She's a few years older. She was the daughter of an engineer, also with a good upbringing.

Q: Did you notice any difference between the Germans and the Poles?

A: The two didn't mix. Not at any time. The Germans were very large -- they were business people and very largely gentry more or less, so they were living on the outskirts and had gardens and such. No.

Q: How about in relations with Jews, the way Germans dealt with Jews and the way Poles dealt with Jews?

A: Germans had no dealings with Jews other than my father because there was 150 families of Jews and the Germans kept to themselves. It was a tightly closed community. My father had dealings with them because he organized their community house activities. He was very well regarded until the onslaught of Hitler.

Q: Earlier you mentioned there was an increase of anti-Semitism. Did you notice any changes in the school that you were attending?

A: Yes. I personally didn't have any attack; I was accepted. I think partially because my father was an officer of the Polish army. He was the proper Jew, but my friend, the one who's now in Florida told me she was badly mistreated. She was a poor student. It still didn't compare with what we had to -- it was a kind of gentleman's agreement. That's what we had. It didn't compare with what was happening in towns where there were a lot of Jews and the National Democratic Party. Don't forget, these were the times where the Jewish students had to sit in a separate portion of the university where ritual slaughter was being forbidden and where Foreign Minister Beck was a German and ___ who was pro-Jewish or at least benevolent

Q: Not anti-Jewish?

A: Was ___ after '35 and ___ who was the field marshal that time was my family's personal friend. He comes from Brezany. That was the funny part but I don't think he would have stood up for Jews.

Q: Just the fact that he established the quotas at the university ..

A: The universities. It was either numerous klauses or numerous. In Warsaw you had klauses and in (?) you had klauses, but they had the Jews.

Q: During these years did you know who Hitler was?

A: Yes, yes. I knew he was ..

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Q: What was being said of him in the town?

A: We were busy. I guess the Jews of (?) were busy with Polish anti-Semitism because at that point they were having all this happening but we knew. I now read the letter that my American relatives had that my father wrote in 1938. "We are heading for a catastrophe. Help us. We're sinking." I cried bitterly. "Help us!" He tried Holland, he tried the poor relatives they had here in the Bronx and he knew. So my parents knew. I was as much aware as the average American junior high school student.

Q: Do you wish to elaborate on ..

A: Okay. I was about that much involved. I read the children's version of the Polish-Jewish newspaper "Nash Schaglone" which came from Warsaw. It was primarily jokes and puzzles and stuff.

Q: So these were probably the days when your father's beginning to try to get a visa to go to America, that you mentioned earlier.

A: Yes. I think he tried in '37 or '38. I would say '38.

Q: After being dismissed.

A: I think that summer was the crucial summer -- no, he must have been told that he would be released before. The spring, right. And that's -- he didn't think he would get a j ob and then towards the end another letter said that he was settling in Bialystok, but before that he tried through a rabbi who knew somebody in Amsterdam to contact the Jewish community. As a musician he did have a profession where he didn't really need the language. He could have settled somewhere but nothing came forth.

Q: The summer of '38 is when you ..

A: Yes.

Q: Were you still in touch with the rest of the staff at Brezany?

A: Yes. I went to Brezany in 1935, '36, '37 and '38 for my vacation. There was a railroad executive who my parents knew from Brezany and I would go with them. We would go by train. So that's how I knew Brezany. It was the first time that I encountered boys and the story goes that anything that wore pants was an absolute object of awe on my part after the years of starvation.

Q: You're talking about after ..

A: ---. And I'd go there and be able to have at least walk counter-clockwise with the boys walking one way and we'd walk the other way. It was known as the Curso. And then I would have big eyes -- anything –

Q: Promenade?

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A: Promenade, yes. With this cousin of mine, and the other.

Q: You were close to at least one cousin in Brezany?

A: Ah, no. This one and the one who's older than I. Very close. I would spend days with them; there was a gigantic, gigantic lake in Brezany with a beautiful beach and early in the mornings, supplied with a big lunch, I would go walk with my cousins and all their friends to swim, and I was an excellent swimmer. And that was Brezany. I'd gain about 20 pounds and be all sun tanned and come home and my mother would say, "Oh, God Almighty, you look like a Ukrainian peasant', and I would lose my very, very Mazurish, which is a very chopped Polish accent and speak with a very, very sort of like southern Polish accent, and was spoiled by my grandmother.

Q: Your grandmother and grandfather were … how did she spoil you?

A: I mean, she just allowed -- well, I was always chaperoned. The cousin who was my chaperon is now in Mexico. I was only allowed to go (?) in the evening, in the afternoon. She spoiled me by feeding me and there was no end to it, spoiled me by having time with me. Scanty time with my mother and my father. My mother was very much involved with my father; maybe it was my fault. I really wasn't a child who would go and converse very much, but there I was very giving and -- permissive people.

Q: Grandmother Ida.

A: Yes. My grandmother Ida; the other one was dead.

Q: Do you have a sense of what she was thinking during these years about the world and about the dangers that your father …

A: No, it was never, it wasn't customary to speak with children. I never heard anything spoken other than my own parents who were discussing it at the dinner table. Not there. They had no such thoughts. That was a different part of Poland. Here my father was actually threatened from two points of view. We could see the border on a clear day. There was no question about it if the war started (?) would be occupied within half an hour.

Q: How about relations between Jews and gentiles in Brezany?

A: Bad. Good with the Poles, because they themselves were a minority there. And they were of the higher class. The Ukrainians hated their guts, but nothing was ever done. You did not have to (?). Oh, incidents, but I mean. The city was, the town was largely Jewish with Ukrainians and Poles on the outskirts. And now, my uncle the lawyer was handling gentiles exclusively because I know because they paid with chickens and geese and eggs. That was the lawyer's fee very often.

Q: What was your cousin Sylvia doing…

A: Oh, Sylvia, fist of all, was not only older in years, she was older, older. I was a child. One of my cousins claimed that I was a real teenager because I was imitating her. But Sylvia was a

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lady or a sort of somebody to be admired by the whole town. She always walked with her mother. I was being trained. See, her mother was gathering her dowry. I never even heard of it. My parents were saving money for my medical school. It was a different kind of thing. It was a little town, and there she was.

Q: So Sylvia was planning on getting married. Did she have a fiancé?

A: She had, yes, well, I was in the ghetto already. Yes, she did. Yes, she did.

Q: In Brezany?

A: In Brezany, yes.

Q: She finished her schooling?

A: She did, no, she graduated before me.

Q: But she finished her schooling with high school?

A: Yes, with a high school diploma. In ’39, no ’41. No, it couldn’t, I, She graduated in ’39 and I graduated in ’41.

Q: She graduated before the war began?

A: Yes.

Q: Was she working or…

A: Yes, I was told that she was working after that during Soviet times. And she had a fiancé who was a student in (?), really a fiancé, ‘cause I had a boyfriend, but nobody called him a fiancé.

Q: No, no.

A: It was just a ghetto friendship which, boy-girl explorations, which were the end of the world kind of thing.

Q: So, Sylvia was planning on getting married and…

A: In a proper way, with the two families introduced and all that.

Q: So, it wasn’t a childhood sweetheart?

A: No, no. Somebody she met, yes.

Q: From Lvov (?)?

A: Lvov, yes.

Q: And she was working during the time of the Russian occupation.

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A: She was. Everybody was. You had to. You had to. Unless you had somebody who was incapacitated. My mother really had a very weak heart, angina and so forth, so … not that they forced you but there wasn't enough to eat if you didn't.

Q: Your grandparents were still in Brezany?

A: Yes.

Q: They were retired I would imagine by…

A: My grandmother never worked but my grandfather was a retired person all through the Polish -- in between the Polish republics. He was getting his Austrian pension…

Q: He was an Austrian civil servant?

A: Yes, yes. That's what he was.

(END OF SIDE A)

I now recollect that during the Soviet times my father was sending money and I would put the two and two together knowing what I know about the Soviet Union that they probably did not honor the pensions. Or did they? I don't know, but somehow I'm under the impression that things were tough at that point.

Q: Where were you and your family when the war broke out?

A: I was in Bialystok and during our graduation ball, came home, got to bed and suddenly the bomb was flying. My father was at the airport walking with the students when he saw the bombing of the airport, the Soviet airplane. And we had a Soviet officer living in our house, one room was rented, and he walked out. He says, "Oh what stupid guys, it must be maneuvers. They must have done something wrong.' It was one bomb. It wasn't maneuvers. Then we heard (?) announcing that they were invaded.

Q: This was the Soviet invasion?

A: That was the German invasion of the occupied territory of Poland. We were almost at the end of it, almost at the end of it…

Q: So in September 1939 German troops marched into…

A: September 1939 was their original…Oh, you're talking about…

Q: Yeah, that's what I was referring to, when war broke out. Yeah, you were in Bialystok when the war began in September 1939.

A: '39. The Polish-Soviet, the Polish-German war.

Q: That's right, yeah.

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A: Well, that lasted a very short time. The Polish army suddenly was no longer there. It was busy fighting the Soviet army, not the German army. It was from both sides.

Q: Bialystok received some visitations, did it not?

A: Bialystok received a visitation. Even before all of this there were some Germans infiltrating there but it had the Germans in for a week. I believe that the fighting took maybe a week, certainly not more. And in September, whenever the Yom Kippur, the Rosh Hashanah came, they were already there, for a week. Yeah. But this was the beginning of the whole thing, you know. The final solution was yet postponed. That was the beginning. I don't know how they worked it in Poland proper. They were killing people but weren't as organized; it wasn't yet a conveyer belt operation. So I can't think of any atrocities of that time. It was a week of intimidations, I would say. They would come over to a Jew with a beard and smack him and do things like that, nothing beyond this, but they were promising it to us.

Q: In what way?

A: They were. I overheard them talking, that within a week they were going to become much less gentlemanly. And we expected it. We already knew what they were capable of doing because they've done it to German Jews. Yes, I was aware of German Jews being, former Polish Jews, who lived in Germany, being thrown back to Poland, and what they were doing, the euthanasia programs and the concentration camp of Buchenwald existed. The German Socialists and Communists were being persecuted and German Jews. Kristallnacht. All this was already known. So we at that point knew what to expect, and I was on breadlines when they said that on Yom Kippur they were going to celebrate that holiday properly.

Q: The Germans would?

A: The Jews would. The Germans were (?) a girl standing, you will read this, and I came home, I said, and told my parents about it.

Q: The Germans were saying that the Jews---

A: That the Jews -- don't worry about the Jews. We will, we know what to do with them. But they already, within a day or two they were removing their belongings, their telephone lines and everything, leaving us. And the Soviets came in and were greeted with flowers and songs, by all but the Poles. They did not trust them.

Q: Well, their country had been invaded.

A: And vice-versa. The Russians, this is why, this is why, not that they so very much loved the Jews. They were the only ones who they could trust. They had nothing against the Soviets, the Jews. Here they came and liberated them from Germans. Anybody would be a hero, and certainly they were. And the capitalists were the only ones who knew, but didn't know to what extent they would be persecuted. Yes, everybody knew about the purges in the Soviet Union. I didn't, but the older people did.

Q: So the Jews of Bialystok were glad to see the Russians come in?

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A: No question about it.

Q: And how was the German evacuation…

A: The German evacuation was very curious. I didn't see that part, but I did see, while the Germans were moving, at the same time in one such street, I saw a contingent of Jews with a red flag. Now can you imagine Nazis and the red flag? You can only do that brazenly when you know that this will be done with impunity. And that's what they were counting on and of course the Germans weren't doing anything at that point.

Q: The Jews were waving red flags…

A: And throwing things at them.

Q: Throwing things at them?

A: Eggs and stuff.

Q: Throwing eggs at the Germans?

A: And they made a note and they came and knew about Bialystok already, knew where it came from, from the Jewish sector.

Q: So the period of the Russian occupation was a relatively safe period for your family?

A: To the non-capitalists. By capitalists I'm simply talking about very rich people, or people who were in some way intimidating workers, and there were such always. And, oh, no, politically involved people, Polish officers, policemen, not fanatical Zionists, all leaders, all leaders were in trouble.

Q: How did the Russians treat your father, who after all had been an officer in the Polish army?

A: They didn't know that.

Q: They didn't know?

A: No. My father hid his army booklet. I don't think he burned it because he felt maybe he'd have to use it some day, but he hid it and he told them he didn't have it. You had to give up our military and your Polish passport to get a Soviet passport. We became a Soviet Byelorussia, Byeloruss now. And he hid it and they disbelieved that. You don't lose a military booklet, whatever it was, or any document. You don't travel, you don't go shopping with it for sure, but he wouldn't give it, so they called me. The KVD requested my presence. Mother was scared to testify against my father but I knew better. At that point I certainly never would have been politicized against my father personally, but I wasn't even politicized against, for them, or against Zionism. This was not yet, they hadn't reached me and all I knew was that my father was in trouble. Was he an officer? I don't know. Was he in the army? I think so, but I don't know. Have you ever seen any booklet? I haven't seen any of his papers. That's how it went, hour after hour. The only time I knew what it was like was when we had the hearings of Anita

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Hill. You remember Specter?

Q: Yes.

A: That's how I was interrogated. And I wrote a letter to Specter and told him that. That was a shameful performance. This way you can get almost any "truth" that you wish to get, and that's how, but they didn't break me down.

Q: Did they interrogate your mother?

A: No. They knew that if they ever going to get something it would be through the kids. The bad guy and the good guy. You know that routine.

Q: Was your father able to continue working as a teacher?

A: He was not only able to, because he really had a very good story to tell, that he was in the Soviet Union during the Revolution, that he certainly wasn't siding with the Whites, and why should he have? He was just an Austrian soldier, that he, that they made him a commissar of something the month or two that he was there. But he was also just a musician, just a teacher, and that's what was called (?). You were between the working people and the peasants. So, so long as you weren't tied in with the capitalists, you were a safe social class and they (?) He was very well regarded and he did know Russia. He still remembered enough. So he worked very, very hard. He was involved with the (?) which was sort of the children of the schools were creative in all kinds of musical and dance ways and they had Olympiads to that effect and he was going to Minsk and to Moscow with his choral groups. He worked in high schools. He was working very hard, very tired, but he surely liked it.

Q: This was a good time for you as well as for him.

A: For me it was a grand time. I was allowed to stay up late. The school was a second session. I would be there in the evening. Boys were coming from Warsaw, you know, the refugees were coming and I met some very nice, interesting people, and that was the time that I actually met with true Communists for the first time. Those were people who were imprisoned in Poland. The Polish Communist Party was illegal. Some people sat in prison 'till the Soviets came. Their daughters and sons were different than we were. They really and truly believed in Marxism. And they were also nice people; all they said was very plausible, ethical, and I was very impressed with it. Little did I know what else was behind, that I didn't.

Q: So you're a high school student at a school that is now a Russian?

A: It became a Russian school. And at first it looked as if I was going to be in trouble because very childishly and naively when we had our electioneering, I told them, thinking that I'm doing something great, I said, "I was a left wing Zionist!" Little did I know that it was a dirty word. You don't ever, you can be all left wing you want, you're still a nationalist, you're still a Zionist, that's a nationalist. We don't believe that. Marxist is not even a second international -- you know. It's a …

Q: That's purging the party.

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A: It would have been just as bad if I told them that -- worse, if I told them I was a Trotskyite and just as bad if I told them I was a Buden member. This was Hashomer Hatzayir (?) in 1939, I was a gymnast in their camp. To that extent I was a Zionist, so I pronounced it proudly.

Q: How did Brezany fare under the Russian occupation? Were there any changes?

A: No. I would surmise that all of the towns that I know had about the same fare, and that is influx of Soviets, we called them (?), or the (?), eastern people would come. First we poked fun of them. They didn't know how to dress (?). All the institutions will become (?) but it became Ukraine.

Q: Yes, there is a difference.

A: Yes, but you don't run pogroms at a time that they are trying to pronounce themselves Internationalists. In our case I'm telling you this is the truth and everybody would corroborate that a person who was sitting in a dentist's office went ahead of a Jewish patient and that Jewish patient said, "That's an anti-Semite" he had to serve in prison a day or two at least.

Q: That's under the Russians?

A: Yes. They were very, very correct. They were trying to force my school to become a Yiddish-speaking school, saying "Aren't you ashamed to speak Polish with all the Polish anti-Semitism?" It was a whole different ball game. They were conducting, they had a university in Yiddish in (?) They had a Yiddish library in Bialystok. All the songs, everything was in Yiddish. They promoted, not Hebrew, not Zion, but Yiddish. That's what was happening, and the same thing was happening there except there it wasn't Yiddish, it was maybe Ukrainian.

Q: The Russians were calling the shots. The Ukrainians are not –

A: The (?) Ukrainians.

Q: Yeah. Keeping in mind the relations between the Ukrainians and Poles, the Ukrainians and Jews --

A: Ukrainians hated the Soviets to begin with.

Q: Uh hum.

A: I don't think the Russians trusted the Ukrainians as much as they trusted the Jews, for a simple reason. What could the Jews do but be obedient citizens?

Q: So the union of Polish Ukraine with the Ukrainian republic is more nominal than real.

A: Nominal. It became a Soviet Ukraine. So did ours.

Q: Now, where were you when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union and come to Bialystok?

A: I was (?) that I was home. That was the day, the year of my graduating from the Soviet tenth year of school, in lieu of the lycee of science which I was really part of, and that was June 21st, I

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think, 22nd perhaps, 22nd. And on the night of the 21st and the day of the 21st we had our graduation ball in school. I came home very late; that was also my first kiss with a boy, which I won't forget. And that early morning they bombed something in the city, I don't -- forget -- a house. One house, and we thought, and so did the Soviet officer in our house that this was some mishap with the maneuvers, but they didn't know that they were attacked.

Q: So it was a big surprise?

A: Oh, absolutely. I saw soldiers coming out in their underwear to get to their units.

Q: Nobody that you knew even suspected or talked about the possibility that --

A: Yes. There was a talk that they had seen Germans, that they had seen strange people walking around pointing to the pictures of Stalin, Molotov, (?), etc., etc. "That's not going to be here the day after --" and the date was given.

Q: You were very close to the German frontier.

A: They infiltrated, we were told, with the refugees yet. You see, the Jewish refugees were coming in 1940, winter of 1940. They opened the borders. They knew what was going to happen to Jews, and allowed them in. They took so many and no more; then they closed it and I am told that that was one danger, that they got Germans and then they did try.

Q: What happened during this second German occupation?

A: Well, that second German occupation was the real McCoy. They've already had two years with Poland, so they already started the annihilation of Jews. So obviously they were just going to take up to this point (?), which they did. They burned the Jewish sector; they burned the people. They took people who had, the Thursday people or the Friday people, they would round up by profession, by age, men, only, and purportedly took them to work. They mentioned that they went to work. Later when it was discovered that they were then killed (?) but they used them for a while.

Q: This was immediately after --

A: This was for about a month. No, it was more than a month, it was the summer and into the fall. Then in October, I believe, of that year, which was in 1941, they constructed the Bialystok ghetto. They walled in a section of town and my family had to move in. We were given one portion of a room, a specific amount of cubic meters per person. It formed a (?) like this, about the cubic meters, three cubic meters.

Q: Your family had lived outside of the ghetto before this time. Was it a mixed neighborhood?

A: Yes.

Q: And how was the ghetto run? Did your father continue to teach?

A: Oh, no. There were no schools. Schools were absolutely forbidden. The only schools -- no, Jews were not to be trained, not in the academics. They would only attend ORT schools; you

know, like the Jewish ORT. Those were artisan schools. (?) We ran our own schools. I ran a little school for little kids. High school graduates would do that because most of our teachers, professors we called them, were killed. Very --

Q: Your father?

A: My father, no. They never got to him. He was just in the ghetto and at first he worked in a -- uh -- he worked in some kind of a factory, I believe a furniture factory or something.

Q: So he's no longer a music --

A: Oh, no, no. In fact, all of his music was up on the roof, under the roof (?) but my father at first worked there and then this didn't shield him. That first action which happened was in February or January in '43, February, I think, yup.

Q: A year and a half later.

A: Yes. And he was in danger. We hid in the Yudenrap (?) the Jewish community because of my uncle who worked there

A: So you had an uncle who worked for the Jewish council?

A: He, yeah, he was something -- a minor official. And he coaxed my father to become something. They didn't have an opening there, but they did have an opening for a scribe in the Jewish police, the militia, and as they booked the scribes, it was a totally benevolent non-malignant type of an institution, because there was no reason for it. There was no crime.

Q: So your father was a scribe?

A: Yeah. He was sitting in the -- they called it the Revere. It was an all-officer thing, the militia. And as such, he was getting a daily soup (?) it was just a little bit easier. And we sold everything we had, little by little. You had to smuggle going through the ghetto walls all the time.

Q: Food was being rationed?

A: Well, we all lost weight, but uh -- halfway decent.

Q: Did you have to wear a yellow star?

A: Yes. We had to wear a yellow star right away. I didn't. I had an Aryan look. Uh-uhh. I went to villages and sold things and brought food home. Before the ghetto. Oh, yeah.

Q: Your mother and father did wear yellow stars?

A: Yeah. They stuck at home. But I didn't. I took a chance. Very -- I didn't mind taking a chance. Should've could've taken more of a chance but didn't. Could've gotten actual papers. When I was going to the Soviet Union trying, at first the army. What happened was when the Germans attacked us, the Soviets were folding every office and moving and the trucks were

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moving, and the cars were moving and families, Soviet families, they were removing themselves. The army was removing themselves. They came to my father and said, "Tovarishka (?)!" means come with us. Please come with us, you know what happens." And my father answered, my father told me you don't move anywhere during the war; I'm staying here. And when I heard that, I had two more friends and we were walking around I said "This ain't good; let's get out of here. They're going to come here any day and there we go." All Bialystok was moving on foot. With rucksacks they were moving, especially those who were in some way involved, whether they worked for the Soviets. Who would have asked them id they were truly Marxists? It was another thing -- it was put in a managerial position to call him a Communist. It was bad enough to be a Jew, but to be called a Communist Jew, that was in the end, so somebody like myself and they would call me everything else, I just didn't even want to take a chance, and besides I knew what was going to happen, so we marched in order to cross the front line. I was going by foot, didn't get too far, and we came back

Q: Overtaken by the Germans –

A: I -- we stayed -- we stopped when we knew that they were ahead of us and then we were overtaken. Yes.

Q: That's interesting that you would seek to flee, you who are in less than immediate danger than say, your parents, who were obviously, your father was a leader of the community and clearly Jewish.

A: No, they wouldn't have gone. My father was, because there plenty of such, who were on the road. I went with my friend's parents who were his age, but that was the nature of my father and my mother, and I was afraid of my mother.

Q: Your experience suggests that if they had tried to leave they wouldn't have gotten --

A: No, no. They would have come back; the trains were demolished. Even if my father were -- the trucks were demolished. I mean they were bombarding us. I would go -- planes would come. I would go to a little forest; I'd wake up -- there was no wood. Now that's what I was trying to say -- and so many dead people, and some of them Christians. I certainly could have gotten somebody else's papers, easily. Just the birth certificate would have sufficed, in my case, my age.

Q: Do you know what was going on in Brezany during these months?

A: We knew that the same thing was happening. The ghetto was formed. And it was true of all the little towns and some of the towns were completely demolished but Brezany was in existence. That we knew. Some of the people in the smaller towns, their Jewish populations were partially shot and they were removed to a larger town. They were consolidating the Jews into specific centers to await the final solution. The planners had that in view all along.

Q: Were you in touch -- were you and your family in touch with other members of your family in Brezany during --

A: Yes. Well, yes. I remember one letter clearly. I have a feeling there may have been one before that. And we had family in another part of southern Poland in the Carpathian Mountains. I had

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an aunt who was a dentist and a younger aunt -- my mother's family, and we were not only in contact with them but my sister was there. And it was my sister who was hidden by my aunt for whom Aryan papers, a birth certificate of a deceased gentile Christian child. These papers were bought and she was taken by a guide to another part of Poland, given to a Christian family who were told that she's the daughter of Polish officers who were executed by the Russians. And subsequent to that I discovered that she was christened by the guide, now that he didn't tell my aunt. It was just a matter of her giving him a certain amount of gold, dental gold, I suppose, and something, and that's how my sister became Christian, and she was on her way intercepted by a German officer who said "Yude!" to her, because she looks very Jewish. She became frightened. The guide told him, "OH, no, no, no, no, no -- I mean here are the papers, blah, blah ---" She ran out and locked herself up in a bathroom, refused to leave. It was a tough time. When she got out, when she got out, she tells me she wanted to have nothing to do with it -- with her Jewishness, and she sat in front of St. Mary's picture and said "Now, I don't know if you're really there, or if you were, but I promise you, if you save me, I'll stick to you.' And she did.

Q: She was saved?

A: She felt she was saved as a Christian.

Q: She survived the war in your aunt's town?

A: She survived -- no, she survived not in my aunt's town --where she was taken to that Christian family. I went back to Poland in 1945 -- '44 -- '45, and I came to her high school, and she walked out. She recognized me and she said, "Where's my mother?" That's how she greeted me. And after that, the next day she went to mass to expiate the sins of our parents who killed Christ. And that's when I said to myself, "I lived as a Jew, not very Jewish, I suffered as a Jew as the rest of them, I'm going to die as one", and I stayed for a while and I left for Germany. And that's another fancy story. I told you I became a British subject by birth to get out.

Q: Now, a few moments ago you said that you recalled one letter from your relatives in Brezany.

A: Yes. My boyfriend, my first love, the one in Bialystok -- no, no, that was a boy in high school, in (?). No, this was another, it was an older boy. He was already a year o two older than I and he wasn't from Bialystok; he was from Lieder, and he came to our house and he wanted to have a connection with the underground and somebody told him if there was anybody who knows it would be (?) and they brought him to my house. And indeed I had a connection, but at first I had to get to know him. So I did get to know him. We fell in love and both of us fell in love and he stayed in our house. My parents were -- because his parents were -- his mother and brother were shot in front of his eyes, and a Lithuanian guard knew him from the school and pulled him out and started -- he didn't look Jewish -- he says, "What are you doing here?" -- and got him out, so he was saved. Shot badly. So that news that this is a boy who lived in our house and was my boyfriend, that became the big story that wanted to travel somehow to Brezany and the letter came, 'Huh, you have a boyfriend; he must be very rich -- who has boyfriends nowadays? Must be lots of money." Little did they know that he was on my parents' keep with no place to go.

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A: My cousin, surely.

Q: Was it Sylvia?

A: It must have been my grandma. She was likely to be the acidulous type of (?). It wasn't usual -- it was -- the story went, "It's in the ghetto, you became engaged or you married, it was for money." Younger girls marry older guys who have some smuggling -- you know, money from here, there or somewhere else. But the truth was that very many young kids like myself acquired live-in boyfriends because we all felt, and I wrote music with him, that the world is in flames, and we are spinning in that ship on that ocean of foam and wrath and, let's be together, let's see what it is like.

Q: Live for today because there may not be a tomorrow.

A: That's right, that's right.

Q: What else were you doing during these months?

A: In the ghetto?

A: Yes. What --

A: Well, you have my story of the involvement with the underground. I met with the underground through English lessons. You know that.

Q: So you were taking English lessons because the underground --

A: I suspect, I suspect it was a boy that had something to do with something and he inasmuch as admitted -- I knew him from (?), he was from Bialystok and we decided let's continue those lessons. I was going to drop it already, but he said, "Let's continue those lessons. That will be a good way for us to talk." And he involved me and it was decided that because my father was a policeman this house wasn't likely to be searched, so under my mattress there was some old Russian magnum (?), a long thing, you know, -- a pistol, a very long pistol and a couple of grenades and literature also.

Q: Where did these come from?

A: From the left wing underground. I was associated with a left underground which meant it was all the way from Communists to Zionists -- left wing.

Q: So, the Jewish underground?

A: Oh, yes, exclusively Jewish. And -- so that was part of it. But I would occasionally meet one person, all I knew, his name was Beryl, and that he was telling me that I would go to the woods when the time comes. When the time came I did go, but not very far because it was decided they wouldn't waste the weapons on an inexperienced girl, having so many boys who could do it, or girls who could do it -- whatever it was -- I wasn't quite what I might do. I tried to convince them that I could pass for gentile and I can easily get money, I mean food, I can, I am experienced. I was led to believe we don't do it that way. We'll go in with our guns and force

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them to give food which was absolutely (?). And besides, they said, you are the spiritual kind of person, you write music -- I wrote some part of the songs -- you go to the ghetto and be in charge of our propaganda to get more and more people. So I, from the sort of a way station, went back. That was my first and only encounter, because the second time that there was a chance to go out I was in love with a boy and not ready to leave this -- that was that time -- and so we were caught.

Q: You were caught --

A: In the ghetto. And we discovered the night we did have somebody in our headquarters who was a Gestapo Communist.

Q: You mean within the -- within --

A: Gestapo. He was our contact with the Gestapo. He knew the ghetto would be liquidated within a day. Apparently, he did know -- somehow we knew that it was going to happen, that they've already brought Ukrainians and Lithuanians in and they're surrounded. Now that this happened we had a dichotomy of philosophy. The older people said, "Let's all perish fighting and write history." And we said, "The hell with history. Let's not perish; let's get out and hibernate in the woods and save the cream of the nation. Give us your arms." And so for a while, we didn't wasn't to stay in the ghetto and that's why the young were going, the older were thinking of (?) occasionally, Parisian commune style of showing this was a left-wing division. But the same was happening with the revisionists and the right wing also; they were talking about (?).

Q: When was this now?

A: This was '43 because we had the first action in February and after that we knew that we were doomed. We thought at first we were designed to survive; we were going to be the museum piece. No, we weren't. The final solution -- we were going to be -- and we already knew about Treblinka because people were coming back and telling. So we knew there was no hope. So that's the time, on that night before the final solution and that had to be September 4th or 5th, one of those because my birthday is September 6th and I was already on -- waiting for the train. We staged, we had it in plan, but now the orders were given. So I was given an order in the morning to go in such and such a place with a grenade and wait for the tank and the tank was going to come and I was told where it was going to come, only I didn't know how to use that grenade, and I'd seen enough cowboy movies and such type movies where I knew you had to pull something with your teeth, but which part, and what do you do with it? And so I went there and they were firing; we had guns -- it was an uprising. We were -- I don't know what they were shooting. They were shooting Germans or Ukrainians or something and I was supposed to stand there and wait for the tank. The tank never came, but an old German came -- a wee old Wehrmacht who was not involved with the Ukrainians, but he was truly helping people settle down on their march towards the train where they were going to be taken, because they were wearing kid gloves with us. All alone, nobody was shot at that point. That was one of the gimmicks. "Oh come on, you know you're not going to die. You know that you've worked for the Germans. You are working contingents. You're all going to work. Just behave. Make sure that your luggage is well labeled and --"

Q: So you were being resettled?

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A: So that German intercepted me and because I was still looking at that grenade he assumed that I picked it up from the men who were lined up somewhere behind these things. And he says, "(?) Leave it, don't touch it, and give it to me. Or put it down." And he picked it up and, "Where are your parents?" And took me over -- was totally bewildered. A little bit later my boyfriend came. He says, "That's a lost cause." He was shooting (?). It was a lost -- we didn't, weren't even organized as well as they were, Warsaw ghetto. But it lasted. We burned up that whole ghetto. I'm told after we were taken away there was still shooting. They had barricades. They died to the last person. There were more people like myself who went off or were directed off. Girls, not boys.

Q: How many would you estimate were involved?

A: In the underground?

Q: Yes, and in the uprising.

A: I have no -- that you would have to check records. Because all I could see that one little piece, that one little street, I never knew the leader, any second names. I knew one face, one man and suspected another, so if I was caught I could be tortured to death, I had nobody to tell on.

Q: Did your parents know what you were up to?

A: My mother discovered in the concentration camp and all she could say, "Oh, is that what you're to us?"

Q: This is after she was in the concentration camp?

A: "That's what you were doing to us. You could have had us all killed!"

Q: And what were your parents doing?

A: My mother was working in a sewing factory, making a uniforms or parts of it, something like this. My father was, I told you, a scribe in the militia, and I at that point was made into a gardener. We were raising our own vegetables and in the militia garden. Somehow he got me released from work, my father, but my main job in the last few months was teaching younger children. I opened little schools. The boss gave me a couple of dollars, vlatiks, whatever, and it gave me, I apparently was born a teacher, the pleasure of facing a child and saying "You've got to know Latin and Physics, absolutely and there it is. Without that you will never be accepted to the school." And the little child translated it into, "I'm going to live!" So I credit myself with able to do that more than anything else; this was the greatest amount of passive resistance. Of course, none of these children survived. Nobody very much younger than I survived because then they were classified as children. Eleven, ten, some tall, twelve, thirteen, okay.

Q: Were your parents rounded up at this time?

A: They went. We were given an order -- you had a choice. You either stayed in your apartment to be clubbed to death or to be killed there and my friend's parents chose this. Or you had to line up -- you were given the hour, the placement to bring your knapsack and label it, all that.

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Q: Were you with your parents or with your boyfriend?

A: No, I was with my boyfriend. I was told -- my parents left and we said we were going after you. They didn't know. We didn't. We went where we were supposed to go.

Q: So your paths did not cross?

A: No, no, no. Then the Germans brought me to them, my mother said, "Where have you been?" I didn't tell her. Then I saw another girl who also came. I was disheveled, without anything, you know.

Q: What were you able to take with you?

A: Must have been the best that we had. A skirt and a sweater, cold -- some shoes, possibly soap, I would say. Food, maybe some bread.

Q: Where were you taken?

A: We were taken by train to Treblinka, which was not even a retaining camp, just pure and simple extermination. You were driven in, exterminated. So we passed the field of ashes and human bones, and they were totally unabashed. We saw it. And it was at that point, and there were many train, that we started to sing all kind of songs, among them, "The International" and they were shooting onto the train because there were some left-wing and some Zionists -- and we were singing all kinds of songs and that was the song of our revolt, and they shot me between my thighs and I was scraped by the bullet.

Q: You were grazed by the bullet which was shot through -- you were in a cattle car --

A: Yes, yes, and so we decided to jump. We were nearing the point before we went to that Treblinka. We knew where we were going. We -- there were some people -- at that point I realized there were more people in the underground, even the other factions, you know, whoever they were, and they were, uh -- I cut my skirt -- there were no slacks worn in those days, and we were going to jump through the window and we saw people who were jump --

Q: Through the window in the cattle car?

A: Yes, you could. You would push -- you could.

Q: No window, but the opening?

A: The opening. The opening. That was big enough to be pushed through and we saw -- I mean -- to let you know that you could -- see, we've seen bodies. We've seen. I'll never forget the jazz musician whose song I carry in my heart and nobody to write it down, and he was shot in front of me. He jumped.

Q: As he was jumping, he was shot?

A: Yes, and then he didn't move, and I never heard of him. Never. So he was killed. And we still decided we will take a chance. But there was not -- we didn't have anything with us. We didn't

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have weapons, we didn't have anything. So we asked people, "Please give us your money."

Q: So you got out of the car successfully?

A: No, no. We were standing in the car and we're asking people who were sitting there praying to God, "Never mind your prayers. We are your hope. If we survive, that nation will live. We can't; we need your money."

Q: Oh, okay, cause I --

A: We knew. Somebody said, "Oh, this one, this is rich so-and-so." Their answer was, "We need that money to buy ourselves out.' And besides –

Q: This was still in the cattle car?

A: Yes. And then somebody said, "If you dare to come close to that window we're going to call the Ukrainian, because if you jump, they're going to shoot through the car." So, we said the hell with it. At that point (End of Tape 1). I didn't mind taking a chance.

Q: So we're outside Treblinka in the rail car?

A: That's how we crossed to Treblinka after the shooting I already had a sore and the reason which I so well remember the scene because with me were my high school friends whose names I know. I know how they perished. Yes. And I know how they perished. And because my mother fainted.

Q: Your parents were in the same car?

A: Yes. I joined them with that German and I went with them and I managed to pass the selection. Many parents were sent off and the train stopped in Treblinka and the last two wagons or three wagons were detached and these people went directly to the annihilator. But my parents passed their original inspection and were with us young people in the same wagon. My mother fainted and she couldn't even go down because it was so crowded. This was the first time that I opened my big mouth to my father. Normally had I done this he would have let me have it. I mean physically. I said, "God damn it, would you get off your you-know-what and help your wife. She's fainted." And wild-eyed, he looked at me as if he was from a different world, and that's when I recognized that that's the end of the big father of mine and the beginning of me, the leader of that family. I've done this all along, supported them, got food for them, gave them the money that I earned. I was the undertaking kind of a person but now I knew if there was any decision to be made, it would have to be me because he's just not there.

Q: This was a different world?

A: This was a different world, and I had to live up to it, so I went to my mother and I said, and I shook her, and I said, "No, you live. You will live. Now you stop it." She said, "Why did you do it? Why did you wake me up? I could have died.' I said, "You don't know yet." And for some reason at that point when I knew I couldn't -- we passed the point. Treblinka was much too far from wherever we could go, somebody told us where the point was. There were many more people. I never knew how many --

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Q: Who were to escape?

A: Who were to escape -- oh, my boyfriend knew. See, my boyfriend was taken with the first action, the one that was in February, and he jumped the train; that first train in February, and he stayed with farmers and he came back home to me. So he knew the point of -- where you could go to, uh, where there was Jewish underground. There was no point going anywhere especially not where there was a Polish underground. You had to go where we knew we had hiding places. The underground amounted to hiding places. We did a little sabotage, but it was basically survival. Well, at that point, we said, well, let come whatever may, and once it passed Treblinka, we started believing, yes, that we are going to work.

Q: You're in the cars that were not left there, so the train continued?

A: That's right. And at that point.

Q: And your family is still together?

A: Yes.

Q: Friends are still with you?

A: Yes. And we were taken to Lublin. Katzov Lublin. It's known as (?). And that is the first time that I realized that they annihilate people in the way they said, because I saw cans of Zyklon B gas right in front of me -- a pile. (?).

Q: Were you the only one to see this?

A: No, we all saw it. And we also had children removed from their parents and taken to the place in front of which was the Zyklon B gas, screaming mothers, mothers trying to go with children and some of us screaming, "No, you can have other children! For the nation." We didn't let them. Some went, some stayed. We were separated from them in that Zukplaza (?) which was in Lublin depot and my friends volunteered themselves. Call went for young ladies to work in such and such a factory and all the women started beautifying themselves with the kerchiefs. Something told me, "Don't do that." Well, those friends of mine went and never came back. That was one other ploy. See, they didn't have a full capacity for all these exterminations. We had such a big transport. So they minimized it. They used all kinds of things. They would take you part way in the train and gas -- CO -- carbon monoxide or whatever in the train or an exhaust or shot them.

Q: When you stopped at Treblinka were you separated from any friends?

A: No. We would start separated from the beginning -- separate. I knew some friends who went with their grandparents.

Q: No, I mean your group. You, you, your car, your wagon, relatives and a lot of friends that you mentioned?

A: Just some that I knew. Most were on other trains.

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Q: That means you all continued on after you stopped at Treblinka?

A: When we disembarked in Lublin, that is when I realized that we were so very few. That means that the rest either disappeared with the first action --it was (?) big ghetto or were already separated and had gone on to Treblinka and I know that my neighbors, young people, a boy and a girl, my age, went with their grandparents, in a wheelchair, so obviously I knew what happened. And my father and my uncle came out of -- you never knew what it was -- steam was coming out from both. Sometimes the steam meant that there was steam coming down as well -- hot water coming for a wash-up.

Q: You're talking about Lublin?

A: Yes. We were all given -- no, no, we were not all given baths. My par – our men were given a bath. That included my cousin, my uncle, my boyfriend and my father, and they got out. We saw them. And they were brought to Majdanek. Majdanek was behind, it was an adjunct, sort of a part, outlying area of the (?) of the concentration camp. We were walked to that concentration camp without the bath.

Q: The women?

A: The women. And we were placed in a square with lights shining on us. We were walked with the dogs and I was looking around saying, "How do I escape? I'm going to my death. How do I? Do I go to a German and tell him a story? "You know, I'm an adopted child. I'm not Jewish." Maybe I can befriend a dog. I don't know. How do I go? Where do I go?" Nowhere. I got to that square and I became frantic because I saw the steam houses. I was sure this was the gas chamber, and no escape. And again, around the friendly faces of the Ukrainians, I tried to talk Ukrainian to them. "Oh, you know, I'm really --" I was just out of my wits. Towards the morning I said to myself. "I think I'm going to live." And all of a sudden I came to my mother and I said, "You know what, I have a feeling we're going to live. Now let's stop that." Oh, my God, she was petrified. I said, "Uh, uh, something tells me I'm going to live." And I turned around to the others; I said, "Let's stop being stupid. If they wanted to exterminate us, why did they bring us here and not there?" I was partially right because they did have a selection right there. I was able to push my mother with me and we went to the bath instead of the gas chamber. We got out, the others never did. We were taken to Majdanek which was a nothing camp but occasionally we would go to work.

Q: You were with your mother?

A: Always with my mother, yes.

Q: Your mother was criticizing you as she did before?

A: Oh, no my mother was a child of mine. From this point on just as she had been a child of my father, a subdued female, so now I became the leader in a very forceful ---. Not only her but I was elected a st_____(?) the leader of that particular -- with all the older women and everything. Because they knew me from school and somehow I made this impression. My spirit wasn't broken. As a st_____, one morning we walked out to work in the fields, somewhere collecting cabbages or whatever it was and we came back late. Instead of being

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brought to where we were on top of the field, we were lined up at the bottom of the field precisely at the time that a factory camp like the one described in the book was looking for seamstresses, just for seamstresses. I knew if they say seamstresses from a concentration camp, you raise your hand, oh, yes you are a seamstress. So I raised my hand and the SS woman was picking out specifically fair, gentile-looking, young girls. That was me and in the back of me was my mother. Once she passed and she pointed to me to go to the line, not only did I go but grabbed my mother and said you go and stood in front of her and hid her. That's how my mother ended up in the girls' work camp.

Q: Your mother was how old at this time?

A: She was 49, that wasn't a girl. We ended in a camp, Blitzen, (?). While we waited in Lublin train station, they marched in 350 men. While they were standing waiting also to be joined with us. This was the contingent of a city of 150,000 Jews. One hundred and fifty of us and 350 men. That's all that eventually survived.

Q: Brezany?

A: That's when they were walking to the train, I asked him. Somebody that I knew, did you see my father? He said yes, he's in the orchestra. Oh I said, he must have more soup. I was rejoicing for him. Being something in camp to meant that he's a little better off. Little did I know what was going to happen. So we worked in that Blitzen, indeed I worked in a knitting factory.

Q: How close was Blitzen to _____?

A: To Auschwitz?

Q: To Lublin.

A: To Lublin. No, I think this was the Blitzen. Was near Radom. Not very far, I would say ---.

Q: Another rail trip?

A: A 150, 200 miles.

Q: So you went by train again?

A: Yes, by train. But it wasn't a big trip, no. This camp was different. It was not a typical concentration camp. It was a working camp where the families weren't together, but women who came before us had their clothing on, their things, their belongings. We didn't, because they took it away. We came from a concentration camp. But they did.

Q: What were you wearing?

A: I had some old rag with something on the back, whatever it was.

Q: What they gave you at Lublin?

A: Yes, after the bath. Yes, we looked real funny. They didn't shave our heads at that time. That

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Blitzen was survivable until about Christmas of that year.

Q: December, December ____?

A: Was okay. By okay I meant the soup was pretty dense, there weren't killings, there weren't executions. They were intimidating, there were a lot of civilian Germans worked the factories. Then there came the leadership of Lublin, of that camp, Majdanek and took over. Our camp became a concentration camp and things became worse.

Q: So the Majdanek management basically, took over the management Blitzen?

A: But I didn't know how and why and then we discovered it. Because some wood, burning wood, woodpiles came from Lublin to us. In them a piece of, a chunk of, a log was found was Hebrew inscription. That told us on November 2, for three days, machine-gunning of all Jews, they are no more. So we knew that I had no father, no boyfriend, no uncle and my mother ---. Well, she said if I survive I can find another guy, she says. Interesting, my mother. I couldn't believe it.

Q: That's her humor?

A: No, it was a method for surviving. Oh, we'll manage, you did not despair.

Q: So your father was killed in the final liquidation --?

A: Of that Majdanek, the Jewish, it was a gigantic amount. So that these guys who escaped going to the front line ---- and I also discovered from the book, from Schlindler's List, that all of these camps, the work camps, were really refugees for enterprising Germans. Made a lot of money but they were all converted to concentration camps. Now without the Wannsee Conference, they were planning for mass executions. So we stayed in Blitzen and started hearing big guns going off in the East. I went through dysentery and a severe one. I went through typhoid fever, typhus because we were knitting the soldiers' socks and they came with lice. It was a very big epidemic, lots of people died. I not only didn't, if you want to know how easily I survived. Because I was a sports-minded, _____(?) kind of girl. I had typhus and the German doctor disbelieved it because I was picked up from the factory with very high fever, walking. So he personally came to the hospital to examine me and that wasn't done by German doctors. Because he didn't believe -- it was after everybody had their typhus, I came down with it. He found that my spleen was yet to be enlarged but everybody had to go through 14 or 16 days. I was done with it in 12. After 14 or 16 days people were just lying and I stood and nothing happened. Furthermore, I ate and nobody ate. So I was never really very skinny because I utilized my fat and I was taught sparingly so I survived the typhus very well.

Q: How was the food at this camp?

A: We counted it out. I have a cousin who taught at Yale and in that camp, we came to a count of about 700 calories a day. That's a reducing diet for sure. Later it became worse. In a concentration camp, it was about 350 calories a day.

Q: Majdanek?

A: And Auschwitz. So that would have been very much more reducing. But I wasn't there long

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enough. Fate has just foreshortened all of my sufferings in this graceful way. We stayed there until May, I think, of '44, in Blitzen. Then they took us to Auschwitz with an order that these are German workers. Nobody touched us, no selection, no shaving heads, stamped numbers, all of us. The entire contingent of that camp got into the Auschwitz area. People were asking me what is it? Who did you know? To this day, I don't know.

Q: You were all Jewish?

A: Yes. From this book I'm surmising that these civilian Germans still hoped that they can get some of us out. Because that's what they did, that Schindler did. It was skilled workers he had there. Machinists, all kinds of people and he was hoping to get some of us out. I mean we could make socks in no time and all kinds of things were done for the army. I don't remember if they did some work for the navy. We got to Auschwitz intact and my mother stayed with me. They had a selection there later and my mother stayed with me. Somehow I managed until --. By the way, in Auschwitz I was helping a Russian to pass soup to the officers who were in very bad shape.

Q: Russian officers?

A: Yes. I helped a French marquis, manage to get a contact to keep some Red Russians and to give them to another camp. There were so many camps and I survived by being with them all day long. Instead of sitting and moping around and being hungry, there was no work, I would go from contact to contact. Some died and met some people from Paris and so forth so I did in that sense help. They helped me; I got a little more soup and I bring it to my mother who needed it more.

Q: Where were you housed?

A: In a barrack. I've visited there, I've been to Auschwitz several times.

Q: Were you in the main camp?

A: No, Birkenau, Birkenau.

Q: Birkenau?

A: Yes. I was in the former gypsy camp. It was an A camp, no a B camp. I had – my number was A. What was it Marvin, 4, 5? 45867, my mother's was 45868, I think.

Q: You weren't tattooed?

A: Yes, I was. I had it taken out because I used to hang on a subway strap and people were looking. I came here before anybody else. I just didn't want to have it on me. _____(?).

Q: Were you put in slave labor?

A: No, once I was. They didn't and if so, it was busy. Birkenau, you were waiting your turn basically but this was the end of the war. What started was exporting people to replenish

missing slave labor of other nationalities. People were getting out, some of them might have just gone to be exterminated, you never knew. There was a civilian coming it was more likely to be for work. He was handpicking his -- mind you they claimed they didn't know what they were doing. What were they doing picking people? They didn't know it was there.

Q: And you arrived in May of 1944?

A: I was there until November.

Q: Did you notice operations?

A: Absolutely. I was near the gas chamber because when we arrived that scene, the girls showed me. Once I did go on a work there. I wouldn't see the bodies. Furthermore, how could you miss it? These chimneys, the four chimneys were smoking so viciously, with such a stench, that only the burning of animal fat, animal protein could produce. You couldn't miss it, the stench was awful, and it was so hot, the flame was coming out. Because they were very heavy hydrocarbons, pardon my biochemistry, coming through. It was incomplete combustion, because of the amount of bodies and the paucity of oxygen. So it was black smoke that was catching on fire from the heat. What was it? And I was right next to the train, the rails.

Q: Did you see the people arriving?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you remember seeing?

A: I saw people dressed beautifully sometimes. Being aroused, marched, I saw all that you see in the movies, I really saw it. Then I could see trainload of 50 people coming into camp of a load of thousands.

Q: Now this was the busiest time in Auschwitz?

A: Yes.

Q: A time of the Hungarian deportation?

A: Right. Not only this, we saw. We didn't know what they were doing there. We hadn't worn this kind of clothing for a long time. But there they were coming in and it was happening at night. We had the so-called blockspech _____(?). The block was closed; you never went out to the bathroom at night. You just used the barrels, but on the outside of the block, they would bring them in and you couldn't when they had the blockspech _____. We told one another, ah, coals have arrived for the stoves. Yes, I knew about this and yes I knew about the men's camp. We saw them, they were less capable of surviving. We saw the so-called muselmenn looking worse and worse. Wasn't very bad, not as bad as it was in the spring. Were real horrors in there. We seen people being punished by having to sit down in ditches for a day with hands-up. Torture. We seen beatings; we seen people on the electrified wire fences. I just discovered -- I was giving that soup and I was told don't have your hands shake, you gonna feel the field. I didn't and that book claims that the inner fences were not electrified that we were told untruth. That to scare us they told us these were electrified wires but that they weren't. But the outer

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ones were.

Q: I'd like to ask you to backtrack just a little bit. Your journey to Treblinka and then to Majdanek?

A: And then to Blitzen.

Q: And then to Auschwitz. Certainly in the early part of this trip, you were in the same car as your parents --?

A: Yes.

Q: And other members of your family and your hometown?

A: No, just my parents.

Q: Yes. Do you recall what was being said, what was being thought during these days of traveling, the time that you were waiting to see what would happen at Treblinka?

A: No, I would say that people prayed, I would say that many people hugged or, if they were my kind, walked around. You've seen the animals at the zoo? Back and forth, back and forth. That was me at all times, where do I go, what do I do?

Q: You paced inside the cattle car?

A: No, I was thinking, I was active. I would go to a person and say what do you think we could do? Do you think there are loose parts. Where is the -- getting the information -- what could be done? Same in camp. I met a Hungarian and a Romanian girl and French girls. Some people I knew from Brezany would surface there. What do you know from the outside and what do you think is going to happen? Do you know if they're burning, what kind of people? Does that mean that we're staying? Just constantly doing something. In a sense of being involved with people who were doing something and possibly promoting my mother's survival. Because if something was going on and we could become part of it -- or at least get some better accommodations. That was happening all along. If you could become a helper of the kapo or something like this, that meant survival, at least temporarily. Nobody was thinking tomorrow but nothing like this happened.

Q: But in the cattle car, before you actually arrived, was the sense of, the mood of --?

A: Desperate.

Q: Desperate. What were other people doing, saying on the train? What were they expecting?

A: There was fighting for water. We were beastly thirsty; we were drinking all sorts of dirty water that some pitying Ukrainian would give to us. People had to defecate and urinate where they stood. Some people were fighting. There was no friendly atmosphere. If you know the biology of the crowded rat, you don't expect that from people in those conditions. Human behavior is not very different. But we were the young, we were part of something, some hopeful thing, we felt.

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Q: I remember there was a debate during the initial train trip about whether to try to jump out of the train?

A: Yes, we would have, several of us.

Q: Were there other similar type --?

A: Escapes?

Q: No, not so much escapes but arguments, debates regarding what to do? What to expect?

A: No, the only impression I have is a very negative one, is from the same religious people who believed that G-d will help them but did not see that so much more will be achieved if at least some of us survived to have children and so forth. There was a chance, because people did get to the partisans. My boyfriend, as I told you, jumped the train and survived that time. That's how I could have but you had to have money to pay that farmer not to inform --. For the immediate thing, without money, there wasn't very much of a chance. Even your gun wouldn't have really helped you on your own. It's only when you're already with a group.

Q: You and your mother remained together through the time you were in Auschwitz?

A: All the way to November when they had another selection. At that one, she was so debilitated and old looking that she no longer passed. I hid her again in back of me and she was pulled out. I went after her and my friends grabbed me and said don't you dare. She ended up in what used to be a chamber of the doomed. This painting I have, I made it. It's in my family. The place didn't have windows, it had skylights, painted. They waited there until the black _____(?) was completely enclosed. Most barracks were just free, that one had a little enclosure and grating with wires. At night, a black truck would come and take them to be gassed. So the next morning after a night of anguish and guilt feeling, why didn't I go with her? Somebody came and said, she isn't gassed, that's where she is. I went there and lo and behold, the door was open. Later I learned that there was an explosion in the gas chamber. There was an uprising, they went up with it. Then something, I think the Swiss commission, whatever it was, my mother was there because they separated the old from the younger. Still this kind of selection going on, in part because now they really were taking the young ones to work. They didn't know yet how they're going to kill the old, the older people. I came to her every day and even there they had a selection because the Theresienstadt women came.

Q: So your mother was saved basically by the revolt that took place in the crematorium? This was in, say November of 1944? So you're again together?

A: In a sense. I was in a different group. Then things became very bad with me. It may have been the beginning of typhoid fever or it may have simply been the food or it may have been an ulcer but I was vomiting. I was taking whatever it was in the morning and vomiting. Taking whatever it was later and vomiting. I knew that that meant that I would die and my mother would see me die. I then decided I'll take a chance. They were taking people, some to work and others to be killed and others to different camps. We were quite close to the front line with the Russians. The Russians came in January, I think; this was November. So I spoke with my mother and I said I am going to try to get you on the list of the capable work. You're not that

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old, don't act old. Act young, perk up and so forth and you will yet go to work. But I can't wait because I'm dying, I've got to get out. Something in the water, or something in the food but I can't hold it. Yes, she said, I, somehow through a doctor, reached, and there was another one, Weiss I think was his name, a German doctor who was making the selections. He put on the list of those who were capable of work. The rest of those people were left in that place were liberated by the Russians. But my poor mother was taken, with the people who were on the list, on the death march to Bergen-Belsen.

Q: This was in January?

A: She survived until the end of February. She died a natural death in Bergen-Belsen.

Q: If you call it that?

A: Well, everybody was starving. She was in bed.

Q: She was marched all the way to Bergen-Belsen?

A: The situation there was just absolutely awful. They were hardly giving them any food and she was already exhausted.

Q: She died in ---?

A: In bed. My friend was with her one evening, talking to her. She was telling her I'm trying very hard to survive, to live. I know that's the end and I just want to live, I have two daughters. She believed my sister was alive. She worried more about me than she worried about my sister because of the vomiting but she wanted to survive.

Q: She died in her bunk?

A: She came in the morning, the bed was empty. She can't remember if it was February or March. She approximates based on the day of liberation, sometime in April, something. So it was not when the British were there as I was told. And others had seen her too and seen her walking to the bathroom. In other words, she was not sick, sick, she was just debilitated, worn out.

Q: Where were you?

A: I was taken to a munitions factory, L____(?) near where Krup_____work and all that.

Q: This is January, '44?

A: I worked, made hand grenades and befriended some Italian prisoners 0f war who refused to fight on the Leningrad front. They were taken back to Germany and put to work. I befriended a German overseer, an older guy, who came to my work and said I want to hear the story. We spoke German and little by little I told him. So I found a sandwich on my workbench every night. It was a night shift, a night shift which was constantly interrupted by the British, came at night and the Americans came at daytime. That lasted until the end of March but in the meantime I became sick with typhoid fever.

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Q: So you went from typhus to typhoid?

A: I was taken to the typhus barracks (?) the quarantine. Once again I showed everybody a miracle because I walked. I wasn't even sick but my fecal examination was constantly showing the bacillus. Again it was hard to believe that they couldn't --. I got to look and act so much better that I started menstruating. Now I'm menstruating, you didn't have enough fat

Q: Were you treated by German doctors or by prisoners?

A: Prisoner, a Hungarian doctor. But I had a friend, he was a Polish SS man. He was a former PPS or socialist or a communist, Polish from _____(?) who knew my father.

Q: Someone who knew your father. Was he _____ or in the SS?

A: He was given an option. We either shoot you or you go to the SS. He was bringing me onion because that was something very valuable as you know.

Q: Did he recognize you?

A: No, he didn't know me. He was -- but he knew my father because he probably was a musician. Well, I saved his life later, I mediated between him and the gum chewing GI. But in 19___. I got out of the typhus-barracks as I said to you, menstruating and looking so well that the Germans were asking me, where have you been, at a resort? This is what I mean, survival of the fittest, I wanted to survive. I must have been endowed with some survival genes which unfortunately doesn't serve me right now.

Q: You look like a pretty tough lady to me.

A: Well, after this, the order still was _____Judenrein (?). No matter what you were or what you looked like. At the end of March, they marched us out of that L_____towards Buchenwald only they didn't get too far. They came to a little village Kaunitz, K-a-u-n-i-t-z. I might visit it if I have enough nerve. We sat in the ditches and right in front of us, there moved a jeep with a white star on it. We had better sense than say a boo. First of all, they probably wouldn't have heard us and second of all, we could have been shot. We looked like the army, later on the patrolling airplane told us they didn't know what the hell was going. They'd never seen anything like it. We each wore an army blanket on us. They didn't know if we were army women. They never saw Jews. We were the first liberated Jewish women yet. So we let the Americans pass and sat in the ditch. All of a sudden all of our SS disappeared on us. The overseer, his mistress, everybody except for the Polish SS. He said, Pan_____(?), he called me Irene, you remember don't you? I says yes, I remember, stay with us. We saw the whole village was hanging white flags out. At that point I became a front-runner because I knew English.

Q: Your boyfriend's help?

A: I still thought that they were British. I didn't know the Americans were at war. We walked to the village proper and there stood a tank with this gum- chewing individual, his funny helmet. I asked him, who are you? He says I'm an American. I said, where from? He gave me, I said are you sure you're not British? They all started laughing and they asked me who I was. I told

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them and he said, I don't believe it. He called in so and so and they came over to us and took out their mezuzah and asked me to identify.. I told them what it was, So they what they call organized, they didn't organize those tanks right away. They occupied the whole village and kicked the Germans out and said girls, this is yours. Everything in it and we will bring you more. And they did! Clothes and chocolate, started pushing on us, crying some of these guys. You are the first surviving girls yet. We can fraternize with you, you're not German. It was something first for the -- especially the Jewish GI's. We stayed in that village and that's when I met Captain Lubetsky who was in charge of the American garrison there who was looking for an interpreter. I was walking with a frying pan to the burgomeister to have it fixed. That's how brazen we were. Hey toots, said he, and proceeded to talk to me and discovered because I spoke Russian and he was in charge of the PW and DP camps. Come on, he said, you're going to be working with us. What kind of house would you like? I said with a piano. Okay it will be with a piano. They found a house with a piano and I was working with the army all through. Then the British came and took over. Again I worked with the British and recuperated and traveled to Bergen-Belsen to find my mother. But what was in my mind was what my uncle said. You find your sister. So sometimes in November, I declared myself to be a Soviet citizen because that's where I thought my sister was. They needed somebody to accompany the Soviets, the PW's who refused to go back home to the Ukraine which would have been where I wanted to go. I went with them.

Q: Go home voluntarily or involuntarily?

A: Voluntarily. It was a matter of propaganda.

(END OF SIDE A, TAPE 11)

Why would they be willing to get them? What do they need them for? These are all traders, they're not going to shoot them all? He said, why not? Little did I know! I didn't believe it, not based on the behavior they showed to us when we were there. It was none of this Stalin's paranoia at that point. That was later on so I went all through Warsaw. I saw what Warsaw looked like and while I was (PAUSE IN TAPE)

Q: You saw flyers in Warsaw?

A: This was announcing hangings of those who staged the pogrom in Lublin of Jews. I will find my sister but I'm not staying. I went to the Soviet Union. First of all, I was dragging with me Polish-Jewish girls who didn't speak a word of Russian to discover on the German-Polish border that it was no longer Soviet Union, but it was Poland. That all the Soviet Jews were coming back. So now I was going into the Soviet Union and I belonged here. I couldn't tell them that I was Polish so with my purest Russian I said _____(?). Who, me? _____ They're all Russian. I passed through.

Q: All Russian girls?

A: I have this ability to mimic an accent. I went through the Soviet Union to once again encounter anti-Semitism. Jews don't wash, Jews go to the front of the lines, they don't fight. I didn't tell them I was Jewish. I learned right away if I want to go through that without much hassle, what do I have to tell them I was Jewish. I told them _____(?) Polish. I could hear it and I immediately realized that this is not a country I want. I went through the Soviet Union to the place where my aunts were last. I found some Ukrainian patients of hers who told me that they

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were all transported to what was formerly Germany and now became Poland. It was a trading. Polish Ukrainian became Soviet Ukrainian and Polish Jews from there were -- and Poles, not just Polish Jews --.

Q: These were aunts from which town?

A: The town was B____(?) which was the only part of Poland where they had oil, mine. That's where she lived and that's where my sister went to visit before the war started. I supposed she had some kind of pneumonia and that was good for her. I still didn't know if my sister was alive but I heard that she was on Aryan papers. From there I went to Poland, to a Jewish committee in Prague. They looked up lists and yes, your aunt is in such-and-such place. I went there and they greeted me with where is your mother? We heard she was alive. I went to tell them the story and -- why did you leave her? Can you imagine having this kind of greeting. I needed a psychiatrist right there! They told me, yes, your sister is alive but she never told these people that she's Jewish. She's going out with a boy who doesn't know she's Jewish. She doesn't want to be Jewish. Maybe she will change if she sees you. So I went over there and she didn't change. My parents killed Christ and I told her, years ago it wouldn't have mattered to me but now I am Jewish so we better part company. I suggest, I told her, I don't want to stay. I have to be on my own and I want to be where I am going to be free. I am going back to the army and I am offering it to you. I will manage, you come with me. No, no, she had a boyfriend, her church and so forth. I left and the only way I could go is with the Germans who were being sent to Germany from the Polish part. But how can I go as a Pole, impossible. I took my papers and they became my citizenship papers and I didn't speak a word of Polish.

Q: You mean -- which papers now?

A: I had an army paper: To Whom It May Concern, Miss Irene Hass is our interpreter and we would appreciate it if all help were given to her. She is looking for her family in Poland.

Q: So this is an American document in English?

A: That was British.

Q: British, a British document in English ---.

A: Which they couldn't really believe. It had a very fancy stamp, it looked like a true citizenship papers, not very much different from my citizenship papers here. That's what I managed to tell them.

Q: So you were able to fool the Poles?

A: They let me though both the Poles and the Russians. Not only this but on one corner of the bridge, they were telling the other corner, hey you there. This is not a German girl, don't be fooling around. They were raping Germans. This is the way I got to Berlin, West Berlin, into a British citizen camp which also had the AKA and the AKA army, Those soldiers were telling me, you can tell them the truth now. You don't have to tell them you're a British subject by birth here. Oh, no I said. What do you mean, my father, my mother, now I don't remember who was British. I went back because of my mother or because of my father but my whole family's there. I was questioned by the British and I am sure that they didn't believe one word

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of what I was saying but I was much too young to know from such things. I maintained my story. I was afraid they would send me back. I didn't tell them and I couldn't get out of the situation because they had written to Great Britain, it would have come out. I was wise enough to say I better get out of here. Where do I go, I always wanted to go to the university, mind you. I went to Berlin Medical School and it was raining through the roof which was non-existent. They told me the only university which is totally intact is Heidelberg. That sounded great so I had a story. I came to them and said, my medical school told me that I can get a transfer to Heidelberg. I did go to Heidelberg and I said let me know when the papers come from Great Britain. I went to Heidelberg and that was the first time where I became me. Not only did I become me, I enrolled at the university as an under-student but the Philadelphia Inquirer ran pictures of me. Here they are. This was all in the Philadelphia Inquirer playing the piano. You see that I am corpulent. This is the UNRRA officer and I am sitting in the office. This is Ruth Krager that was in my girls' dorm. This is the JWV, Jewish center where the GI's met with the Jewish girls and we had our salami and coke, salami sandwich and coke. These papers appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer and my cousin is in Philadelphia and they discovered a survivor, one lonely survivor there, me. A telegram came, registered to the American council for a visa. At the time where I had already applied for savant (?) because I did speak French. I decided to go to America. Before that time, a little bit before that happened in Heidelberg, a very strange thing occurred. Because I am not an English speaking person and because my behavior was very much like that of gentiles and Wasps and because there was preconceived notion of children of immigrants who came here from the little shtetls without manners and without this and that, that I couldn't be Jewish. I was summoned before the and I didn't speak Yiddish -- in other words, I just didn't fit. The other Jewish boys and girls even at the medical school were more like the type that you would find among New York Jewish people for instance. It was just a total bias. I was summoned to prove that I was Jewish. I was questioned by a Canadian head of the Joint Distribution Committee to prove to them that I was Jewish before I get the toothpaste and the toothbrush or whatever else.

Q: Didn't you have your tattoo?

A: That didn't mean anything. I could have done it to myself. So I asked him. He had an aide who was a German Jew. I asked him do you speak any Hebrew? He said no and I proceeded to recite poetry by the noted poet Bialy (?) All he was interested in was the prayers and I knew the prayers and after two minutes, they realized. I didn't have enough guts and knowledge to just tell this guy what here the Polish organization was begging me to sign that I am Polish and give me anything just to sign. We all signed stateless, we were furious with the Poles. Why would he want me to prove I was Jewish? Surely I wasn't German, so what was I, Polish? Why couldn't you give me a toothpaste and toothbrush to a Polish girl? That was horrible, I will never forget this denigrating experience. But eventually my visa didn't come, I didn't wait and meanwhile Truman signed a 2,000 person collective visa for professional students and such. I was asked to sign that. I came here on that collective visa and my visa went to somebody else.

Q: When did you come here?

A: I came here with the very first Marine perch (?) in May of 1946. I was greeted by the press for whom this was the first experience. Nobody came before and that was that. I stayed with my relatives for a while. I knew English well enough to immediately enter Hunter College. Tried to get to medical school, didn't have the money. I knew Russian, taught myself to type and worked as a translator for Russians who went to school. One of these days, I was introduced by

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my former boyfriend to that guy and that's how the story goes. We're still friends with the boyfriend.

Q: Still married to the guy too?

A: Still married to the guy.

Q: What happened to your grandmother back in Brezany?

A: I am told – I was told by one of my aunts that was in the hiding -- I am assuming that she may have heard it from the Ukrainians. She was hidden by the Ukrainian family -- that my grandmother couldn't get off the bed. She was clubbed to death and that my aunt and my cousin, my girl cousin, were taken away. What happened after that, I don't know if they were shot, executed on the cemetery or wherever or taken to a camp to be executed. Somehow I have the feeling that somebody said my little cousin was trying to run away. He did look Aryan, he was blond and all this.

Q: Sylvia's brother?

A: Brother, that they shot.

Q: From the letters that you received, they were still alive in the spring of 1943?

A: Yes. I'm putting that together with what I know later and they probably perished in that massacre.

Q: The final deportation?

A: I didn't even know that that's what it was. I thought they were just doing it to people who were in bed killing them on the spot. So with the rest of the family. Countless mounds of -- those who didn't migrate to the United States at the end of the 19th century, some of my relatives were here already, and later. Those who were, were still _____(?). Some great aunts and uncles and cousins and second cousins that were there.

Q: Did you return to Brezany at the end of the war in '45?

A: No. That became the Soviet Union. No, I didn't go there.

Q: You just went looking for your sister and your aunt and that was it?

A: Yes, because by then I already knew that there was nothing left. There were no small towns that had survivors. No point going anywhere, no survivors anywhere. Coming back from camps later, they were often hiding.

Q: I have one small question I would like to ask you. I'm pretty sure you'll know the answer to this one. That is the day that you were liberated, I'm sure you will not forget. Do you remember the date?

A: April 1st.

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Q: April Fool's Day. So you were one of the first to be liberated?

A: We had to be, we were almost at the Dutch border, oh yes we were. They had just broken through. They were stalled, this is why we were marched toward Buchenwald because they were stalled. They were bombing but they were stalled for a while at Ochen(?) and we were not very far from Ochen.

Q: Normally, the forced marches and evacuations were in the opposite direction but instead you were moved closer towards the front?

A: No, we were moved closer -- in between the Russians and the Americans, Buchenwald.

Q: I'm saying Buchenwald --.

A: Closer to the Russians.

Q: Yeah, so you were moved in a westerly direction?

A: In an easterly direction -- we were between the two fighting armies. They had no way, we were almost at the American lines, we couldn't go west. There was south, they could have taken -- no, Bergen-Belsen was liberated maybe 15 days later so that entire front line was really broken through. The only way they could go is a little further east. That indeed took a longer time. Buchenwald was liberated much worse, much later and was in a worse shape.

Q: That's right.

A: They had an order because each working camp was known as the ouserkommando and we were ouserkommando of Buchenwald. That's why they are marching us there but never got there. That Polish soldier, I told the American. I said now look, he was kind, he was helpful. I said at least question him. I was under the assumption he was going to be shot. Because later on I did some things I shouldn't have done. Women captured a horrible, horrible overseer who's beating, in Germany, beating the women merciless. The captain Lubetsky designed a scheme. He says if I give him to the CID forget it. With the white gloves nothing's going to be done. I know what we'll going to do. I have a dumb so-and-so southerner. I will tell him that if this guy budges, he's to shoot. I'm going to stand there and I'm going to call for him to come to me. Don't say a word, he said to me. I said okay at first. This procedure was being enacted, something drove me out of it. I screamed, no, don't you dare to do it and spoiled the story. He said why did you? I says killed in battle but kill, his wife and children are standing, that's not a revenge. We are not vengeful people and that is what I would like to say to the blacks who executed a Jew. We didn't do it, very few cases where the people got out of camps and killed Germans. You would have heard about them. We are not vengeful people and I didn't have it in me at that point, at least, or now. I am not able to go to Germany and enjoy it, sightsee at this point because of the things that have been happening. I cringed when I meet Germans who are the proper age and start questioning me where from Poland, where am I from? I see the type but beyond this ---. "Never again" means don't let it go and get to that point. That was before. At this point I am most concerned with anti-Semitism whereas before I was concerned with all kinds of biases. This type of development is taking place; I think that this is the most atrocious and vicious because it singles one particular group of people to cure all ills anywhere you go.

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You name a country where there was no anti-Semitism and no killing of Jews. So it's much worse than blacks because they're not being singled out all over the world. But Jews are, even in Japan, that never had and doesn't have Jews. Now I'm saying charity begins at home. I put all of my efforts trying to stop this vicious happening. That's just the way it is.

Q: I thank you on behalf f the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and I certainly hope that your wish will come true.

A: I hope so.

Q: Thank you.

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