

RG-50.322.0013

Interview Dates: April 30, 1981, May 7, 1981

Emma Fiszlewicz (maiden name Giertier) born on January 16, 1923 in Kreisk, Minsk in Russia; the youngest of four sisters and one brother; her father was a pharmacist and her mother was a midwife; she describes living in different places around the area of Minsk as a child; her father transferring every few years to open a new pharmacy; living in Kreisk, Lofts Lavada; then moving to the towns of Uchwalt, Lemina, and eventually to Uchwally where she finished elementary school; speaking Yiddish at home; learning to speak Russian; never being allowed to attend Synagogue or celebrate Jewish holidays which she describes as a missing piece of her life; in 1937 attending architectural school with her older sister in Minsk at only 13 (since there was no high school in her town); between 1919-1938, Minsk was about 10 miles inside Russia from the Polish border; finishing architectural school in 1941 but unable to get her diploma; the war starting on June 22, 1941; never seeing her brother again after he joined the army; her sister having gone to Moscow to receive surgery on her crossed eyes as medical expenses were free; the Nazis coming (German National Socialist party); hearing the sound of bombs coming from airplanes and sleeping in the basement of the school; an announcement made by the school that they were to run away on foot, she describes running away from the school for 22 hours straight (4am to 2am) without food or rest; suffering from swollen feet and hunger; staying in the house of a friend and arriving at her parent's house a week later; the Russian Ukrainians in Nazi uniforms coming with trucks and taking Jewish people; hearing the words "Rous! Rous!" which means "Out! Out!" and being hit over the head; being taken to a large room used by the Russian government of this area of the country; people forced to carry those who were dying; how everyone was robbed and then released; her father being taken later that evening for work, but killed that same night (and not knowing what happened to him until years later); she describes having to wear the yellow star in the back or front, or on your arms; being treated like an animal; running away and heading towards Moscow to be with her sister; running from one little town to the next; coming upon a town of Jewish people (about 25 miles from her home) and warning them to run, but accused of being a Communist spreading propaganda; suffering from hunger, head lice and open head sores, eating and resting in homes along the way; walking for 3-4 months, her shoes being so torn that she was forced to place rags on her feet; her feet froze and the skin came off; getting past the Moscow border by hiding inside a barrel in a truck; traveling to Vehvaly in Central Asia by train; meeting her husband David who was a tailor from Stettin, Poland (today, the town of Szczecin); getting married at the end of 1942, the same year the Russians began to push the Nazis back; remaining in Russia until 1946; finding out that her mother and sister lived for six months after the war; returning to Poland and living there for 18 years; experiencing continued anti-Semitism; she states that during the war David's father and mother were in the Warsaw Ghetto and later killed; his five brothers and sisters were also killed; David had been in a Russian work camp in Siberia and lost a lot of weight from being under-fed (he was down to nearly 100 lbs); how he injured his spleen in an accident at work that caused him serious health issues throughout the rest of his life; she

describes how she suffered from very bad vision most of her life from walking without food in fresh snow; arriving in the U.S. on April 29, 1946 with the aid of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS); staying in Paris for a week and waiting for the boat that would take them across the Atlantic to New York; being taken to Dayton; being married for 37 years and having three children; the hardship of running a dry cleaning business; her husband passing away after multiple surgeries and a leg amputation; her only living sister moved to Israel.