

Interview with Emma Fiszlewicz.

SERIES: SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST –ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

Interviewer -- Cynthia Wolfe

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Q: My name is Cynthia Wolfe. I am a graduate student at Wright State University, in Dayton, Ohio. I am conducting interviews with Survivors of the Holocaust who live in this area. I am interviewing Mrs. Emma Fiszlewicz, as part of this project on April 30, 1981, at 10:00 a.m. in her home.

OK. Let's start with your place of birth and date.

A: I was born January 16, 1923, in Kreisk, Minsk (area of Minsk,) in Russia. My father was a pharmacist. My mother was a midwife. We lived in this Kreisk for a very short time. I was a little more than one year old, when my parents moved and I remember nothing from that place. My father, as a pharmacist, was transferred every few years to open a new pharmacy. So we moved to Kreisk, Lofts Lavada, also in the Minsk region, a small town near Minsk. We lived there for about five years. Then we moved to Uchwalt, then to Lemina, all in the Minsk area. We lived there for a few years and then, when I was about twelve years old, we moved to Uchwally, also near Minsk. I was in the 7th grade in this town of Uchwally. That is then where I finished my elementary school education. We didn't yet have high schools, in these small towns. So I had to go into the city of Minsk. There I started to study to be an architect, that is an architect technician, not an engineer. That was in 1937, when I started this school in Minsk. It was a four-year school. (Please note that between 1919 & 1938, Minsk was about ten miles inside Russia from the Polish border). On June 25, 1941 I had to get my diploma. Of course in order to get my diploma, I had to do a project. When the project was done, I was to answer questions by a kind of jury. If I did all of this right I would get my diploma. The jury was to meet on June 25. However on June 22, the war started. On that day, I was in my dormitory. That dormitory was in a wooden building, just like a barrack. All the students were told that on the night of June 23, we had to sleep in the basement of the school. The school was a big house. We heard the bombs. We were very scared. We didn't know what was going to happen. At 4:00 a.m., the teachers told us that we had to run away. We had to run away on foot. We didn't have any transportation. They told us "Go on this highway on the way to Mogilev." So we couldn't do anything else but run, without clothes, without food -- with nothing.

Q: You went to a lot of detail about what happened there, but you didn't talk about your family life, when you were growing up.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about how many brothers and sisters you had?

A: We were four sisters and one brother. I was the youngest one. My brother was in the service at the time when the war started, in the army. Once the war started, I never did see him again. He was moved right to the action, as you say, the front. My one sister was in Moscow at that time because she had trouble with her legs. She was there to study and to take medical care of her legs. Another sister was not in very good health, she was always home. The other sister was in another town working. She was also a pharmacist.

Q: Did you give me your maiden name?

A: My maiden name was Giertier.

Q: The area where you grew up, was it a rural area? Was it more like a city or were there more farms?

A: It was more of a farming area but, since my father was a pharmacist, we were living a more citified life. My mother was also helping my father because she was a midwife, but she would have to go to other towns to help the ladies with the babies, and her health was not that good. So she learned how to fill prescriptions.

Q: Did you attend Synagogue? Did your family?

A: No. We were not allowed. My father was an older man, at the time, he was 65 -- now it doesn't seem that he was an older man but, at that time, it seemed like it. At that time, a 65 year old man was considered an older man. He was still working. He was in good health. He was registered to be a religious school teacher, but he was not allowed to teach us, and, if he would have done it, He would have been prosecuted for this. In a small town everybody knows everybody. It was a Communistic regime. So I don't know much about religion, and I am very much ashamed of it. Now I could learn some and I do. I go to the Synagogue, but we didn't have the proper education from the beginning. I still don't know a lot about religion. I feel as if a big part of my life was missing, because of that.

Q: You were not able to celebrate any of the High Holy Days?

A: No, not much, just very plainly, in hiding. We did not want anybody to know, so we did very little, not too much celebration.

Q: What was the language, which was spoken in your home?

A: The language was Yiddish. But, since we were living in Russia I had to learn Russian also. We went to a very little school. In one room were all the children through the fourth grade, and one teacher taught us all. Everybody was taught by the same teacher at the same time. But we learned Yiddish pretty good; I speak Yiddish pretty good. I can speak it and write and read it. Then after I finished the fourth grade I went to Russian school. It wasn't so hard to change; I did pretty well in school. I was very good in languages and I was pretty good in math also.

Q: So there were Jewish and non-Jewish people going to the Russian school?

A: Yes, but very few Jewish students. It was a small town. There were about eight Jewish families. I can't remember exactly, maybe five, maybe seven, I couldn't even remember now who they were.

Q: Were you especially close with them?

A: I can't say that I knew them very well because I lived only for one year in that little town and then I had to go to Minsk. After that I was home only for short vacations. Only one of my friends was Jewish, the rest were Russians.

Q: What kind of activities did you participate in? They didn't really have to be involved with the synagogue, but maybe with the theater, or was your father involved with politics, or something like that?

A: No. My father was not involved in politics. We didn't have much of a theater, whatsoever. We really couldn't afford anything. All we had was a gramophone. How did we get a gramophone? It was actually by mistake. My father ordered medicine which came in big boxes and they made a mistake and sent us a box with the gramophone with the other boxes. (Note that in Europe, pharmacies carry nothing but pharmaceuticals). Naturally a gramophone is really a record player. We had maybe three records, but we had many copies of the same record. Maybe we had sixty discs, but they were all copies of these same three records. Still, the gramophone was a big attraction in our little town, like when television first came. I remember that they were Russian songs. We tried to send it back and get actually what my father had ordered, but we never could get that straightened out, for some reason. So it remained with us. We had other activities. We would go to the river and swim and go to the woods and pick blueberries.

Q: Would you describe your childhood as being a happy time?

A: No. I would not describe it as being a happy time. We didn't have anything. I wouldn't say that it was unhappy either. I am thinking of now, when the children have so much to play with. We certainly didn't have anything to play with. We didn't have dresses. There was a time when my father had a brother in the U.S.: he had run away from the Czar.

Q: When was this?

A: I never knew about that. He ran away from Russia before I was born. I remember once that we got some money from our uncle, but the money was not useful. All we could do was to take it to the "Toctime". That is where you had to take the foreign money. I remember that we got some stockings and dresses. Oh, we were so very happy. I remember the brown stockings. We probably also got some groceries, I believe. I was a child then, so I don't remember exactly. I remember that we also got some tennis shoes, that I remember, bought from this "Toctime" store. I remember also that, when I was ten years old, there was a government crisis. Then it cost a lot of money to buy flour to make bread. I remember that I could not fall asleep. My father had to borrow money! I remember that he had to borrow money to make bread. That was not very happy. You see I didn't have a very happy childhood. Later, I remember that I went to the big city, Minsk, to go to the school for architects, I was with my sister, who was about one year older, or one and a half years older, but we went to school together, in the big city. Then, in Minsk, we saw a line for butter and sugar. We had to wait in line to get butter, I believe it was ½ pound, since they wouldn't let us have more. We bought one thing and another, to make a package to send home. I was 15 and she was 16, and we were so happy to be able to do that.

Q: Your father decided not to leave Russia?

A: That's right.

Q: Do you know why?

A: First of all he was a pharmacist. Maybe the only pharmacist in a radius of maybe 20 km. So he believed that he had a duty to perform with the pharmacy. Secondly he didn't get any orders to leave -- it wasn't his pharmacy. He couldn't just lock it up without an order and go away. Also we didn't have any transportation! My mother was a very heavy woman, weighing maybe 220 lbs. with heart problems and other different illnesses. My sister also wasn't well. We had no way to go. Furthermore, we didn't believe that it would be that bad. My father remembered World War I. At that time, they didn't single people out. After all it was a war, of course, and everyone was involved in it, but I never remember my father saying that we were persecuted. So, all together we did not even think of leaving. We couldn't anyway. We just stayed, and when the Nazis came (i.e. the German National Socialist; i.e. Hitler's party) the first thing, it started. We couldn't believe it. Before they came we heard that we would have to run. There were airplanes throwing bombs. We were so scared! We were scared of the bombs because the houses were small ones made of wood. But when the Nazis came with trucks and they took the people, the Jewish people, then we heard the motor of an airplane running, we were so happy that it was not a truck. However, the truck did come and I started to run away. I heard the shout: "Rous! Rous!", (meaning "Out! Out!"). These were the Nazis, actually

Russians wearing Nazi uniforms, you know Russian Ukrainians. I tried to run away -- I ran to the cowshed. I really don't know how come I was so strong, since I was only 17, but I tore out part of a wooden door; however, they caught me from the other side. They hit me over the head, and took me like everybody into a big room, which had been used by the Russian government. The government of this area of the country.

Q: Was that before you went to school in Minsk?

A: No, I am talking about the war. Did you want to ask other questions before that?

A: So, that was after you came back from school?

A: Yes!

Q: OK! Let's talk about how you went to Moscow. I meant to Minsk to go to school.

A: We had never gone to a big city, my sister and I. My brother who was older, maybe four years older than my sister, "Since you have pretty good brains, you better go to that there architectural school, and besides that, they have only so few places remaining available". You know it was only one school which had only a certain number of open spots for students. So we went and took our tests. You know there were entrance examinations to cover Russian geography, amongst many other subjects. I don't know which they were now. My sister and I, we both went to the same school. We both passed the entrance examinations. I felt so relieved when I heard that I passed, that it was amazing. It was so many years ago, it was in 1937, but I still remember that I said: "Let's treat ourselves to ice cream." That was a true treat! We had gone to take the examination but we had never gone to a big city before, and Minsk was a big city for us. So our brother was our chaperone. He made certain that we would get to our relatives. I never knew them although I had their names. Their last name was Gordon. I know, I remember, that they lived on a street called Sacha, which means dry. Our brother was with us and we got into a streetcar and he said: "Now you get off!" So my sister and I got off, but he said: "Oh, it is too early!", and he went further. We were like two goats, we started to run after the streetcar, to catch our brother and we did not find him. We got lost, but we knew the name of the street and the name of our relatives, but we had no money, not a penny. We were still very young, she was 15 and I was 13. We kept on asking how we would get to Sacha Street. We couldn't find it and we didn't have any money to get on a streetcar. It started to get dark so I said that we better go and find our school. We finally found our school and they took us up to the dormitory. That wasn't so far. Everything was fresh and clean. We were so happy that we could lay down and rest. It was very close to the railroad station and we could hear the locomotives. In the morning we started our examinations, which took two days.

- Q: Did you have any trouble there because you were Jewish? Were there a lot of other people?
- A: They didn't tell us, but we felt different. They did not associate with us too much.
- Q: Do you remember any incidents which happened there?
- A: No, not really.
- Q: Do you remember anything about going to school there?
- A: No, not anything special. No, we tried to learn all we could. But, what I do remember is that we sometimes wanted to buy shoes and when we did we had to go at night and stand in line at the stores. We couldn't do it in the morning because the store was so far away from the school. It however, was safe and we had no trouble walking at night, you know two young girls, walking alone to the store. You know one would wait and one would go in and then we changed again. I remember that it was safe. Nothing happened to us.
- Q: How long were you there?
- A: Oh, four years! In 1941, I was supposed to get a degree, my diploma after being questioned about this project. That is when the war started. We had to run away, as I told you. I never got my diploma. Nobody got them.
- Q: How did you feel when you first heard about the war having started?
- A: Oh! I was never a politician. I never learned about politics. Even now, I don't know anything about it. It was to me as if it happened suddenly. I was shocked! I couldn't believe it. I was young, you know, 17 years old. Which other 17 year old knows about politics? Maybe there are some, who are interested in politics. It came to me as a terrible shock.
- Q: When did you first hear about it?
- A: In the papers, the next day. The war started on June 22nd, 1941, and on the 23rd, at night, after school, they told us: "Don't go home! Don't go to the dormitory! You stay, tonight, on the floor in the basement!" Some of them were laying down, some of them were sitting, some of them were shaking, it was terrible. All the time we heard bombs fall. I hope that you will never get to hear it, except sometimes you see it on TV.
- Q: So how or when did you decide to leave? In which direction to go?
- A: They told us. They told us to leave and about the way to Mogilev, that city about which I talked earlier. They said: "Go on the Mogilev road!" That is the highway

which was to take us to that city. We ran away on foot. There was no transportation whatsoever.

Q: That was for everybody?

A: Yes, for everybody from our school. Everybody had to run on their feet. We ran from 4:00 o'clock in the morning, to 2:00 o'clock the next morning. For 22 hours without food, without rest. We would walk the best we could. We never thought that we could do that. We would walk and run and walk and run. I didn't think we could do that. Finally we got to a little town and we could not walk anymore. Somebody from our group had a friend in that town, I don't exactly remember how it happened, we got to a house and they let us put ourselves on the floor and lay down. Then we couldn't get up anymore. Our feet were terribly swollen. We were tired. The people probably gave us some milk, but I don't remember now. I know that they gave us something to eat. Then the next day we had to go again. We couldn't stay there, first of all the bombs and then I decided to go to my parents. In about a week of walking and running being hungry, since I was without food, I got to my parents. They were so happy to see me alive.

Q: Was your sister with you?

A: No. My sister was in Moscow, at that time. Her eyes were crossed and she was so ashamed about it. Somebody had told her that in Moscow they performed surgery for it. She didn't actually ask permission. She just went to Moscow, to get the surgery. You see that is a good thing about Russia: people don't pay for medical expenses. That is the only good thing. She had her eyes corrected by surgery. She was so glad. She wrote to the school in Minsk to mail the papers to the school in Moscow. So she was there when the war started. I was glad because she could not travel like I did. No! She had a bad ankle and a problem on the other foot. I think you call it elephantiasis. (EF gives the name in Polish and then explains) I know this is better in Polish, because I lived there a long time in Poland and I talk Polish with my children here, they were born in Poland. My parents, as I told you were very happy to see me; as a matter of fact they were so happy that they cried. So therefore I was at their house. We were told that, in a short time, when the Nazis, the Germans would be there, the Jews would have to wear a yellow star, either in the back or the front, or on the arms. Sometimes they would catch us on the street and they would order us to work for them -- without pay, of course -- and at times they treated us like animals. They did just what they wanted. We couldn't do anything against them, we just had to wait. One day there came some Russians in Nazi uniforms. They took all of us out of the houses by ordering "Raus!" which means 'get out'. They put all of us in a room, as I told you earlier, they put everybody in there, even people who were dying. If somebody had to carry them that was done. They all had to be there, the little ones, the old ones, everyone. We thought that we were going to die in a minute. I was 17 and I thought: "I am going to die in a minute!" I was so terrified. I didn't want to die! I was healthy, I was young. You know, how would you feel about

the idea that were going to die? I felt so bad that I started to pull my hair out. My father cried because my sister in Moscow would be all by herself, sick in one leg small and with one leg big. That sister's health was never very good. She was always pale -- we all tended to favor her from all the children because she was not in good health. We figured that she would be all alone in the whole world, because we were going to be killed. My father didn't cry a lot for himself. But what happened is that they let us go an hour or so later, after they robbed everyone. They just took whatever they wanted. That evening, they came to the house and took my father, they said 'for work'. But our apartment was in the same building as the pharmacy. They got oil to oil their rifles from the pharmacy. We thought that it was true that they took him for work, but they killed him that same night.

Q: How did you find out?

A: After years! That evening, after my father had been taken, an older man came in, whom I didn't know. He talked to my mother. Nobody knew me and I didn't know them, because I was away at school. He told my mother to make me run away. He told my mother that he had once been designated to be killed, but that he didn't wait, that he ran away. He ran away so he was still alive. He told my mother: "Make her run into the woods, make her run anyplace." My mother said, "A young girl, how can she? Where would she go? How can I let her go?" However he said: "If she won't go she will be killed by the Nazis." So, my mother said: "If you are right, she needs to wear clothes like a country girl:. She meant for me to cover my hair because my hair would identify that I am Jewish. You know, I have curly hair and most of the Russians have straight, blond hair. So I ran away, in the morning. I didn't know where to run, but we were in a war, where there was no information, we didn't have any newspapers, no radio, we didn't know anything about what was going on. So people would say: "The Russians are coming". That was good for us. They said that the Russians were pushing the Nazis back, so we were very happy about it. Of course, we were not in love with the Russians, with the government, but, at least they did not kill us. So, since the fellow told me to run, I ran in the direction where the Russians would be, on the road to Smolensk. I thought that the Russians had freed Smolensk, due east of Minsk. I went by the small road because I didn't dare go by the main highway. I thought: "What if somebody catches me? What should I tell them?" So I decided that I would stay around where my parents were. I had no money, nothing. Actually money was nothing, you could not buy anything for money. So I was dressed in these clothes of a country girl, and that is all I had. I waited for somebody to ask me: "Who are you?" Or "Where do you want to go?" So I decided that I was going to say that I ran away from a prison, because there were many people in prisons. The prisons were full of people. They were in prison only if they stole such as if you worked with sugar or whatever one could put one's hands on. They would steal such things, because people would not accept money if you wanted to buy bread. All the people stole what they could from the place where they worked because everyone worked for the government

and the government didn't take money so other ways had to be found. You put some sugar in your pocket and, if they catch you, you were put in a prison. So I would say that I was put into the prison, and now, the Nazis let us go, because they didn't want to see that. I would tell them that, now I was going to my parents. I would try to ask the people for directions to the little town on the way to Nagidor (I am not certain of this name). That is the direction in which I would have to go if I was to get to the Russians. So I would go from one little town, to another little town. When I came to a town where there were Jewish people I had to rest. It was 40 km (about 25 miles) from my house. It was the third day. When I saw that little town with Jewish people in it I said: "Here, dear God, you are still alive. Run!" Of course we didn't know where to run. They could not run the way I did. I said that. They said: "You are a Communist! You are just spreading propaganda!" They didn't believe it that the Nazis would kill us. I said: "Why would I do that?" And I added: "Wait, they took my father away!" They still wouldn't listen to me. I thought: "Maybe they are right. I left my mother and my sister", my sister was never in good health. Then I thought: "Why shouldn't I be with them? What is the matter with me? I should be there. I am going back!" I was in a strange little town. I talked to a man, who was very sick, they called him the prosecutor. He was actually a shoemaker but he was so smart. Actually I did not know him myself but I judged him by the way people talked about him. I told him that I was sorry that I ran away, and I told him: "You know what, I am going back!" I said: "I ran away from my mother and my sister and people will say that I am stupid; they don't do anything to the Jews. They probably took my father for work." I said: "I am going back!" He said: 'No, you're not going back! Your mother was killed, your sister was killed.'" This was not true. I found out after the war stopped that my mother and my sister lived for six more months. However I suppose that he told me that in order not to let me go back. When he told me that, I cried very hard, of course. He told me that my sister had put bad luck on the Nazis and that I would have to go on walking. So I walked, and I walked and I walked and I walked and it started to get cold and snow started falling. I didn't have any warm clothes. I actually didn't even have cold clothes. Vermin got upon me. I got head lice. I couldn't wash myself. I didn't have anything to eat. However I couldn't stop. I had to go on. I would get into a house, they would let me sleep sometimes. Most of the time they let me sleep overnight, before I went further. Sometimes people would even give me something to eat. I went on and on and my head opened here and I got open sores and the lice would walk over my wound.

Q: Do you want to stop?

A: No, let us go on.

Q: Do you remember anything about the people you stayed with?

A: Yes. One lady said: "if I let you in, maybe someone will let my husband in, because he was in the war." She didn't know whether he was alive. Maybe he

was running as I was because some parts of the army had split up when they were defeated. Maybe he also running, like me, without a home, without food, without anything. I said: "Would you let him stop over there?" She let me rest. She didn't have a bathtub like that but it was a little town and she went out for some water and put it in a container. I washed myself. She even gave me something to put on my wound. Then I had to go further, and I went. I went every night someplace and I had to ask people to let me in because there was snow. There was a lot of snow. Still I had to walk. I walked like that for three months -- maybe four months. I am not certain. One night I heard shooting and in the morning the Russian army was around where I was. The Russians had pushed the Nazis back. I believe that by that time it was the beginning of 1942. So I was so happy. I said: "Probably they will give me some help. Maybe they will give me some transportation. Maybe they will give me some shoes because my shoes were all torn up." I had had to put some rags on my feet. My feet were frozen and the skin would come off. I told them that I was Jewish, that I didn't have anything, that I had run away from the Nazis. They would listen to me as you listen to a dog. That is what they did to me. They didn't care. They had their own problems of course. So the last night in that house where I was when the Russians came I told them that I was going to Moscow because I had a sister in Moscow. This was the only relative I had. I said: "I have to get there!" What else could I do? The lady I was staying with had a daughter living in Moscow. She didn't know whether her daughter is alive and her daughter didn't know if she is alive, since there was no mail in the country. So the lady asked me to, if I ever got to Moscow, to at least give a letter to her daughter. I said that I would try. She gave me some clothes, into which I changed. They were fresh clothes! That was so nice! On the way to Moscow I was walking in the deep snow. I still didn't have any transportation. I heard a car behind me and I obviously had to go to the side to let the car through. The guy who was driving stopped. He said: "And where are you going in that big heavy snow?" I told him that I was going to Moscow. He asked me: "Do you have a Moscow passport?" I said: "No, I have nothing with me." He said: "How come you are going there?" I told him that is where my only sister is, all the other members of my family have been shot. He said: "They won't let you in in Moscow. You have to have a Moscow passport." I said: "I have to?" So he said: "I have barrels in my truck. Get in a barrel and hide there well. If they catch you -- because they will probably check the truck -- tell them that I didn't see you, that you hid away by yourself." I said: "OK, I will do that." I was very pleased and thanked him. We got into Moscow without my being seen.

Q: They didn't stop the truck?

A: They probably did. I don't remember exactly -- although I am surprised that I don't remember it because it was an important moment in my life. However I truly haven't thought about it in 40 years. So I came to Moscow, and I began to look for my sister. I had her address. I still remember the street name and I know that it was in District 1V of Moscow. I cam there but there was no school around

there. My sister had been in an Institute of the University. The school had been evacuated -- we didn't know where they were evacuated to. So I did not know what to do with myself. Then I remembered about the letter and I said: "I am going to find these people." I found them and they were so happy to hear that her mother was alive. The people I came to lived in a half basement. They gave me a place to sleep, they gave me a bath, they gave me food and they gave me fresh clothes, not new but fresh clothes, to change to. Oh! I was so happy! then they suggested that I go to a "evacupunkt", that is a place to which they evacuate people. I got there and I told them my story. I remember that they gave me a piece of white bread to eat. I remember that I gobbled it all up like a dog. I was so hungry, you know. There also was a Chinese boy. He told me that he didn't like that bread and he gave me his bread. I ate both pieces and I was still hungry. So they sent me to a displace persons center (DP) away from Moscow. There they gave me a place where I could live with another girl in one room with another family. The girl was a Jewish- Polish girl, of about my age. We slept in one bed. That was OK. You know what else one could expect? Next I got a job. Once I was sitting at the table and one woman was waiting for me to take her name. What I was working in a place where they drew blood to send to the soldiers. That woman said: "You got a letter today!" I said: "Why, did you see it?" I got really excited when she said "Yes!" and wondered who I could get a letter from. The letter was from my sister. My sister was still in Moscow! They had evacuated her from one place to another. Later the Nazi armies started to get closer to the city to which I had been evacuated. I got so afraid that the same thing which happened before, would happen again. I said that I had to get out of there. This time I went by train. I said good-bye to my friend, to the girl I lived with. I told her: "I am not going to stay here any longer. I am so scared! I am going to Middle-Asia, actually I mean Central-Asia." I remember that I got some groceries, a jar of honey amongst other things. When I came to Central-Asia, in a little small town. There we worked with cotton. I didn't like it there because I had no friends. So I stayed there for a couple of months, and I said: "No, I don't like it here -- I will go to another place!" When I got to the train station, my jar with the honey fell out and broke. We usually say that this is for happiness, when something broke like this. Actually within a short time I met my husband, my future husband. He was from Poland. I was from Russia. He had his problems he went through when he ran away from the Nazis. In a short time we got married. It was not really a matter of love. I suggested to David that we could make it easier. We went to the justice of the peace and that is the way we got married. We called the few friends we had together and we made a little party. We really didn't have much with which we could make a party. Then we lived together for 37 years. I had three children. The first child was born in Russia, it was the first year after I got married, at the end of 1942. That was my oldest boy. Then the war stopped in 1945 and my husband said: "We will go to Poland." They said that the Polish people can come to Poland. We took my sister along. First she didn't want to go, but then she decided to go, then she decided that she wouldn't go, back and forth, but finally she said that she would go with us. There

was no family except me. So we took her along. She got married in Poland. I had two more children in Poland. Then we came to the U.S. in 1964.

Q: How long was it between the time you left Moscow and the time you went to Poland?

A: I was in Moscow for only two days. They didn't let me stay longer. And I left Russia in 1946. So I was in Poland for 18 years. Now Polish is my main language, because I had two children there, they went to school. I had to check their homework. So I learned Polish very well and another thing here, I speak Polish. I even write to my sister in Polish. My sister is in Israel. She has three boys. Her husband was a bad one, she did not have a good husband. I am ashamed to say that he left her, three years ago, for a young woman, thirty years old, and he is sixty. He has children older than his new wife.

Q: Your sister moved to Israel from Poland.

A: Yes, I was supposed to move to Israel, but my daughter got sick, at the time when we received the telegram to get into the boat (for Israel). So we decided that we would go to Australia, because there was no way to go to the U.S., but all my life I had dreamed about coming to the U.S. I still remembered that we once got money from the U.S., from our uncle. We could get stockings and such. So I felt that it was a very good country and I dreamed about America. Then there was a way to come to America, instead of Australia, so I decided that I better not go to Australia. So here I am.

Q: Do you remember much about your life during the four years you lived in Russia? During the war? When you were first married?

A: Yes. I remember. After we got married we had to live in a room with another couple, an older couple. People who had honeymoons had their own little place, even if it was one little room, but not us. I had to live in the same room with that couple, even the first night after getting married, in that one, same little room. That was disturbing.

Q: Was it difficult to find a place?

A: Yes, it was, very difficult. In the beginning it was impossible. Later, we found a place. It took awhile. After that first, older couple, we had to move to another place, where we lived with another couple. But in that second place, at least, they had another bedroom, although they had to pass through the same room. But finally we got our own room. This kind of was our own home. It was only a room. There was a kitchen and everything in it.

Q: Did you have problems because you were Jewish? Do you remember anything like that?

- A: We just were not liked because of it, but we managed. Really we did live a quiet life. We didn't bother anybody. I can't say that they bothered us a lot. They didn't like us. It caused problems. I don't really know why. However no one really did us harm. Who cared what they did say, with the war going on at that time.
- Q: Do you remember much about what was going on in the world then?
- A: No, we didn't have any newspaper or radios. As I said: I was not a politician, never was and I still am not, even now, I know nothing about politics, not much anyway.
- Q: What did your husband do?
- A: My husband was a tailor. But you could say, in general terms, that he was a businessman. In Russia he was in a concentration camp, that was not by the Nazi, but by the Russians. I don't exactly know if you would call it a concentration camp, it was at first a work camp. He was not allowed out from there. It was in Siberia. He had a weight problem; he was very thin because they didn't get food - - you know I mean that they didn't get proper feeding. He weighed 50 kg (about 110 lbs.) Actually I guess that it was even less than that -- once he weighed 100 lbs. At work he had to carry sacks of sugar that weighed 100 kg -- twice his weight. He had to work so very hard. He was a tiny man, thin and not in very good health. That work made him sick. He had an accident, at work. He hurt his spleen. From then on his spleen was enlarged through all his life. He had pain. In the beginning the pain was severe, but afterwards he seemed better and the pain was not so severe. In the beginning he was in the hospital. However his spleen was always enlarged. In 1975, they performed surgery. That destroyed him, I feel certain, since I believe that the surgery did him no good. After the surgery he was in terrible pain. He had to have another surgery and another surgery and then they amputated his leg. He lived without that leg for one-and-a-half years, then he passed away. He was in terrible pain at the end.
- Q: You said that he was from Poland.
- A: Yes. He went back there, after the war and he didn't find anyone alive. His parents had been very young. His mother was 43 and his father was about the same age. There were six children and nobody, but nobody was alive. His parents were in the Warsaw Ghetto. You probably did hear about the Warsaw Ghetto. We didn't know how his brothers and sisters were killed. One of his sisters was so beautiful that when she walked everybody would turn around. She was so beautiful, I never met her, however my husband told me and a cousin of his told me also. She was taken by the Nazis. She had a little baby and her husband said: "When my wife goes, I go also." He went with her and they were both killed. One of the sisters was also in the Ghetto. She was 14. There were

also three more brothers of my husbands, we never found out how and where they were killed.

Q: Where in Poland did your husband come from?

A: In Stettin, (today this is the town of Szczecin).

Q: Do you recall anything about your life in Poland?

A: Yes, I do.

Q: Was your husband a tailor again?

A: Yes, he was. There was some anti-Semitism when my daughter was three years old. The neighbor, next door had a grandchild who was also three years old, maybe the grandchild was two-and-a-half years old. The two children got into a fight. The old lady came out to my daughter and put her in a corner under the stairs and said: "You, Jew, you killed Jesus Christ, now you want to kill my granddaughter!" My three-year old got scared.

Q: Did you have any other problems like that?

A: Yes, we had. My husband was riding once, in the train, and they wanted to throw him out. They were some Polish men.

Q: Not from the running train?

A: Yes, from the running train. It was lucky that they didn't do it. Still they had threatened him. When he came he had been so scared. He never wanted to go again by train, to be treated like that. That is the reason why we left Poland. We truly had actually never had wanted to live in Poland. However there was no way to get out of there, so we lived in Poland for 18 years. We had three children and we did not get any babysitters and anyway I was not able to get a job there. My vision was always bad after the war. Before the war it had been fine or else I could not have finished my architectural school. There I had to make drawings without glasses. However the walking without food -- some of it in the fresh snow -- my vision became bad. I went to doctors. What they gave me was stronger and stronger glasses. That was all they could do. Now there are no more stronger glasses available. So, since you had to be able to read and write to get a job I couldn't get one.

Q: Did you, officially, meet Jewish people while you were in Poland? Did you have friends?

A: Yes! We had some friends.

Q: Did you attend Synagogue there?

A: Not very much. Sometimes, maybe twice a year for the High Holidays. I think that, maybe people don't like me very much. Maybe it is because I don't recognize them. When I walk in the street and somebody will come by and shake their heads, as people often do, to greet me, I don't notice it. People think that I don't want to notice them. Maybe that is the reason, or maybe I am just not a likeable person. I don't know. However this is how it has been all my life. People say that I don't look at people. I look, but I can't see them -- you know. It is hard for me because I have very bad vision, as you can tell by looking at my glasses. The first time you were here, I looked different, didn't I? Isn't that so? You don't remember! I was wearing contacts, however when I do I still have to wear glasses. The other glasses look better than these, but I can wear them only with contacts. However I don't like the contacts because they are not so good for my vision. You see, the doctor tells me that I have to remember to blink, when I wear my contacts, because if I don't blink and because my contacts are pretty big and they are made of plastic so my eyes don't get oxygen. Sometimes I see like through a milk glass. Therefore I try to avoid the contacts. However when I want to look a little better, you know, so I wore the contacts. I also wear them when I went to a singles group. Then I put on contacts. However they are not good for me. I cannot afford losing any of my remaining vision.

Q: What was the main language which you spoke at home?

A: Polish.

Q: Did your husband speak Yiddish?

A: Yes. We also spoke some Yiddish too, but not all that much. For some reason, we adopted the Polish language. Maybe because of the children. They were born there and then they started to speak Polish. Maybe it was a mistake that I didn't start with Yiddish, the way my parents did. I don't know, but most of the Jews we knew spoke Polish with their children. So did we.

Q: Did they attend school? I mean public school?

A: Yes.

Q: Were there any special events which occurred which made you finally decide to leave Poland?

A: We wanted to go right away. When we returned to Poland from Russia, the Poles threw rocks into our train, when we first arrived from Russia. Some of the Christian Poles put Jews in the windows of the train so that the people, who were going to be hit by the rock, would be Jews. Jews were the ones they intended to throw the rocks against. Obviously there were some Christians coming back from

Russia. The Christians put Jesus in their windows so that the rocks would not be thrown against them. So my husband wanted to leave Poland, escape from Poland to the free world. But that was illegal, still people did. In order to flee Poland they tried to keep the children under control. Sometimes in attempts to do that they would kill the children by smothering them with a pillow to keep them from crying out. That happened generally while they were trying to cross a border. Obviously this suffocation of children was not done intentionally, of course it didn't happen often, but still it happened.

Q: Did you know people who were leaving?

A: We could have left Poland right away. In order to leave you had to pay money. Maybe they would not have charged us much, because he (the fellow who smuggled people out of Poland) was a friend of my husband's. But I was afraid that something would happen to my child, he was one-and-a-half year old. I was afraid that he would be suffocated. We also didn't know where to go after we crossed the border.

Q: That is when you found out about your parents, as you mentioned previously?

A: I found out in Russia, after the war was over in 1945. I wrote a letter to my friends in the little town where I had lived before our last move. She wrote me that there were some who survived, Russians, not Jewish people. Her sister was a friend of mine. We went to school together. She also was cute, that Russian girl. She worked with the Russian underground. I found out that my principal, whom I had in the last grade in school, was also with the Nazis. That was hard to believe. I have no idea whether he was made to work with the Nazis or whether he volunteered. Of course, since I never went back to that little town I don't know whether it is true or not. I didn't have to go there and I didn't want to -- ever. Maybe that was a mistake. Maybe I should have gone there to find out for myself. However I dreamed many times of that. In my dreams I would come there and my house was in peace. Actually it wasn't our house, it belonged to the government. Maybe I should have gone there; but since nobody was left alive; why should I? With a small child, by then. It really wasn't that easy for me to go there from Asia to the region of Minsk.

Q: Do you remember the place where you were in Central Asia?

A: Vehvaly (that is what it sounds like but the transcriber can not locate it, however EF spelled it as shown).

Q: Do you remember anything about Poland which you would like to tell us about?

A: I can tell you how I got here. Do you want to hear it?

Q: Could it wait until the next time, when I will interview you again? If that is OK with you.

A: Yes.

Q: This is the second interview with Mrs. Emma Fiszlewitz at her home on May 7, 1981 at IDAM.

Before we begin today, would you like to add anything to what we talked about before in regards to your childhood?

A: I didn't go over what we spoke about before, in my mind. I am busy teaching English to Russian Jews (that was the time when families of Russian Jews who had succeeded in leaving Russia were being resettled in the Dayton, Ohio area). Teach them to write English and to teach them Hebrew.

Q: Let us start then with when you decided to come to the U.S.

A: We applied to go to Israel. My sister went to Israel. When the time came for us to go to Israel, when the telegram came, my daughter, who was three years old at the time, was very sick. She had strep throat. She was very sick, we couldn't go, we had to stay on in Poland. Life is very hard in Israel. The immigrants live in the beginning in barracks, made of iron -- they were very hot. We didn't think all that much of Israel. Maybe that wasn't all that nice if us, but we never had had a good day in our lives yet, and we wanted things to be easier. We couldn't go to the U.S., but there was a way to go to Australia and my husband had cousins there. We were pretty happy with that idea, so we decided to go to Australia. Before we could get the papers we found out that the people who were born in Russia were able to go to the U.S. I had uncles in the U.S. about whom I told you. These uncles had wanted to have my father come over and they would open a pharmacy for him in the U.S. They were going to provide us with money to buy food and clothing. So when I heard that there was a chance to come I was very happy. I already had a passport to go to Australia, so I went to Warsaw and asked the people, who were in charge of all this stuff, to change my passport. They gave me a little paper and said that it was OK. We returned to the city of Stettin, where we lived, and received a note from the police. It told us to come over that day, then we got so scared, we were scared that they were going to harm us because I changed from one place to another. So my husband asked me: "Now, what did you do? Now we are going to be in trouble!" So I went to the police. My husband came with me also, but he wanted to remain outside, to see what would happen. We were both scared. As a matter of fact we were so scared that we couldn't sleep all night. However nothing really happened and they just changed my visa. We had thought that they would take my papers away, but they just validated them to go to the USA.

Q: How did that become possible?

A: Because I was born in Russia and could travel under the Russian quota.

Q: What about your husband?

A: I could take my husband, he had that right; and my children also. So everything got prepared to go to the U.S. We received a note from the embassy a note to come over-- that was in Warsaw. We went there to sign the papers and obtain the visa. They asked for a copy of my Russian birth certificate. I had to tell them that I didn't have any copy. I had established through the courts in Poland, that I was born in Russia. He said: "No, no, that is not good, we need an original!" I asked: "How am I going to get such a document?" I had to go to school, so I had it, but where am I going to get such a thing now?" So he said: "I am sorry!" So I went back to the secretary and I said: "Oh, Gosh! What can I do? We were all prepared to go to the U.S. with the Self-Help organization (this was a Jewish organization which helped settle new immigrants to the U.S.). With all the furniture." We were ready to go. She said: "He is a nice man. Go again and ask him." So I went back in and I said in English: "I have been learning English for years. If you only could let me go." Because I took English lessons over the radio. There were such lessons twice a week over the radio. The whole family also learned English, but very little. When he heard me speaking English, he signed my papers right away. Oh, my children were so surprised and my husband was so happy. I don't remember which date it was that we got our visas. It was the beginning of 1964. We came here on April 29, 1964.

Q: Where did you arrive at?

A: In the port of New York. They took us right here to Dayton. My husband wanted to live in NYC, because in NYC he had friends and in NYC he may have been able to have his own business. Here he had to work for \$1:60 an hour (that was minimum wage, at the time) -- so he was very, very unhappy, since for this \$1:60 you couldn't make a living. My son made \$1:00 an hour and he gave us his check. He was so happy, he made once an extra \$5:00 for something he did. I was ironing clothes in the basement and he came in: 'Mamie, Mamie!' I didn't know what happened. He said: "I have \$5:00 an extra \$5:00". He was so happy. He gave me all the money he earned. So finally we bought the business because my husband wasn't very happy working for \$1:60 an hour. He started to feel bad with some kind of pain in his back. So we bought the business. Then he again became unhappy because we didn't have money to operate it.

Q: Could you explain what kind of business it was?

A: Dry cleaning business. I had to write the names and I could not understand what was said and how to write. We had to operate machines. We had to hire a man who does it, but he was drunk and sometimes he would not come and the machine would break. There was nobody we could call to repair it. My husband didn't

know anything about machines. He was a tailor. He is rather a businessman. If I would have let him he would have had businesses all over the State. However I was the administrator, and my English was terrible. We had only been in the country for maybe two-and-a-half years or three years in the U.S., altogether. I could do a few things, but to be such an administrator was very hard for me, but if we had more business, I would go crazy. I was almost crazy. I cried every night, because we left the house in the dark in the morning and came home in the dark. My daughter was only ten years old. She never had had a working mother. I didn't have to work in Poland. We made enough to get by. As you might say, it was not too bad. My husband had had a clothing store in Poland. My daughter said: "In Poland, my mother is home, and here my mother goes to work from dark to dark. I don't see her. I have to cook dinner, clean the house and take care of everything." So I was very unhappy. We couldn't only do the business which came in through the door, we had to take over the business from the guy we had bought the dry cleaning business from. We had to take care of the business from motels in order to get enough money to pay the bills. It was stuff which we had to pick up in the morning, not very early, only at 9:am, and by 5:pm we had to have everything back. Oh, that was quite a rush business. Sometimes the machine would break, sometimes, the girls wouldn't come -- sometimes something would be mixed up. We also did laundry. We also had machines to do the shirts. If something got lost or mixed up or torn it got expensive at \$18:00 or \$25:00 per shirt. One time we had to pay \$175;00 for a suit, because it got hooked on something in the machine and there was a tear. We didn't want to lose the business from the motels because without them we couldn't survive. I cried way into the night and I did probably have a breakdown, but I didn't go to the doctor. My son would say: "Mother, think that you are working for somebody, don't think that you are working for yourself. Don't worry! Somehow it will work out!" I couldn't -- I was just very unhappy. Then we needed a clothes presser rapidly. I don't remember what happened but our presser quit. Are you very interested in what I am telling you?

Q: Yes. I wanted to find out how you got established, and how difficult it was.

A: So we needed a presser and I put an ad in the paper. A man came up and said he was a presser. So I asked him for an interview and I interviewed him. He said that he had had a dry cleaning business of his own. A business in NY. I said: "If you had your own business. I don't think that you are going to work for me." So he said: "So I buy it from you!" So he was ready to buy it from the beginning, from the first day. I said OK. We had our machines from the start and we were in the business for 12 years. When he came up with the idea of buying our business we had been in the business for maybe seven years. I believe. We had already bought our shirt unit and we had one more payment left to do for the machines. So I said: "OK." I knew that my husband would like to sell the dry cleaning business and go into the clothing business instead. I told him that we paid \$10,000 for our business, without the shirt unit, and I added: "Give us the \$10;000". It had actually cost us the \$10,000 plus \$6,000 for the shirt unit. He

agreed to give us \$10,000 after he came to our house to look through the books and papers. I knew that my husband wanted to take the \$10,000 and invest it in a clothing business. There was a clothing store on Main Street which was going out of business due to bankruptcy so I said to this would be presser: "Listen, I know now how to conduct this business and I will sell it to you. If we buy another business and if we would not be able to make it -- in the new business -- would you give me a job here?" He said: "Are you crazy?" I said: "Am I crazy? Oh, Oh! I am not crazy! I am not going to sell the business to you." So we did not sell it. Then I told myself: "I don't have to cry. I own a business! Why should I cry? It is hard, sure, but if I work for someone else it will be hard too." This fellow opened my eyes. I told myself. "I am not unhappy, I don't have to cry. We are pulling through! Next month, once the machines are paid off, I will have \$150:00 more each month. No, I am not going to sell! My husband didn't say "No" and he didn't say "Yes". I truly don't know why because he was not very sick yet. Of course he was somewhat sick, all his life, because of his spleen injury in the Russian work camp, about which I told you. They also had him do some welding but gave him nothing to protect his vision. Once at night he got up and when he came back to his bed, in the dark, he saw all kinds of lights and he layed down on the edge of the bed and hurt himself. Still he had to go to work in the morning, in spite of his injury. He had to go 18 kilometers, about 11 miles, by train. Then he became very sick at the train station and they had to call the ambulance which took him to the hospital. I got a message that I was to go right away that very day, but that day the train didn't run any longer due to flooding, on the tracks. So I went by foot, it was not good for me. I had walked so much before. So I walked the 18 kilometers and I found that he was very sick. I walked back also. I couldn't sty there, at the hospital; there was no place to stay. After a week or so, they discharged him from the hospital and he came back. He still was not feeling good. He was very pale. I would put a chair out for him, in the sun, every day. I would try to give him good food. That was very expensive, but I managed to give him every day an egg or some meat, amongst other things. So he was OK, after awhile. He was OK, but all the years after that, his spleen was enlarged, that is what the doctors always told him. But the doctor didn't do anything about it. I don't know whether they can do anything about an enlarged spleen, or whether they can't. When you go to the doctor he gives you pills, he doesn't tell you much.

Q: Was your husband excited about coming to the U.S.?

A: Yes, yes. We all wanted to come.

Q: Did you receive some kind of aid?

A: Yes, from the Jewish Center. As a matter of fact, we were brought over by the HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society). They paid for the transportation and they took care of us. We stayed in Paris for a whole week, waiting for the boat with which we were to cross the Atlantic. They paid for the hotel. It was not a

very big hotel, but it was a good one. We also had friends who were living in Paris. We were with them for dinner once or twice. We couldn't afford to buy any better food than we got in the hotel, that means the hot rolls, which were available. However we couldn't get a cooked meal, so we went to our friends. Of course, we had Polish money but we were allowed to take only \$5:00 per person out. That money was exchanged from Polish to American money. Therefore we had no money while in Paris. We had some crystal with us, and we told our son to sell a crystal vase. He went to sell it, but he couldn't speak French. He showed them that he wanted to sell it and a fellow thought that he had stolen it someplace -- so the fellow called the police. My son was with a friend, another boy, who was going to come with us to the U.S. also. So we had to go to the police station and they just couldn't understand us. I talked Polish, since my English was not good enough. Some of the people in the police station spoke English but that was no help. Finally we found someone who could speak Yiddish, and we explained. So they let us go.

Q: What happened when you came to NYC? Was that a family from Dayton which had sponsored you?

A: It was not a family but a Jewish organization. HIAS is a Jewish organization, which helps Jews from all over the world.

Q: Did they take care of you in NYC?

A: Yes, when we were in Poland they started to take care of us, and they did continue over here too. But we wanted to be in NYC and they would not let us. I understand now, we probably could not have made a go over there. They gave us an apartment on Lexington Ave. They gave us the most important things like furniture. It was OK used furniture. They gave us dishes. They took care of us for two or three months. They also found a job for my husband. However, as I told you, that job did not pay much. It was not enough. However we made it. I looked for a job also and went to work, even though the only thing I could find was to be a dishwasher for \$1:10 an hour. I stayed there, working, for a few months. However that made me cry all the time. I found it easy to cry, and so did my husband. I better not say anything bad, about my husband since he's not alive any more. He was a good guy, but he had a temper. Later I worked for Kettering Hospital, first as a dishwasher and then later they transferred me to the kitchen as a salad girl. Then my husband bought the business -- so I ran the business for 12 years.

Q: How do you describe life here, as compared to Poland?

A: Oh this land here, I have to tell the truth, I cannot lie, one has to work very hard. This life we got involved in was too much for us. That dry cleaning business is very hard. Something always breaks. Neither my husband or I could drive and the clothes had to be picked up and delivered the clothes. A laundry woman

would come to pick up the shirts from us to do them, since at the time we didn't have a shirt machine, in the morning. In the evening one of my two sons, the older one, who at the time worked for the NCR, didn't have time to eat, he rushed through his food in a minute he had to rush back to get the shirts and deliver them to the store, so I could put them in order. Oh, believe me, it was very, very hard. We had to work from dark to dark. However this fellow, when he wanted to buy the business, he opened my eyes. So I stopped crying. However I had cried from the beginning, from the first day we had the business until the time came when he wanted to buy it. Then my husband got sick in 1975. He told me: "Just go on with the business." As a matter of fact he and my younger son picked up another motel, the new Stoufer Motel, to do their laundry. That indeed was a big motel with a lot of business. We did work for them for probably three years, and then my husband got very sick. The doctor said that, when he comes out of the hospital, he would have to go to a nursing home, or I would have to be home. So I got rid of the business and I took care of my husband. However he didn't live too long anyway, only two months. From then, until now, I didn't know how well I did that I did not put him in a nursing home. I found it out, because just here, about a month ago, in April, I went to a singles group, as I told you; there a lady told me how bad her father was treated in a nursing home. Until then I didn't know how good my decision was to take care of him at home. She said that they would give water which was too hot. Her father had been amputated also, like my husband. My husband was for one-and-a-half years without a leg. He had an artificial leg. Oh they say how good the artificial legs are. Maybe they are very good, maybe it wasn't the artificial leg but my husband was in pain for four years. At the time the doctor made me decide I didn't know anything about nursing homes -- I just wondered to myself: "Why should I keep this business?" So I just sold the business. I sold it for pennies. For whatever I could get, because he wanted me to be home with him. I am so glad that I did that, especially since I found out now, a month ago, that I did a very good thing.

Q: Before you sold the business, how do you describe any social life you had?

A: I didn't have any social life, none whatsoever! I didn't have time. We were in the store six days a week. I always did the bookkeeping. I used to pay by check. At times I had two girls working for me, at other times one girl, sometimes even three girls, it all depended. I had to give them the checks on Tuesdays. So every Tuesday morning I got up at four o'clock. Somehow I never found time on Sunday to write the checks. I had no social life, none whatsoever.

Q: Did you have a chance to attend synagogue at all?

A: Twice a year, on the High Holidays.

Q: You don't feel that the synagogue is the center of the Jewish Community?

A: I don't want to answer this question.

Q: Do you usually associate with Jews or non-Jews?

A: Only with Jews. I shouldn't say "only", there is a lady to whom I am teaching Hebrew, and she is not Jewish. We became very good friends. However I go to the Jewish Center now! I am not a "Senior Citizen" yet; but I don't have any other places to go. When I go to another place I feel terrible! I don't have any friends. When I go to the Center I meet many people. Usually they are older than I am, Senior Citizens. These are the friends of mine whom I have now, that is better than nothing. They are very nice people, but I cannot find a friend to whom I, maybe, could get married to. The men are all too old, and I would not want a very old man for a husband. The youngest one is 70 and he does not think to get married, and we have one 94. I belong to the singing group. I am not saying that I have a good voice however they do want me to be with them, and to sing with them. So I do.

Q: What else do you participate in?

A: As I said I give English lessons to Russian couples. I teach them a little Hebrew. I am learning Hebrew myself. (The Russian couples are Jews who were recently resettled in the Dayton area).

Q: At the Jewish Center?

A: Yes, I know Yiddish. However Yiddish and Hebrew are like day and night. So, she was in the class and she couldn't read when the teacher asked her (Note that Yiddish is a language about 1000 years old which is usually written in Hebrew characters. It is basically a Germanic language but with Polish, Hebrew, Aramaic and Roman expressions and words -- it was not written much until the XVIII Century and then was adopted to localities by utilizing local expressions.) I felt sorry for her. Everybody else could read. There were seven students in the Hebrew class. Everybody else was Jewish. This poor lady, she was about 38 or 39. She tried but she just couldn't. She was sitting behind me so, when the class ended I said: "Do you mind if I help you? I will be happy to." She lived far away from me so we worked together over the telephone, in the morning. She had a book and I had a book. If she didn't do it right I corrected her, and that she appreciated. I don't know why I don't have any non-Jewish friends, but I just don't have any. Oh, come to think of it, I had another very good friend, actually I have more but I just forgot about them. That one lady used to work with my husband. She is from Latvia or maybe it is Estonia, I am not certain. When my husband was very sick, and I had to have an alteration done and I couldn't do them because I am not a tailor, so would do the alterations for me. I nearly forgot about her, being non-Jewish. She and her husband were very nice people. She would do the alterations for me and charge me very, very little. She would say: "Emma I am only charging actual cost" So she would charge me only \$1:00 and I would charge the customer \$3:00. She knew that I was making money on this --

she actually wanted me to do that. Then there was another very good friend who taught me how to drive. I had to learn how to drive, but I was scared of cars because when I was a child there was an accident. I was just a little girl, eight years old, and I was playing with a little girl my own age. A car came -- that was a strange thing because we didn't have many cars at that time, we would see a car very seldom around 1930 -- and killed her instantly. I was lucky that I was in the house. I had just gone into the house to get something, maybe something to eat or drink. After that I was so scared of cars. When my son started to learn to drive my face was so crazy when I watched him that the lady who was teaching him said: "Emma! Will you stop it! You are scaring him!" I was truly scared of cars, but my husband had to learn and so did my children, but I never wanted to learn. I said: "No! I will never learn -- I will never want to learn". But when my husband got sick I said: "I have to learn!" Oh I was shaking. Now I am teaching a young girl how to drive; that young girl had a driver's license, but she does not have a car. That young girl came from Russia five months ago. She never had had access to a car in order to practice. Now I am ready to go on a vacation with my son and I want her to take care of Mrs. May, and to come to my house and water the flowers. So she needs a car, and needs to know how to drive, and that is why I am teaching her so that she can do all these things. I hope that it will all work out.

Q: Do you think much about your former life?

A: I had a good husband, still I had a hard life. I didn't have a good day in my life. Well maybe I had a few good days.

Q: Was that before or after you came to the U.S.?

A: I am sorry to have to say that I didn't have a good life in the U.S. I was happy to come here. Before I started the business, it wasn't so bad. My husband was not happy, so it made me less happy, when we had to work for someone. However once I had a business I got very involved, and I had no time left for myself. People said that, in the business, I would run like a chicken without a head. That is probably true because I had so many things on my mind. On Saturdays, I didn't have help. So on Saturdays, I had to do everything myself. If a customer was coming, I had to take care of him. I had to take the laundry and the dry cleaning in and check the items off. Then I had to clean them if people were in a hurry so that people could get their things back. I had to do everything: clean them and wash them and iron them and order material. I can't even tell you how busy I was on Saturdays. It was just plain terrible. I am truly glad that I don't have that business anymore. I am happy about it. It was just too bad that things didn't work out. You know, my husband was dreaming that, after we retired, we would go to Florida and have a good life. Maybe we would live there for a while because we never had had a good time yet. In the communist countries there is always something to worry about this thinking that in the future, perhaps, it would be OK, but it never happened. Maybe we had it worse than some people, I don't

know, but my life certainly was not a happy one. Still he was a good husband. He would give me whatever he made. He didn't go to other women like some of them do. That was OK. However we didn't have time to live. Life was very hard for us, indeed.

Q: Did you ever return to Russia?

A: Oh, God forbid. I never wanted to and I don't want to go to Poland either.

Q: What about your children? How do you view their lives?

A: I would say that they are pretty happy. They are all married. They all have good jobs. My older son works for Inland Manufacturing Company and he also is a teacher in Patterson Co-op High School. He teaches electronics. My younger son is in San Diego, California. He has a master's degree in business. He married an American born Jewish girl. They are very happy. They have a girl, who is two-and-a-half years old now and I am going to visit them at the end of this month. My older son is married also. He has a little boy. His wife is very, very nice. I love her. She is not Jewish. She is from Czechoslovakia. She is a very, very nice lady. I can talk to her about anything, even more than I can talk to my daughter. My daughter is very nice to me also. She works, she is the manager in the nutrition center. She finished OSU. She wanted to be a vet, but she couldn't get into the field. She married an American boy. He converted as my husband wanted. They are all OK. Each wants me to live with them, but as long as I can be on my own, which means that I am in good health, and I have my own house I am managing OK so far.

Q: Do you have any experiences in your life which you would like to pass on?

A: I have no idea what is meant by this question.

Q: Do you talk much to your children about what happened?

A: They know. I wrote a story about myself and I thought that I would publish it, but I never did. I wrote it in Yiddish. I wrote it in Russian, I wrote it in Polish; it is now laying down someplace in a drawer. I wrote to the "Jewish Forewartz", that is a daily Jewish paper. I mailed them some parts of another little story which I wrote. I went on writing and writing. They said that it is OK, it is interesting. I stopped writing when we got into the business, and then I was so involved and never had time. So it never got very far.

Q: Do you think that it is something important?

A: No, maybe not. I don't know. I wrote about my life, so this is it; everybody knows about it. Our Rabbi knows it. One lady had it on paper, she wanted to publish it in our newspaper (probably the Jewish Chronicles of Dayton), but for

some reason or other it has not been published. She told me that because I was in the paper not too long ago, in September of last year, when I received my citizenship -- she told me that, because of this mention of me in the paper, they cannot publish my article right now. I don't care whether they publish my article or not. She just wanted to, for her own good, because she promised me money. She runs the paper.

Q: You just got your citizenship?

A: I didn't take the time while I was running the business. Then I didn't have time for anything. I cleaned my house when I had time. It was terrible but I am not one to complain, but truly it was very hard. Now I am getting used to being alone, but for a while I just couldn't bear to be alone. I felt so unhappy to be alone.

Q: Can you think of anything you would like to add?

A: I hope that these circumstances never happen again. I lost my parents when I was 17. I still cry about it. I can't help it. Probably my eyesight would be much better if that had not happened. I didn't have any food -- I was walking and hiding and I still cry about it. I just can't talk like a human being. I just cry like a child.

A: I want to thank you for co-operating with us.