

Oral History: Gisella Frayman, November 14, 1996

Gisella Frayman, born March 12, 1926 in Cracow, Poland, describes: her mother, a religious Jew from Lublin; her father, an observant but secular Jew, officer in the Polish army, and then successful restaurateur; a brother, two years older; a relatively cosmopolitan environment in Cracow; a middle class, increasingly prosperous life in a series of apartments; not experiencing much anti-Semitism before the war; attending a Polish government school, then a private high school; in the early days of the war, the family and other Jews fleeing Cracow for the countryside village of Michalowice*; heading toward the Romanian border; a Polish attempt to stop the Russians from occupying territory in Poland and Romania, during which the Poles burned a small Jewish town; Frayman's family continuing east and encountering Ukrainian bandits; entering Rozhyshche, Ukraine, where Poles [sic, not Ukrainians] shot into a synagogue and killed two Jews; her family settling in Lvov, where she and her brother were able to attend school; being rousted by Soviet militia and sent by train and barge to a work camp in a Siberian forest; living in a barracks among 360 Poles and Jews; being relatively well treated; following the Nazi invasion of Russia, the workers being freed to leave; traveling by train, barge and ship to Uzbekistan and then Kazakhstan. where they worked on a kolkhoz; getting along well with the local population; her mother dying suddenly, age 43, possibly of a heart attack, on June 29, 1943; Frayman herself becoming very ill with a cattle-borne disease; hearing news of the war but not of the death camps until word came of Majdanek; remaining in Kazakhstan until 1946 with her brother, while her father rejoined the Polish army and returned to Lodz and then Cracow, and also remarried; returning to Cracow with her brother and very quickly resuming a good life; joining Hashomer Hatzair; getting married; concluding that the future for Jews in Poland was bleak and immigrating to Israel with her husband and two children in 1957; moving to Australia in 1960.

*Phonetic.