HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

VERA OTELSBERG

Transcript of Audiotaped Translation of Interview

Interviewer: Edith Millman
Date: November 6, 1989

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VO - Vera Otelsberg[1] [interviewee]
EM - Edith Millman[2] [interviewer]
Date: November 6, 1989

Tape one, side one:

EM: [trans]lation of an interview conducted in German by Mrs. Edith Millman, M-I-L-L-M-A-N interviewing Mrs. Vera Otelsberg, O-T-E-L-S-B-E-R-G. This is Edith Millman interviewing Mrs. Vera Otelsberg. She lives in Montevideo, Uruguay. Today is November 6, 1989.

EM: Vera, could you tell me what was your, no – can you answer in German dear – could you tell me what was your maiden name, your maiden name?

VO: My maiden, my name was Vera Neuman, N-E-U-M-A-N. My maiden name is Vera Neuman. I was born in Bielsko-Biala, B-I-E-L-S-K-O [-] B-I-A-L-A, in Schlesien, S-C-L-E-S-I-E-N on 25th of September 1924.

EM: Could you tell me a little bit about your family life before the war?

VO: My mother was dead when I was four years old. My father was an industrialist.

EM: Industrialist?

VO: Industrialist. We lived in a house with a factory and I went to school before the war. First I was in a Jewish school and then in a Catholic school. I had many friends in the Catholic school. [German] Shall I speak German from now on?

EM: Yeah, Yes, please speak German.

VO: And I am still in touch with Polish friends.

EM: Can you tell me a little more about your life before the war?

VO: I have a sister who is 15 years older than I am and she took my mother's place. Should I talk about this?

EM: However you want. [Not completely audible].

VO: My father was a widower and he had a girlfriend before the war for which he unfortunately perished.

EM: You can tell me about that later.

VO: Yes.

EM: Was your father religious?

VO: No, my father was not religious. He was a Jew. He felt he was a Jew but I believe he only went to the Temple once a year.

EM: I want to ask you the questions in English but you can answer in German. Please tell me a little more about your life as a child. Did you find any antisemitism?

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[1]née Neuman.
[2]This interview was conducted in German and later orally translated by the interviewer, Edith Millman. The transcription is based on the English tapes only.

VO: I personally never experienced any antisemitism neither in school when I, as a Jewess, went to a church school, a parochial school, nor otherwise. It was more, I must say first that we moved in a circle where there were a lot of Jews but also Germans, Schleiser [Silesians, S-I-L-E-S-I-A-N-S) and I cannot personally say that I ever felt any. On the contrary, I had acquaintances who were Poles [unclear]. They also never showed [unclear] that they were anti-Semites.

EM: Your mother died when you were a young child. Who brought you up?

VO: My mother died when I was four years old and the nanny, Marie whom we had in the house brought me up. This was a person who was in our house for over 40 years, who took my mother's place, who was very, very warm and who always looked out for me and even during the war helped me.

EM: Was your family well off financially?

VO: Yes, yes, financially my family was very well off. Money was of no consequence.

EM: Can you say that your child was, childhood was a happy childhood?

VO: [unclear] that I had no mother, that I always had the feeling that something was missing, was lacking, and I for example, had memories that I went to the Jewish cemetery with my father. The cemetery unfortunately was not there after the war. That I always had a funny feeling I had a some; I had to remember my home. For example, in my childhood room there was a tree outside out the window, a birch tree and I often kept my eyes closed and imagined what it would be like sometime if I could no longer see it. I played with the daughter of our janitor and the game was always the same. We always played as though we had suddenly returned from some place far away and the game was – we knocked on the door and the people [unclear] and we would say, "Oh what a strange house! We don't know these people at all." And it was somehow always the same thing. Always as if I had returned from far away. After the war, I often reminded myself about this moment and it was really just as I had imagined it as a child. I did return home and it was like that.

EM: What happened in September of 1939? What do you remember?

VO: I spent the last vacation in Szczyrk, S-Z-C-Z-Y-R-K and one day my father called me I should come home right away. The factory had been sabotaged. Somebody threw in a bomb or something and the wall was shattered. My father was dreadfully excited and the whole family was assembled and it was decided what one had to do. One part of the family wanted to go to Zaleszczyki, Z-A-L-E-S-Z-C-Z-Y-K-I.

EM: Zaleszczyki?

VO: Yes, Zaleszczyki and from there to go on. Another part of the family wanted to go to Warsaw. Half a year before the outbreak of the war my father had rented an apartment in Warsaw on Pod Chorazy Street, (P-O-D, C-H-O-R-A-Z-Y)

EM: Pod Chorazy?

VO: Yes, Pod Chorazy, number 103.

EM: That was a street in Warsaw?

VO: Yes in Warsaw and that was later a German section. We then one day after the family had reached the decision that one part should travel to Warsaw and one part should go to Zaleszczyki, we went with my brother-in-law, my sister, my niece, their nanny, my nanny, we went away to Krakow. In Krakow we were with my aunt and there our cars were requisitioned by the Polish military. And we travelled by train to Warsaw. When we arrived in Warsaw, it turned out that of the furniture that we had sent ahead, the Persian rugs and the valuable pictures and the living room had arrived but no beds. We had to buy an iron bed. And one after the other we took turns lying down in the bed next to each other and slept in it. In the meantime, my father was still in Bielitz, B-I-E-L-I-T-Z. This is the German name for Bielsko, B-I-E-L-S-K-O and as my uncle who was a Polish major returned from the front told him he should hurry and quickly leave Bielitz. My brother-in-law's parents also went with him, with my father from Bielitz to Krakow and from Krakow to Lublin. In Lublin, the old people could go no further and decided to stay in Lublin and my father continued with his girlfriend on from Lublin to Lemberg [Lvov].

EM: How old was your father?

VO: My father was then 55 years old. He was a robust, healthy person who once only had a slight heart attack. At this time he was never sick, and not used to any doctor, and didn't want to believe what the doctor told him. And as we were in Warsaw he telephoned us from Lublin. My sister spoke with him and I stood next to her. I never forgave her that she never gave me the telephone at that moment, when she talked to my father for the last time, so that I could at least say goodbye to him. I never saw him again.

EM: What happened to you when the Germans marched into Poland?

VO: During the bombardment of Warsaw we lived in the Hotel Europejski, E-U-R-O-P-E-J-S-K-I. I don't remember why. I think it was because we didn't have the beds yet and as we moved into the Hotel Europejski, we immediately had to go down into the cellar because the bombardment had started. We sat in the cellar of the hotel the whole time. Once a shrapnel had hit a horse. The horse had fallen dead in front of the hotel and the cook from the hotel had cut the meat out of it, to give the people something to eat. It was my birthday, and since I was very, very hungry, I got that horse meat. That was my first birthday in war time. It was in 1939. Later, when the bombardment had stopped, we returned to the burning city. The houses had collapsed. We were walking in the middle of the street, because of pieces of burning wood and glass pieces were flying all around and we came home to the Pod Chorazy Street, 103. There were no windows. Everything was smashed. But the apartment was there. Polish soldiers were living everywhere. Polish military returned from the front, some from Lodz and some from [unclear]. The brother of my nanny came back. He was also with the military. In the meantime, the Germans marched in. The brother of my nanny became ill. And the

Germans maintained he had typhus. There was a big danger of typhus. And all of us were in the apartment. In between the parents-in-law came also. We were all put in to the school and quarantined for 40 days.

EM: 40 days?

VO: 40 days. They wanted to cut the hair off from all of us women. It was awful. But for money that we gave them, it did not happen. A certain lady, Mrs. Deutsch, D-E-U-T-S-C-H, who was from Bielitz, but had lived in Warsaw, sent us the midday meal every day. That way we were able to survive that time. And then they let us out, back again to that apartment. We weren't in the apartment long when the Germans came, and every day there was something else that they took away from us. One day a Persian rug. One day a picture. One day something else. And it was a very dangerous time for us. In the meantime, my sister tried to get immigration papers through a *macher* a so-called *macher* [a big shot][3]. My sister and my brother-in-law, shortly before the outbreak of the war came back from a trip to Western Europe and had valid passports. The brother of my brother-in-law, who had fled from Germany and had, I think, an Italian passport went together with them to this *macher,* and wanted to arrange for these immigration papers. But since I was the youngest, I had no passport, only a school identification card. And they said they could not take me with them. But to hurry money to this *macher* for that I was good enough. The winter in 1940 was dreadfully cold. I had grown and my winter coat was short. It did not even reach my knees. I was very cold and I rode in an open *droschka* [a carriage drawn by a horse] with gold, dollars, and money to this *macher,* to pay for the emmigration papers for my sister, my brother-in-law, the brother of my brother-in-law, and my niece. They never even considered me [unclear]. The relationship between my brother-in-law and myself was not good. And of course, I did not know what lay ahead of me. I stayed there with the nanny, with my nanny, and with the parents of my brother-in-law. And so one day I found myself at the main railroad station in Warsaw, when my sister, my brother-in-law and everybody left. And I was all alone. I was 15 years old. I can't even say that I was very sad. [unclear] I met an acquaintance from Bielitz who had family in Hungary and who wanted to emigrate to Hungary with her husband. When she found out that I was alone, she said she will adopt me and take me with them. I found it odd that this stranger had offered to help me while my sister and my brother-in-law had left me behind. My sister only said at that time, before she left, "You understand this. We are all Feuereisen. And that's the name. And your name is Neuman, so you can't come with us." Reportedly, repeat, reportedly, it cost $20,000 per head to emigrate.

EM: $20,000?

VO: Dollars, yes, reportedly. At that time, I was very friendly with a girl who had come from Germany with her family to Warsaw before the war and lived on

[3]Somebody who was able to arrange things, usually illegally and was able to obtain different documents, mainly through bribery.

[unclear]. Her name was Bender. The Benders had a large department store in Breslau, B-R-E-S-L-A-U and the second one in Katowice, K-A-T-O-W-I-C-E. Steffi Bender was an only child and we were at that time very, very close friends. One day a German came into the apartment and announced that she was moving into our apartment. We had to leave everything and I was able only to get for o*ma* **[**grandmother], the mother of my brother-in-law a small cart, on which we put an easy chair with a footrest for her. And with that, and a few dollars that I still had, we moved into the Ghetto, to Zelanzny Brany #6, Z-E-L-A-Z-N-Y, B-R-A-N-Y, number six. It was an awful house, very dirty, a room in which bed bugs crawled around on the walls. The owner of the apartment was very unpleasant.

EM: Who went into the Ghetto?

VO: [unclear] The father of my brother-in-law had gotten an angina pectoris attack and died before we went to the Ghetto. So there were my brother-in-law's mother, my nanny and I. We, the three women, we found a room.

EM: Was the nanny a Jewess?

VO: A Jewess, who was brought to us by my father from an orphanage when she was 18 years old. She was very good to me. She was engaged to a man who went to Lemberg, and from whom she heard to from time to time. The house where Steffie lived was also evacuated, but the parents were able to rescue some of the furniture. I believe it was a dining room that they took with them and moved to Panska Street number 10, P-A-N-S-K-A. Steffie's parents were like parents to me. They were lovely to me. When there were Jewish holidays, they invited me.

EM: Did you go to school before you went to the Ghetto?

VO: No, I did not go at all. I resumed my education after the war. I got lessons.

EM: How did you occupy your time?

VO: In the beginning when we moved to Platz Zelanzny Bramy, by chance, I found a nanny, a girlfriend of my cousin. She had worked for a Jewish family, who had left shortly before the war, I think to Hawaii. They had left a completely furnished apartment and she proposed that I should stay in the apartment with her.

EM: That was outside of the Ghetto?

VO: It was before the Ghetto was closed. The gates had not been closed yet. I also went to her because I felt that perhaps I could do more for my nanny and *oma* from the outside of the Ghetto. I decided to stay with the woman, to live together with her. Before that, I had met a certain Mr. Kohl, K-O-H-L who was a representative for our electric factory in Czechowice, C-Z-E-C-H-O-W-I-C-E. My father had an electric factory which produced different instruments for electric current and electric bulbs, and he had a large warehouse in Warsaw. A cousin of mine, whom I had met once in Warsaw invited me to her aunt's**.** The aunt was Jewish. Her name was Niemitz, N-I-E-

M-I-T-Z. She was Jewish. And nobody in the house knew that she was Jewish. Her husband worked at the Foreign Office in Warsaw.

EM: Was her husband a Jew?

VO: No, her husband was Christian. With her, we left an Oriental rug and some suits from my father, some things of value. I only knew her for a very short time but somehow the woman had made a good impression on me, so that I trusted her completely. And through Mr. Kohl

[Tape one, side one ended]

Tape one, side two:

EM: Tape one, side B continuing interview with Mrs. Otelsberg.

EM: And through Mr. Kohl we got various articles and things from the Electro-Czechowice warehouse. And the husband of this Mrs. Niemitz tried to establish a business for himself from this. I have tried with the *droschka* to sell these things. I went from store to store, but I was not experienced. The people still didn't take me seriously. I was 15 years old, not used to selling, did not know much about prices. And so I decided that he should open a store and sell these things slowly out of the store. This Mr. Kohl was very nice to me. He had a wife and a daughter. Later we were [unclear]. Mr. Niemitz was a person who had no character and he was dependent on his wife. Dora Niemitz was the head buyer for the Phillips Company for all of Poland. As a woman, she was like a man, you know, strong of character and energetic**,** not gentle but very smart. And she did not want me to go into the Ghetto and I would not have gone if I hadn't come back one day to nanny -- the children's maid with whom I was living -- and saw that the house was empty. The Germans had thrown everybody out of the house. It was on the Polish side that it became part of the German quarter. I don't remember anymore the name of the street. And so the Germans threw them out. They had to leave only with whatever they were wearing.

EM: That was the nanny?

VO: Yeah, from the children. I had no choice. I had no place to stay. I had to go into the Ghetto. And we moved from the Platz Zelanznej Bramy to Leszno number 61, L-E-S-Z-N-O. There we had a *Durchjanjszimmer*, D-U-R-C-H-J-A-N-J-S-Z-I-M-M-E-R [a room through which other people had to pass]. We, the three women had this pass-through room. We pushed a wardrobe in front of the beds for privacy, and lived there. The money started to melt [was being spent]. *Oma* had a sister in Bielitz [unclear] married to a Mr. Wiesen, W-I-E-S-E-N, who was a very wealthy man and lived on Sienna, number 41, S-I-E-N-N-A. He found for us a place to live next to his apartment. It was a *Durchjanjszimmer*, rooms which people had to cross, in a large apartment where we put two wardrobers and curtains for privacy. And that is where we three women lived. At that time, I studied with Steffie. I studied. We studied Spanish. We were getting together with Bielitzers [people from Bielitz], Mr. Herbert Reisfeld, R-E-I-S-F-E-L-D whose stepfather, whose name was Wilner, who had the good fortune to leave as a foreigner. There was a girl named Mary Wassenberg who sang beautifully. [unclear].

EM: What was that called?

VO: *Lipski Zespol Artystyczny*, L-I-P-S-K-I, Z-E-S-P-O-L, A-R-T-Y-S-T-Y-C-Z-N-Y [Lipski Artist's Troop**].** [unclear]. Mary was a pretty girl who had a very pleasant voice, and who had sang in the Ghetto in the café [unclear]. Through her I met different people, a young lad who just before the war, the outbreak of the war, came for a

vacation to Poland from [unclear] and who never went back. A family of a Jewish woman whose husband was British, and who went into the Ghetto because of the wife. Even though he was not Jewish. And one day posters went up on the wall announcing that all Jews who are not Poles have to register. People who by some way have gotten papers that they were citizens of Honduras or Mexico or some other country came forward and registered. And he turned himself in also. [unclear] And the among those who registered were Erna Wolf from Bielitz and Mary Berg, as an American. The only one who survived was Mary Berg whose mother was really born in America. And then in an exchange between the German and American prisoners had come to America, I think in 1942.

EM: Was she in the Ghetto in 1942?

VO: No, I believe it was in 1941. She describes it in her book, when she got out.

EM: What book?

VO: The name of the book is *The Warsaw Ghetto*. She mentioned me in the book she wrote. It was published in America, I think in 1944. And the book was translated into 60 [languages]. Later I had heard nothing further from her.

EM: Did you sell personal things to be able to live, or did you have money? Were you ever hungry?

VO: Yes.

EM: Or did you, were you ever hungry? How did you manage without working? And how did you get any ration cards? Could you describe that?

VO: As long as it was possible to enter the Warsaw Ghetto, it was Dora Niemitz who helped. She was Jewish. But nobody knew that. The people knew each other from before the war, from Bielitz, B-I-E-L-I-T-Z, and it was very odd that nobody suspected her of being Jewish. The entrance to the courthouse in Warsaw was on the border of the Ghetto. On the one side was the Polish side and on the other side was the Ghetto. And there were entrances on both sides. We met each other at the courthouse. Dora was selling dollars and Persian rugs one after the other. Only my father's suits I did not let her sell. She was bringing the money to me in the Ghetto, through the courthouse. I also had a girlfriend, a girl from Lodz. She carried books from house to house, because a library was organized, and I helped her. In the house where we were living, there was a family named Reuben from Vienna. And there was a man friend and Rudi. And we gathered peelings from potatoes and together carried it for cows, so that we got some milk for children who, living in the cellars and sub-basements, had nothing to eat. A base cabinet from an old grandfather clock was all we had to store our entire provisions. That is some black bread and that bread from marmalade, which we had gotten for ration cards. I believe we had this only when we had started to work in a shop. Before that I can no longer remember.

EM: Approximately when did you start to work in a shop?

VO: I don't remember anymore. My nanny was the first one who started to work. She really started working in order to earn something. *Oma* was already old. She couldn't do anything. She, from time to time, if somebody wanted to shorten something she did it, she did it [made alterations] and with that earned a few cents.

EM: She sewed?

VO: Sewed. I myself didn't sew. I hate the needle. But despite that I let myself be registered in the shop and did mending and put [unclear] on the collar of the German uniforms. They were frequently uniforms that were full of lice, bloody and dirty.

EM: Where were they from?

VO: Apparently from dead people. For a time, we hid a child in this environment, from one of the woman who worked in the shop with me.

EM: Which shop was this, was it Schultz, S-C-H-U-L-T-Z or Toebbens, T-O-E-B-B-E-N-S?

VO: At Toebbens, T-O-E-B-B-E-N-S. In the meantime I no longer lived on Sienna Street number 41. We were evicted from this part of town and we lived on Zielona Street 15, Z-I-E-L-O-N-A. In this apartment lived a Viennese couple, two old spinsters who lived together, a Lithuanian Jew named Nowik with his wife and daughter and we. The shop was nearby.

EM: Can you remember where, on what street the shop was? Can you remember the name of the street?

VO: No, no.

EM: Describe the work in the shop. How many people were in the room?

VO: We were many women, one next to the other, on hard benches. In the middle there was a table. On the table were the uniforms with the lice, full of lice.

[End of tape one, side one of tape in German]

[Tape one, side two of original tape on German]

EM: Please tell me a little bit more about your work in the shop

VO: We repaired uniforms and had to stitch the insignia on the collars. Many people died from dysentery. From the Germans we got spoiled vegetables. There was nothing else to eat. In the streets there were many bodies of dead people. In the house where I lived also people who worked with me in the shop.

EM: How far was it from the shop to the house where you lived?

VO: A few blocks, a few houses only. One day I met a certain Mrs. Helena Ahrenberg, A-H-R-E-N-B-E-R-G. She sat next to me. Mrs. Ahrenberg had two sons. Rysiu, R-Y-S-I-U and Witek, W-I-T-E-K. Witek was an architect. He had studied in [unclear]. Witek tried to help me. He hid me one night in the warehouse for fabrics, so I could get a good night's sleep. He also brought me a cigarette three times a day, and a sour candy, and forbade me to eat the vegetables. That sustained me for several days.

EM: Did you smoke these cigarettes or..

VO: I smoked them. I was very, very tired and one day I decided to sneak out to go home to wash up and sleep in a bed. The nanny and *oma* were there.

EM: Where did you live when you worked in the shop?

VO: We worked day and night, day and night in the shop, but since for three or four days I did not go home I wanted to get home to wash and sleep and change clothing.

EM: Couldn't you go home? Why did you not go home?

VO: The Germans watched us. They did not let us go. They beat us with a whip on the backs. And one day they, I don't remember how, it happened, but they learned that there was a child hidden in the shop, in the room where we sewed. They found the child and took it away. The mother committed suicide. How, I don't know anymore. Once, I went home with my nanny to sleep, but we barely got undressed when we heard banging at the door downstairs. The banging became louder and louder, and we remembered that there was a hiding place in the attic. We escaped through the kitchen exit, ran to the attic and knocked against the wall, and searched for a hollow sound. Finally we found the hollow sound and somebody asked in a whisper, "Who is there?" In the darkness, we did not see anything but somebody pulled us into the hiding place. And from downstairs we heard only the yelling of the German soldiers. Somebody ran upstairs, apparently also into our apartment, and then we heard nothing more. Later we carefully went downstairs full of fear because we were sure that they killed *oma*. As we entered we found *oma* in good shape in bed. When we asked her what had happened, she told us that the janitor brought the Germans straight into the apartment and told them, "Here lives a young girl." I found out later that his young niece lived with him, and he was afraid that they might rape her, so he took them to our apartment. When the Germans only found old *oma,* they left. They were drunk.

EM: Was this in the Ghetto?

VO: Yes, this was in the Ghetto.

EM: And the janitor was Jewish?

VO: Yes a Jew. From this day on, I did not want to stay there anymore. I got in touch with Steffi. She was in the big Ghetto. I was in the small Ghetto. In the meantime, since Dora Niemitz did not come to this courthouse with the money any more, I got money through a certain Mr. Ludwig Wagenfeld, W-A-G-E-N-F-E-L-D, from Lodz, owner of a chocolate factory, Iwonka, I-W-O-N-K-A. Dora Niemitz gave him the money outside of the Ghetto and she brought it inside the Ghetto. He worked at the *Werterfassung*, W-E-R-T-E-R-F-A-S-S-U-N-G[4] and could go in and out. When he brought me the money for the third time, he told me that if I should have difficulty I should approach a certain Jewish policeman. I don't remember his name any more, but later, when I wanted to approach him, he was not there any more. A few days later, early in the morning, a worker knocked on the door and asked, "Does Vera Neuman live

[4]*Werterfassung* was the office responsible for processing seized valuables.

here?" "Yes, that is me." "Dress immediately and come to the main gate at six o'clock." I did not know what it was all about but he said, "Don't ask any questions. Just be there."

EM: Was this a German worker or …

VO: No, a Polish worker.

EM: And at that time where did you live, on what street?

VO: On Zielona, Z-I-E-L-O-N-A.

EM: Did you still work in the shop?

VO: Not anymore. Frieda, the nanny, yes, she worked. They changed my card. At the time when you had a green card you could still live. When you had a pink card, one could not live.

EM: Could you explain some more about the cards?

VO: Not really. I only know they gave you a card and there were people…

EM: And these cards, one got so as to be able to stay in the Ghetto and not be deported.

VO: Yes.

EM: And when was that, in what month? Can you remember?

VO: In the summer.

EM: 1942?

VO: Yes, summer 1942. When the Polish worker came I immediately put something on. I also put a gold piece in the Nivea cream.

EM: $20?

VO: $20 in gold, and went to the gate where many workers are already assembled. I also had 500 *zlotys* in my hand. And at the gate, the German asked, "What do you have here?" I opened the bag and I said, "A towel and soap." He did not look any further when we were on the Aryan side.

EM: Were you going to work? Were you in a work battalion, column?

VO: Yes, the people I was with were in a work column. I kept inching my way towards the Polish worker, who led the column, and finally asked him to lead the column closer to the sidewalk and not to look when I'm going to escape at a certain point. I pushed 500 *zlotys* into his hand, inched my way back towards the end of the column, and when the column turned around the corner, I slipped into the entrance gate of a building. I sat down on the staircase, did not even think that I still had my Jewish armband and my Jewish work card. Only when I heard somebody descend the stairs, I quickly removed and got rid of both, and started to walk slowly towards the Powisle, P-O-W-I-S-L-E.

EM: That is a part of Warsaw?

VO: Dora Niemitz lives on Dobra Street number 22/24, D-O-B-R-A. I rang the bell and when Dora opened the door she yelled out, "Today I sent two policemen for you they should arrest you and bring you here!" These were two Polish policemen who

were supposed to arrest me and bring me to the Aryan side. She did not know that in the meantime, Ludwig Weidenfeld had sent for me.

EM: Ludwig Weidenfeld was the one who arranged with the Pole who had let the column out of the Ghetto.

VO: Yes, to bring me out, to save me. His secretary before the war was a friend of Dora Niemitz and through her I received the money in the Ghetto when Dora could not come to the **courthouse** anymore. Later Ludwig Weidenfeld bought some goats in Zakopane, Z-A-K-O-P-A-N-E. Lived in the mountains as a goat breeder. He survived the war. He visited me in Bielitz after the war. He emigrated to Canada, but two months after his arrival, he was killed in a car accident.

EM: What did you do? Could you live with Dora Niemitz?

VO: As soon as I came to her, she sent me off with a cousin, to Zombki,[5] Z-O-M …

[Tape one, side two ended]

[5]Polish spelling Ząbki.

Tape two, side one:

EM: This is tape two side one of an interview with Mrs. Vera Otelsberg. It is a translation of the interview conducted on November 6, 1989, Edith Millman interviewing.

EM: What did you do? Could you live with Dora Niemitz?

VO: As soon as I came to her, she sent me off with a cousin to Zombki. We walked there. I think it was about 11 kilometers from Warsaw. I was supposed to wait there at this cousins and this until I got false papers.

EM: This cousin was her cousin?

VO: It was his cousin, a Pole. This cousin lived together with a sister and brother. They grew tomatoes and somehow tried to survive the war. Since trains passed through Zombki there are frequent house searches. Some people even escaped from the train in Zombki.

EM: The train from the Ghetto went through Zombki?

VO: Yes, the train from the Ghetto went to Zombki. Where to, I don't know. After a week or so, I had to leave Zombki, walk back to Warsaw to Dora and receive papers of Anna Borowska, B-O-R-O-W-S-K-A who somehow disappeared. But her parents knew that somebody will react to these papers. I had to learn all the particulars of my new name, the name of my mother, Maria Zaszekowski, Z-A-S-Z-E-K-O-W-S-K-I. My birthday, the Catechism.

EM: Who arranged for these papers?

VO: Dora Niemitz, allegedly through the *AK*. She had a cousin, a Jewish cousin who worked for the *AK* and who was able to get false papers. In addition, I had an acquaintance in Warsaw, who used to be a representative of our firm who helped by giving me an *Arbeitskarte*, a work card, testifying that I worked in his office. He also told me that the money they were supposed to pay me came from some Jewish organization in the USA. After they learned that I was a grandchild of Bernard Liebernwill [phonetic] was a Polish legionary, and who received a special metal from Emperor Franz Joseph for his work. [unclear].

EM: This is a grandfather on your mother's side?

VO: Yes, on my mother's side.

EM: Do you know which organization it was that helped you?

VO: No, I don't know, because he did not want to tell me. Even when I met him again shortly before the end of the war, he did not want to tell me. All I knew is that I received every month 1,000 *zlotys*. I don't remember what the value of it was at that time, but anyway, it helped me.

EM: At that time, did you live as Anna Borowska?

VO: Yes.

EM: And you worked in the office?

VO: Yes at the office of my father's representative. He was a half-Jew.

EM: And through him you received the money?

VO: Yes.

EM: This was at the end of 1942?

VO: No, later in 1943.

EM: At that time, did you still have contact with the Ghetto?

VO: Naturally. I was in contact with the Ghetto up to the liquidation. My nanny was still there. I arranged for papers for her and a place to live outside the Ghetto when an acquaintance of mine went to the Ghetto to visit his mother, I asked him to visit her. She did not want to leave, saying she does not want to take the chance. She does not want to take the chance. Helenka Adelsberg, A-D-E-L-S-B-E-R-G, with whom I worked in the shop in the Ghetto, was with her in the train to Treblinka. But Helenka, she had a husband and two boys and she still wanted to live. She's now 90 years old. She lives in Warsaw. Her name now is Zophia Rawkiewicz, R-A-W-K-I-E-W-I-C-Z. She is now all alone. I wrote to her a few weeks ago.

EM: Well this is the woman with whom you worked in the shop?

VO: Yes, whose two sons [unclear]. The older son was the one who saved me from dysentery [by warning about the food], and the younger helped me on the Aryan side. The whole family was on the Aryan side. The father had an addition built to a house which, later was eliminated from the Ghetto. And one day when this part of the city was outside of the Ghetto, he came out of his hiding place. His two sons were already on the Aryan side, and his wife jumped out of the cattle car on the way to Treblinka. She was still alive. She bought a bag of potatoes from a farmer for a lot of money, and although she was bloody and wounded on her forehead, she made it to Warsaw to be with her sons and husband. They called a physician with the explanation that she fell from the window while washing windows. The doctor treated her and she got well.

EM: And the nanny continued the journey? She did not jump?

VO: No, she did not jump.

EM: And you don't know anything more about her fate?

VO: No.

EM: What happened to the grandmother?

VO: Grandmother was…

EM: To clarify again, it was not your grandmother. It was the mother of…

VO: It was my brother-in-law's mother.

EM: Your brother-in-law's mother. And what happened to her?

VO: She and her sister were taken to the *Umschlagplatz* and since then I heard nothing. I had an acquaintance. His name was Leblowitz, L-E-B-L-O-W-I-T-Z. He was a policeman in the Ghetto. He helped many people. And when I begged him, he would

bring back some people from the *Umschlagplatz.* This naturally only postponed their fate for one or two days. And he was the one who saw her at the *Umschlagplatz.*

EM: How much contact did you have with the Jewish police?

VO: Except for Leblowitz, none. Leblowitz was from Bielitz.

EM: What was your attitude towards the Jewish police?

VO: In generally it was sad that they behaved miserably. I only know the case of Leblowitz, who was from Bielitz, who had studied chemistry in Prague, and had a sister in Lushaka [phonetic] in Africa, after the war. I think she left Poland during the war, at about the same time when my sister left.

EM: Did she survive the war?

VO: No, but he behaved in an extremely decent manner. At least towards me. He helped people.

EM: Did you have to pay him?

VO: No absolutely not.

EM: Let's continue. You worked in the office?

VO: Yes, the office of our representative.

EM: Where did you live at that time?

VO: At that time, I lived with Dora Niemitz and later through Hans Deutsch, D-E-U-T-S-C-H and his parents, I got a position as a maid for Mr. Weil, W-E-I-L. They gave me a totally empty apartment of Baroness Hirsch, and my task was to furnish this empty apartment. I engaged carpenters, painters.

EM: How did you get this job?

VO: Through Erwin and Hilda Deutsch who played [unclear], pretended to be a Volksdeutsche [ethnic Germans].

EM: Were they ethnic Germans or Jews?

VO: No, they were Jews. They lived in the German part of town near Szucha Street, S-Z-U-C-H-A. They got me the job with Mr. Weil. He came from Germany and was…

EM: Why did you go to Mr. Weil at that time? You had another job.

VO: That job ended. I could not continue anymore with it.

EM: Mr. Mard? [phonetic]

VO: Yes, that was the name of my father's representative. Had to leave Warsaw. I think it also started to burn under his feet. And so I was left without a job. Erwin and Hilda, who had helped us when we were under quarantine, and who knew my sister very well, Mr. Weil was not yet in Warsaw but furniture from the Ghetto was sent to this empty apartment. It was awful. In the meantime I lived on Zlota Street number 5, at the apartment of the woman whom I met through one of my uncles. She did not know exactly what it was all about. She only knew that something was not quite alright with me. She lived with her daughter and friend.

EM: She was a Pole?

VO: Yes, she was a Pole. The daughter went to ballet school and she made dresses for her dancing out of *tallisism* and when something broke in the apartment, I had to pay for it regardless of what it was. When somebody dropped a perfect vase, I had to pay for it. When something went wrong in the kitchen, I had to pay for it, etc. An acquaintance of hers visited from time to time and always looked at me in a special way. I felt very uncomfortable there. And when I accepted the job at Mr. Weil's, I at least was not there for the whole day. I had to be at work at 8 o'clock in the morning and came home before 8 PM because of the curfew. I fixed up the apartment, arranged everything, and only then Mr. Weil came with his wif, who immediately desired to have Hitler's picture hung over the bed. And their three children [unclear], every day I went with the three children, the youngest still in the baby carriage, to the Meinfeld store, where the Germans could get everything imaginable. I had to do the shopping, cleaning and washing. One day Steffi called me from the Ghetto telling me that her parents committed suicide on the *Umschlagplatz* and that she wants to leave the Ghetto. I knew immediately that the only way for her to be safe was to get her a job with the Germans because her Polish was extremely poor. And she would be immediately suspected. Steffi got out of the Ghetto with the help of a German, whom she gave all the jewelry. When she came out, she had the address of a Greek, who was married to a Jewess. And there she got a job as a nanny.

EM: Did she ever get back the jewelry?

VO: With the jewelry there is a real funny story. The German lived on Szucha Avenue.

EM: What was the German, a soldier?

VO: I think he was something more than a soldier. And one day Steffi decided that we'll both go there. It was a very, very childish plan. Steffi would go upstairs, ring the bell and when he would open the door and say, "Oh Steffi are you here?", I would follow her upstairs. If, however, he would be unpleasant, I would approach him and ask if a Mr. Makowski lived there, and Steffi would run away in the meantime. When I was halfway upstairs, Steffi rang the bell. He opened the door and said, full of joy, "Oh Steffi, you finally saved yourself." I followed her, after she called for me. Although he could have later shot us or called the Gestapo, he really returned all the jewelry to her. He had a Polish girlfriend whom he later married. He even invited Steffi to his wedding. He worked for the *AK* and German resistance.

EM: Was he a *Volksdeutsche* [ethnic German]?

VO: I think he was an ethnic German.

EM: Was he dressed as a civilian or…

VO: I saw him as a civilian.

EM: Did he have some kind of a job in the Ghetto?

VO: Yes, in the shop where Steffi works.

EM: Can you remember when Steffi got out of the Ghetto? Was it still before the uprising?

VO: Yes, before the uprising. At the time when Steffi got out of the Ghetto, a cousin of my father's from Tomaszow, T-O-M-A-S-Z-O-W, came to Warsaw also to the Deutsch family. I also brought Steffi to the Deutsches. They arranged for her first false papers. When she first got out, and had no papers, and no place to stay overnight, and I could not bring her to the apartment where I stayed unless I would hide her under the bed so the woman would not know that she was there. The Deutshes devised a plan. I was to pretend to be [unclear] and rent a room for a night in a hotel. I dressed accordingly, put lots of makeup on, rented a room and left, while the cousin and Steffi went in. That's how we did it.

EM: I don't quite understand. What kind [unclear]?

VO: Per hour.

EM: So the cousin and Steffi were staying in this room overnight?

VO: Yes, but something terrible happened. In the night, somebody was banging at the door. It was the morality police. The two women hid, if I remember correctly, in the bathroom. The police searched the apartment but did not look in the bathroom and that's how the two escaped detection. And the next day Steffi, went to the Greek and then she already had the documents.

EM: Who arranged for the documents?

VO: The first one was the Deutsches. Later she got other documents. I don't remember through whom. Her first name was Janowska, J-A-N-O-W-S-K-A. [unclear]. Later Wroblewska, W-R-O-B-L-E-W-S-K-A. [unclear]. In the apartment on Zlota number 5 also lived a woman. Her name was Zlonkowska, Z-L-O-N-K-O-W-S-K-A [unclear].

EM: Just a minute, do you remember the name of the German who helped Steffi with the jewelry, etc.

VO: No, I have no idea. I have never seen him again. Later they shot the Greeks.

EM: Do you know their names?

VO: No, Steffi gave the small child to an aunt [unclear].

EM: They shot both of them? [unclear]

VO: Yes, both of them. In the apartment they found a whole arsenal of ammunition.

EM: Did they work for the *AK*?

VO: I don't know for whom. I think so. Later on, so that Steffi could take my place as the Weil's, I behaved in such a way that they chased me out of the Weil's place and Steffi could have my room and my job. But I had to leave the room I rented, because people became suspicious and started talking that the girl who lives there does nothing for a living. Then Dora Niemitz was able to get a place for me, in a little house of an

acquaintance of hers in the suburbs. He was a pilot before the war. His sister, who was a teacher, lived there with her two children, so they put an extra bed in their home and I lived in this room with the teacher and the two children. We worked the land, planted potatoes and all kinds of vegetables to have something to eat.

EM: This is end of tape one, side b of original interview in German.

[Tape one side two ended]

Tape two side one

EM: This is the beginning of tape two, side one of the original interview in German on November 6, 1989, Edith Millman interviewing. This is a translation.

EM: Vera, tell me more about the time when you had to leave from Zlota 5 because the woman started to suspect you.

VO: Well we lived with the family of the Polish flyer. The woman didn't know what was going on with me, but she knew that I could not move freely. She introduced me as a cousin of her husband's. I gave lessons and for that we got meat, flour, sugar, eggs, etc. from the peasants. At the same time, I noticed that above us, above the room in which I lived footsteps going back and forth especially at night. In spite of that, I didn't think that anybody lived there because upstairs they had disconnected the electric light. When the man came [unclear] to check how much had to be paid [for electricity] he always climbed up there. I decided to find out and went up and there was a family with a little boy about five years old and she asked me [unclear] and the little boy asked me why I walked freely and he can't [unclear]. The family survived the war.

EM: Who knew that the family was hiding there?

VO: The parents of the woman where I was had hidden these people there, took care of them, received dollars from them, for that which they brought them. They did not take advantage of them. When I was in Warsaw she always asked me the rate of exchange for dollars and they knew that they could get for them [unclear]. The woman has risked a lot. It was a small village and when she went shopping, I knew that she bought less for two people than for five. One day the child of the people where I lived got scarlet fever. I didn't know if I had had scarlet fever. A peasant woman, who had visited us frequently, and whose children I had tutored, always brought me stockings from over the green border as a present.

EM: What do you mean by green frontier, green border?

VO: She went to Germany [probably part of Poland annexed to Germany], all the way to Lodz) and in this manner she had brought her husband and her children to the border [unclear]. As the child where I was living got scarlet fever, she proposed to me that I move into her little house, and gave me a bed there.

EM: Was that in Germany?

VO: No, that was in the *General Gouvernment,* General Government. And so in exchange for my room and board, I also tutored the children there. At the same time, I would leave early in the morning with a milk can, walked 11 kilometers one way and 11 kilometers back and bought milk from a farmer and on the way back sold the milk. During the night in the cellar we listened to BBC to news reports which I translated from the German language to Polish. There were nuns in the village who issued a *gazetka*, G-A-Z-E-T-K-A (a small paper, a bulletin).

EM: Legally?

[Tape two, side one ended]

Tape two, side two:

EM: Side two, tape two translation of the interview with Mrs. Vera Otelsberg.

VO: No it was an illegal paper. It was very important to them that I stay healthy. At that time my legs were always blue, since I very seldom went out. I had very poor circulation in my legs. The nuns wanted that I go to a doctor in Warsaw. I quite frequently had to go to Warsaw, and I always told the nuns that I saw the physician or that she was not available.

EM: How did you get in touch with the nuns?

VO: The nuns were friendly with the woman with whom I was living. Bit by bit they pulled me into their underground movement, not directly but through my translations from German into Polish for the underground. I told them that I had lived in Katowitz, K-A-T-O-W-I-T-Z [Katowice] where I learned German.

EM: Do you think that they suspected that you were Jewish?

VO: I don't think so since even the woman in whose house I lived tells me that if she knew where a Jew or Jewess was hiding she would personally denounce them. For some unexplained reason she got fond of me, and invited me to live in her house. But suddenly there was too much talk in this small community that someone is listening to the radio. I realized that it was burning under my feet [it became dangerous]. But oddly enough, in the middle of all of this came the Uprising in Warsaw, and the people were being deported to various places. I had gotten a postcard from Dora Niemitz that her husband had been deported to a labor camp in Germany and that she was in Sochaczew, S-O-C-H-A-C-Z-E-W.

EM: That was the Polish Uprising?

VO: The Polish Uprising. One day I set out with a backpack, a piece of bread and with all my belongings, which consisted of pants and of a dress. I had a dress from the Ghetto, from Steffi which we had taken turns wearing with her. And I went to Sochaczew. On the way there was a small railway station. I don't remember its name and people were lying and sitting there. No train ran anymore. And these were people who had been injured from the Uprising. Among them was a young girl who appealed to me, and I asked her if she wanted to go with me. She wanted to continue to wait for the train but I had decided to go and said to her that I would carry her backpack if she would only go on with me. And so we went off and on the way we thought that some wagon would pick us up. Once somebody gave us a ride for one kilometer or so and then we stood at the side of the highway. We couldn't go any further and we signaled something from a distance and as it came closer it turned out it was a truck with Germans. In spite of that, they let us get on the wagon, on the car and took us a few kilometers further. Shortly before Sochaczew a truck with horses took us along. The men were in German uniforms but when they opened their mouths we saw they were Ukrainians and we were terribly frightened. The wagon went straight ahead but suddenly we went to the side of

the road and we thought God only knows what plans they had, God only knows what plans for us. We jumped off the wagon. And fortunately they really had stopped to let us know that here was where they were going and they couldn't go any further. We got as far as Sochaczew and the girl stayed in Sochaczew.

EM: Was this the Polish girl?

VO: Yes a Polish girl. And from there on, I had a further address to *Weis* Chodakow, C-H-O-D-A-K-O-W *Weis,* [phonetic] village, a place Wanubwek, W-A-N-U-B-W-E-K. I walked till the village of Chodakow, and from far away I noticed a house between trees in the forest. And that's where I was directed. That's where they sent me. And there I saw on a pile of wood, a wooden post with the name of Dora Niemitz. It was a tremendous relief. I finally had the possibility to say who I am. I had often asked women where I had lived, you know, "What do you think? What name would fit me?" Christina, Hanka sometimes said Vera in between, Veronica. They always said, "No, no, you are called Anna Barowska and that is a perfect name for you." I only wanted to hear sometimes what my real name sounded like. And Dora was there and on the one hand was thrilled that I had come and on the other hand was very apprehensive. Dora had gotten a corner in the kitchen from the farmer and there a carpenter had made her a bed out of four boards, somebody gave her an old sack which she had stuffed full of straw and that was her…

EM: Mattress?

VO: Her mattress. And an old pillow that the people had given her as a gift, that was the pillow. The coat was the blanket. We both started to make apple tarts with the farm woman. The farm woman had the apples and a bicycle. And we together made the apple tarts. And the farm woman brought them on the bicycle from Chodakow to Sochaczew and sold them there.

EM: On a bicycle?

VO: Yes, on a bicycle, with the money that we got, the three of us, Dora sent food ration cards to Germany that she had got from German soldiers who were stationed there and sent them to her husband in Germany so that he would have something to eat. At the same time that we made a living from this, I also gave lessons. An owner from Wanuwek, W-A-N-U-W-E-K, that was supposed to been an estate, was determined that her son got German lessons. And there I taught German. And for that we got a plate of soup every day, Dora and I. Besides that, we had potatoes to eat. And so we waited for the Russians. The Russians stayed at the Wzura W-Z-U-R-A, for a long time. Wzura was nearby. One day the Germans called together every woman and every man from the village to dig trenches against the Russians. The earth was hard. Everything was frozen solid from the cold. And I said to the good man who put the shovel into my hand and was standing next to us, "Don't you think", I said, "that when one knows a little Polish, German, and Spanish that one is not supposed to chop all that soil?" He shrugged his shoulders and said, "That's none of my business". The next day he came back again and

said, "Do you really know Spanish and German?" I said, "Yes, German a little and Spanish even less." And he said, "You know, you know what? Give up the chopping and go on making the apple tarts with your aunt. So, and I will come in the afternoon to pick up the apple tarts." I made an apple pie and because of that I had nothing more to do with the chopping. I had any already blue feet and frostbite from the cold. I lost my shoes. While we were living at the farmer's, there was no toilet. The toilet was far, far away and consisted of three boards. There was no door that one could lock. Someone always had to stand in front of the door. And one day I said to the farmer, "You know, when spring comes, it will stink terribly. Why don't you dig a hole close by, get rid of all of that and make a door that one can lock?" "What for?" he asked me. But after the snow had melted, and the one day I wanted to walk there with the village girl from where we were living, I felt suddenly that my shoes were sinking into something soft. I pulled and the shoe stayed there. It was dreadful. I ran home barefoot, back to the hut where we were living. Dora gave me a basin with hot water and some kind of leaves or herbs and soap and I washed my feet The peasant had made their hole without telling us about it and the shoes stayed in there, so then I had no shoes. The peasant woman from whom we had gotten the apples had shoes two sizes larger than what I needed. I stuck newspaper into them and she told me to wrap my feet with newspapers. And so I did. One day from far away we saw some odd blue lights. The blue lights came closer and closer and then disappeared and vanished and then we saw shadows in the white that were outlined horribly in the snow. But before that, we had nothing for heating and baking. But there were trees. There were many felled trees. We went in the night, with the woman who had given us the apples, who had the garden, to steal a tree. The Germans looked the other way. We took the tree trunk on our shoulders and brought it home. And in the back of the house all night long we sawed the tree.

EM: You sawed it?

VO: Yes, so that by early morning it would not be there anymore. As we saw the lights and were handing the bush we didn't know [unclear]. A few days later, or maybe two days later, one heard from faraway shooting and detonation. And then on the horizon, tiny tanks which came closer and closer. Suddenly a German came, out of the bunker, a young man from Vienna who sometimes had got apple pastries from us and asked if Dora could provide him with a suit. And I don't know if we had given it to him.

EM: Civilian clothing?

VO: Yes, we had none. I believe a few hours later the Russians were there and shot all the Germans, although they had white flags.

EM: Why did the Germans not leave?

VO: They felt they could hold out, apparently, and even who run away were caught by the Russians. They ran by our window and said we should lie down and duck so that we would not be hit by the flying bullets. And on the next day the Russians were there. Dora, who knew Russian as well as German, once started to barter with the

Russians and they gave us flour, butter and a pair of horses. With those horses, a peasant and a wagon, we drove directly to Warsaw to take out the jewelry, the gold, that was in her apartment. She left me outside of the city to stay with some people in the house where the people had lived before and she was the woman who had the apples, made it across the ruins over everything. Somehow had gotten to her house. And in this cellar, below the door, she dug out the gold and jewelry which she had stored there. She let the man with the horses go back to Sochaczew and we slowly made our way towards Dziedzice**,** D-Z-I-E-D-Z-I-C-E. And then further on to Bielitz.

EM: Tell me how did you get back to Bielitz? Did you walk? Did you drive? Or…

VO: All different ways. Sometimes we walked. Sometimes we drove. Sometimes stayed with peasants overnight. Till we got to Katowitz, K-A-T-O-W-I-T-Z. And in Katowitz the Red Cross helped many people from the camps with tents and gave them food, etc.

EM: Were you still Anna Borowska?

VO: Yes. When I was in Katowitz one day, the next day came the notice that Bielitz was liberated by the Russians. And I insisted on going to Bielitz. I wanted to see if my father had survived the war. We went to the military and got documents, that we could travel to Bielitz. Dora and I bought a ticket and together we travelled to Bielitz. And when we got off the bus, there sat a Polish policeman, not in uniform, but with a gun, many neckties in his hand and said, "Oh, the first Jewesses came back", and that was the welcome.

EM: He had stole the neckties?

VO: He had stolen them. And that was the welcome.

EM: And later, did you get into the house? Did you get your house back?

VO: No, they didn't let me enter the house. First I got an apartment for Dora and myself, where we slept. We were afraid of the Russians. My cousin was evacuated from her house because [unclear]. We took an apartment. I don't remember any more on what street. And then came the first Russians. And they helped us. These two Jews. When they heard we were Jewesses, they helped us immediately. They bought us bread and meat and took care of us.

EM: Were they officers?

VO: Officers. One of them spoke perfect French and played the piano beautifully. They looked after us. When they left, they handed us over to others who helped us.

EM: Did you live in your apartment then? [means house]

VO: No, we did not. In the house were the Russians. In the factory also. And in the mill. They didn't let me in. Only after a period of time, only after I had begged them 100 times, "I only want to go in to see what things look like," they allowed me to go in, with a man holding a bayonet. He walked behind me. And on the stairs were

wooden boards. When I asked what the boards were for, they said to me that they were for the horses. In the kitchen the horses were standing at the sink. The sink was full of grain. The faucets were open. The grain was scattered about the floor and was going to seed. And on the table there was a silver vase. The house was left plundered by the Germans, then Poles, then the Russians.

EM: But on the table there was still a silver vase?

VO: A table and a silver vase. The silver vase I gave to Dora. The table I later took to Uruguay. That was a table from my grandparents.

EM: How big was that house?

VO: That house had long stairs and entrance foyer, a salon, a dining room that had room enough for a table to extend for 24 people. A bedroom for my sister, a bedroom for my niece, the living room, the kitchen, two bathrooms, and upstairs in my room, my father's room, a dining room, the salon [not clear]. But no kitchen. The food was brought up by a small elevator from the downstairs kitchen and there was a bathroom for the household help. The garden…

EM: How large was the garden and how many servants did you have?

VO: In the house we had two nannies, mine and one for my niece. The maid and Marie, who raised me and was the house factotum. And outside there were the a chauffeur, the gardener and…

EM: Was the family very wealthy?

VO: Very.

EM: Were many Jewish families as wealthy as yours in Bielitz?

VO: Yes. Julius Deutch, D-E-U-T-C-H, Lenker, L-E-N-K-E-R, Karo Better, B-E-T-T-E-R, Moszkowitz, M-O-S-Z-K-O-W-I-T-Z and others.

EM: Were there also poor Jews?

VO: Yes, yes.

EM: Were your father or your sister active in any kind of Jewish organization?

VO: I don't think so, I don't think so. I can't remember anything about that.

EM: But in the Temple, did you go there?

VO: On the High Holidays only. Otherwise no. The family, for instance, my Aunt Pollak, P-O-L-L-A-K, the owner of the screw factory, had permanent reserved seats.

EM: How large was the family?

VO: It was my father, his brother, my father's uncle, the brother of my grandfather and a sister, Pollak, and an aunt who lived in Vienna. On my mother's side there were many siblings. From them only remained alive my cousin in Denmark who died last year, a cousin in Germany who also died recently, whose name I don't know. And there is a cousin in London whom I don't know.

EM: Your father and your mother, did they live for a long time in, or originally came from Bielitz? Or was their origin in Dziedzice?

VO: My mother's family came from Krakow. My father's family originally came from a town near Bielitz. I forgot the name. And the rest of the family originally came from Vienna, from Werbling Street, W-E-R-B-L-I-N-G Street number 66 [unclear].

EM: Do you want to add anything else?

VO: Yes, Jurek **S**urstenberg was the name that I can remember, was the name of the one who one day in the Ghetto in Warsaw, when I was still living on Sienna Street, ask me to a coffee house [in the Ghetto, in the Warsaw Ghetto were small coffee houses]. And he asked me to come there and told me that someone, that, in the coffee mall, they told me that someone was arrested from the Neuman family in Lemberg.

EM: Who was Jurek Surstenberg, J-U-R-E-K, **S**-U-R-S-T-E-N-B-E-R-G?

VO: Jurek Surstenberg came from Bedzin, B-E-D-Z-I-N. He was the son of very rich people. I think they owned some mines. I don't know exactly what they had. My father had once met his father in some resort place in Pisczan, P-I-S-Z-C-Z-A-N, Toplitz, T-O-P-L-I-T-Z, Marienbad M-A-R-I-E-N-B-A-D. Jurek Surstenberg had brought his parents from Lemberg to Warsaw. I believe his sister also, into the Ghetto and he told me that he knew that one of the Neumans was arrested.

[Tape two, side two ended]

Tape three, side one:

EM: This is tape three, side one, translation of an interview with Mrs. Vera Otelsberg conducted in German on November 6th 1989. Edith Millman interviewing.

VO: I begged him to tell me which one that's arrested. I knew there were three Neumans in Lemberg**,** my uncle, my father and the uncle of my father. And he asked his parents who were there, with a cynical smile on his face, "Shall we tell her?" He said, "Yes," so he told me, "Your father has been arrested." And I, of course, replied to that, "For God's sake, please do everything that you possibly can." I knew that he was in contact with the Gestapo. "Please, show what you can do for my father. You know he wouldn't ever think to repay you for that. He would be so grateful to you." And then he said to me, "Look, I can do something. If you gave me one of your diamonds, I will do it." My heart was racing and I then said, "I have nothing anymore. My sister went away from here and left me behind without anything. I don't have even one diamond. I have no money. The money that I had, I used up, and I had to sell my father's suits. That was the last thing I sold." And then he said to me, "It's a pity. But then I can't do anything for you." I left him in tears and went home and that was the last thing I knew.

EM: Was he a Jew? Was that a Jew who was in the Gestapo?

VO: Yes a Jew who was in the Ghetto, a horrible guy.

EM: So is there anything else you recall, can you think of anything else that perhaps is important?

VO: No, only that Steffi also survived. She stayed with Weil household. Weil later said that he was very good to two Jewesses and demanded reparation from the government.

EM: Tell me about that..

VO: Weil, he was a German. Weil was the German who came to Warsaw when I, and later Steffi, worked as maids and who, when it got hot in Warsaw, moved to Vienna, Neustadt, N-E-U-S-T-A-D-T. And when the Americans marched in, Steffi told them that she does not deserve any *Wiedergutmachung*, W-I-E-D-E-R-G-U-T-M-A-C-H-U-N-G, she was treated only as the maid there, and that he was a Nazi, that his wife always wanted to have Hitler's picture over her bed, that he received all kinds of goods from the Ghetto for his personal use and that his claim for reparation for helping Jews was not warranted.

EM: Tell me when you left Bielitz?

VO: The first time I left in 1946, went to Zurich where I stayed for three months. Then I left for Genoa, where I booked passage for South America. After three months there, I went back to Poland because I did not like it there. I did not feel well at home of my sister and brother-in-law and because my future husband, my fiancé, was still in Poland.

EM: [This is the end of tape two, side A in the original German. Tape two, side two, an interview with Mrs. Vera Otelsberg in German. Edith Millman interviewing.]

VO: I stayed a few years in Poland, lived in my house, but had to take a lodger, a subtenant so that I would not be forced to take in a stranger. Marusha, who used to work for us, again lived with me. I got married and had a daughter. And in 1957 again left for Uruguay.

EM: How are things with you now in Uruguay?

VO: We live very comfortably in Uruguay. We are satisfied. We adapted well. Maybe we don't have as many close friends as survivors in other countries but we are in contact with many people from Bielitz.

EM: Are there many people from Bielitz in Uruguay?

VO: No, only the family Tisch [or Fisch], former manufacturers [unclear]. Otherwise there are no Bielitzers in Montevideo.

EM: Do you belong to a temple or…

VO: No, we don't belong to a temple or any organization except the Holocaust organization. Otherwise nothing.

EM: And your daughter, is she married?

VO: Yes, she is married. Her husband is Jewish and they have two sons.

EM: The children are brought up as Jews?

VO: Yes, they are being brought up Jewishly

EM: Do you want to add anything?

VO: My father was arrested because of his girlfriend who was German.

EM: How did that happen?

VO: She was with my father in Lemberg when the Germans occupied the city, she had to register for work. When they asked who she was, she said that her name was Neuman. They told her to divorce her Jewish husband which apparently happened automatically.

EM: Was she married to your father?

VO: Yes. When I was in the Warsaw Ghetto, I wrote a letter to him after I heard that he wants to marry her. And people said that he should marry. I never forgive myself for this letter. It was the last letter he received. I wrote about all that hurt me through the years. I never wanted to be with her. She never came to our house. I hated her. Apparently without any real reason. But she ruined my life. She did not come to the house neither as a mother, a wife or friend. Father worked all week and Saturdays and Sundays he spent with her. She wanted to attend the Olympics in Berlin and sit beneath Hitler. She travelled all over the world with my father. As long as he had money, she was enthusiastic. When the war broke out, my father left with her to Lemberg**.** She apparently pulled him away from us, and not to go to Warsaw. My father was supposed to cross the border with a Mr. Deutsch but Mr. Deutsch left with his car a day before the agreed date. **S**o my father was left behind with her. When she started to work, she asked

my father for a divorce. At least that's what people told me. My father was arrested and one day [unclear]. My father had a friend in Teschen, T-E-S-C-H-E-N who also had a mill, a certain Mr. Eisen, E-I-S-E-N. I looked him up one day, and he told me that this friend of his was with my father in jail in Lemberg. And this man supposedly had a bloody handkerchief which my father supposedly gave him after a beating as a souvenir. I can't imagine my father giving somebody a bloody handkerchief after a beating as a memento but this story really poisoned my life. [Vera is crying}

EM: Well thank you very much. This concludes the interview with Mrs. Vera Otelsberg, born Neuman who was born in Bielitz, Poland and now lives in Montevideo, Uruguay.

[Tape three, side one ended, interview ended]