

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

NINA FRISCH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Judith S. Finkel
Date: April 22, 1985

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Melrose Park, PA 19027

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NF - Nina Frisch¹ [interviewee]
JF - Judith S. Finkel [interviewer]
ED - Ethel Dannenberg
Date: April 22, 1985²

Tape one, side one:

JF: Gathering of the Jewish Holocaust Survivors. And I'm Judy Finkel. And I have just interviewed Ethel Dannenberg, who was Nina Frisch's mother...

NF: Mother. Stepmother.

JF: Stepmother, actually. And Nina's going to tell her story, too. Hello, Nina, and how are you?

NF: Hello, Judy. Fine, thank you.

JF: O.K. Let's--[tape off then on] O.K., tell me when you were little, and let's begin with your time. What do you remember, and how old were you in the early '30s and...

NF: I was born in 19--July 25th, 1935. So when the war broke out I was four. I was an only child. I was a very pampered child.

JF: You lived in Poland?

NF: I lived in Stanislaw, Poland [Stanislawów-Polish], with my mother and my father. And my grandparents lived with us too, my mother's parents. Since I was an only child I was a very pampered child. My father was quite well off, and act--whatever I wanted, I actually could have--there. I remember in Poland bananas were a delicacy. But I always had a banana. Various things, you know, I remember being very spoiled. I didn't like to eat, and I remember running around in the garden and my mother running after me with a spoon and a--the old, you know, Jewish mothers, where the child had to eat. Otherwise you would starve. And as a result I was a plump child.

JF: Do you...

NF: The reason why I'm saying that I was a very pampered child, because, what I went through later, just shows you that a person can get used to everything. That's why I get very angry now at people when they say, "I have to have that or I have to have the other thing." How I started being such a pampered little girl and then having all the deprivations, and somehow you get used to it.

JF: Do you remember your life? Were you very Jewish when you were growing up? Did you...

NF: Yes, my parents were very orthodox, and my mother was very religious. I remember they would--my grandparents were speaking Yiddish. I didn't know Yiddish. I spoke Polish. And I would answer in Polish.

¹née Dannenberg.

²Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.

JF: Do you remember, when's the first time you really knew you were Jewish? Do you remember that?

NF: Oh, it was, I mean it was a...

JF: You're always...

NF: It wasn't--it was brought--it wasn't a--told, today, "You are Jewish." It was just, you were brought up, and you did, you know...

ED: Jewish [unclear].

JF: Do you remember when, when was the first time that you remember, it might be that it was, it wasn't so good to be Jewish? Do you remember that?

NF: I guess it must have been 1939, because I remember my father coming home and telling my mother that, "Hitler is coming. Hitler is coming."

ED: [unclear]

NF: Maybe '40, '4--I don't know dates. I'm very bad...

JF: You don't know, right...

NF: In dates.

JF: That's O.K. We don't need the date.

NF: But I remember, oh, with that terrible frightened face he came in and told my mother that it's bad. "Hitler's coming in." And I really didn't know what Hitler was, but I saw my father was scared, my mother was scared. You know, I was scared too.

JF: So you remember that that's the first sign. You remember the...

NF: Yes.

JF: That everybody was scared that Hitler was coming.

NF: And from then on, I remember having this terrible fear, always a fear in the pit of my stomach. And always this feeling that, you know how when you're scared you have to go to the bathroom? And this constant feeling that I always had to go to the bathroom, because I was always scared. That terrible knot in your stomach that you...

JF: That you...

NF: Had.

JF: Yeah. Tell me, what hap--what was the first thing that you remember that, you know, Hitler did, or that happened to you?

NF: I remember that, we lived a little out of town or something. And I remember what my mother was talking about, that first action. An action was when they--a pogrom...

ED: Riot.

NF: A riot, a pogrom, or whatever. And when they said that all the Jews had to put on whatever gold they had and all the furs or something that they had, just get it all ready and wait and they'll come for you. And like idiots we stood and we waited and we waited. Because at that time, like my mother mentioned before, we just didn't believe.

JF: You didn't, yeah, so...

NF: We didn't believe that, I mean...

JF: You remember standing out there? You remem-...

NF: No, in the house.
JF: In the house.
NF: We were waiting in the house, yes.
ED: Living with--I was living in Ulat.
JF: In the...
ED: In the ghetto there [unclear].
JF: Yes. [tape off then on] O.K., so you...
NF: So we waited, and because I didn't, we always thought, you know, if we do what we're told, they would have no cause to harm us and we would stay alive. Nobody imagined that for no reason at all they would just decide to kill you, just because you were born a Jew.
JF: Were you wearing the arm bands by then?
NF: Well, I was a little girl...
JF: Girl.
NF: I was only...
JF: So you didn't have to.
NF: Yeah.
ED: No, she didn't have to.
NF: But I remember I had a beautiful fur coat. I had that on, and I had--little girls used to wear earrings, gold earrings with little blue stones in them. And I had those on. Little things you remember. And we waited and we waited. And nobody ever came, because we lived out of town. And then when, towards evening I guess my father must have gone out, and he heard what had taken place, that all the Jews were gathered on a cemetery and 12,000 Jews were killed at that, in that time.
ED: 20,000 [unclear].
JF: And you were--and you just heard that story from your father.
NF: Yes. We were never taken. We were never taken, that day.
JF: You--O.K., yeah, right. O.K., so then what happened after that? Do you remember any--what happened after that?
NF: Well I guess we, then [unclear]...
JF: Do you remember things that happened? Do you remember the Nazis doing things? Do you remember seeing them around?
NF: Well, then we had to move into the ghetto.
JF: Oh, even when you were out of town you were...
NF: Yes.
JF: O.K., you had to give up your house.
NF: Yeah, give up our house. How, whether they were given houses or whether you had to go find your own, I don't know. If you had to find your own, I don't. Certain things I don't know.
JF: Sure. How old were you then at that time?

NF: Five? Six?
JF: Six, yeah, yes.
ED: She was...
JF: Do you remember what...
ED: Six.
JF: Do you remember how you felt that you had to give up your house? Were you just scared or...
NF: Well, I--to tell you the truth, when you...
ED: [whispering] She was so smart.
NF: As long as I had my parents, you know, a child does what the child is told. And you have your security. Your mother and father are there. If they gonna move here, fine, move there. What's the difference?
JF: It didn't...
NF: The implication didn't hit me, because I just was too young to understand.
JF: Yeah.
NF: Yet we were smart. Like mother says, we were smart. We knew enough, you know, one word or one look we knew to quickly get dressed and, you know.
JF: Do you remember your parents being very unhappy about moving or scared about moving to the ghetto?
NF: Not unhappy. I mean, of course unhappy.
JF: Yeah.
NF: But I'm just saying you didn't give it any thought. That's what they told you to do. You tried to survive in every way possible. And you just, the thinking was if you would do what you are told, you will--they can't harm you if you do what you're told.
JF: And that was, that was...
NF: That was mainly the thinking. I--the rational way of thinking was that if you follow orders, you work hard, you'll be left alive. And nobody thought that they would just do these sadistic things, you know.
ED: Just for a little money.
JF: So when you got to the ghetto, what do you remember about the ghetto?
NF: My father used to work on--outside the ghetto. Some people were allowed to go, and, I don't know where. He was working where?
ED: He had a...
NF: Oh he had one of--a permission slip that he was allowed to go to the ghetto and...
JF: To go...
NF: I used to go with him sometimes.
JF: To go out? Or in?
NF: Yes.
ED: Yeah, later on. Not in the beginning.

NF: And, at the ghetto, you couldn't just go in and out out of, wherever you wanted. There were certain gates. At those gates, when, in the morning when you left they stood there, and when you came back they, the Gestapo, stood there with big German Shepherd dogs. And the dogs, when you came back, would sniff you and, to see if you had brought in any food or anything that you weren't supposed to. And sometimes, at the will of the Gestapo, the, he gave an order to the dog to attack somebody. Just for no reason at all. Just for sport. He had to just touch the person on the shoulder and the dog would attack them.

JF: Wow. Did you watch...

ED: [unclear].

NF: I, yeah.

JF: Did you watch?

NF: I watched that. And for the longest time I was petrified of dogs.

JF: I can imagine.

ED: Tell about the muff.

JF: I can imagine.

NF: Yeah, so, I remember it was wintertime and I had a muff, you know, they used to wear muffs? Where you...

JF: Yeah.

NF: I don't, you put your hands in to keep them...

JF: Yeah.

NF: Warm? In there I--my mother put a little butter in a little cream box, to bring it into the ghetto so we should have a little butter. And I was carrying, and they gave it to me as a child. They thought the child they wouldn't...

JF: Touch.

NF: They wouldn't touch, and they wouldn't search, they wouldn't search. And, as we came to the ghetto, I saw that the dogs were there. And my knees like buckled. And I was only around five or six. My knees buckled. I knew, because the dog is gonna smell that butter. Somehow he didn't. I don't know how he didn't, but I was petrified. I was so scared.

ED: You didn't; she didn't look scared.

JF: When you looked at those dogs.

NF: Yeah, yeah, and I, I like gave it to somebody else. I don't remember. That I do--all I remember just being...

JF: You don't remember.

NF: Very frightened. My father told me later that I gave it to a friend. I just gave it to her. My father remembered all different dates and happenings and, I don't.

JF: Yeah, well we don't [unclear].

ED: [unclear].

JF: What was your life like in the ghetto?

ED: [unclear].
JF: What did you do in the ghetto? Do you remember?
NF: Very vaguely. I remember having a little girlfriend and then one day she disappeared. And every day somebody else would disappear and...
JF: Do you remember asking where they went?
NF: Yes. They, at first I think they tried to mask it. She went away. And then later they just said, "She was killed." I mean, you, you became hardened, even as a child. You became very hardened. And the animal instinct to survive, even in a five--six-year-old..

ED: [unclear].
NF: Came out.
ED: [unclear].
JF: And that, that was...
NF: Even at that point. You were just, the feeling, unfortunately, oh, I don't know if it's unfortunately. It's a--I was told now that this is a normal reaction. The reaction was, they took this one? Well, they didn't take me. I'm sorry, but I'm still alive. What can I do?

ED: Animals, animals, we were animals.
NF: Yeah, but, the will to survive, and the animal instinct to survive came out very strongly.
JF: Yeah, right.
NF: But, it didn't come out immediately. You were so, you were driven to that point after a while. But the...
JF: Do you remember being hungry and sick or anything when...
NF: I--my father somehow always provided for me. I personally never remember being hungry.
JF: The whole time in the ghetto you didn't...
NF: Somehow I...
ED: Because he was working. He was...
NF: He was working...
ED: Working.
NF: On the outside. And as I said, I was the only child.
ED: He knew a lot of Gentiles.
NF: And, I, I wasn't full, but I always, truthfully I never remember being, oh, I remember being hungry, but not to the point of being starved.
JF: Right. I understand.
NF: Yeah.
JF: Do you remember, you were with them, with your mother and your father and you...
NF: Yes.

JF: The whole time in the ghetto?
NF: In the ghetto.
ED: In the ghetto.
NF: Then I--my father befriended a Polak that took me, because things were getting very bad for me.
ED: No, after, the woods.
JF: What do you mean they were getting...
NF: Well that's what...
JF: What do you mean they were getting very bad? What was happening?
NF: Well, they were closing the ghetto. They were making it smaller and smaller, and...
JF: Making it...
NF: Concentrating it, the Jews...
JF: All [unclear].
NF: Into smaller areas. And we st--and the grapevine had it that eventually the ghetto will be closed. And the thought was just to save the children, save the children. So, he sent me and my mother to the woods. We had woods in Poland that I have--I've lived in America now since 1949 and I've traveled, and I have never seen woods like that, since then. Such thick woods like, like the woods in the fairy tales that the little girls get lost and that type of thing! That's the type of woods we had. And we were, my mother and I went--I mean this Pole, Ukrainian man, or Polish man?
ED: Ukraine.
NF: Ukrainian, took us to the woods. And there, we were there with other people and we cleared a clearing I guess, and we were all together. And my father was with us too. Later on...
ED: [whispering] It's, it's not the way it was.
NF: No? Well I can just tell you my recollection.
JF: Yeah, tell yours, and then you...
ED: All of us first went to the woods and we were hidden by a Polish family...
NF: Well, I want to make it within the hour.
JF: O.K., tell, yeah, go tell your story.
NF: And I remember one time we were by [unclear]. And my father and a, the other men, went some place. Where did they go, I don't know. They, and the women and children were left. And we were sort of in a valley. And all of a sudden the Germans were on top of a hill. Actually, I understood later on, I was told that they weren't looking for Jews, they were looking for partisans.
JF: Oh.
NF: And, my moth--we started running. And...
JF: And that was you and your mother?

NF: Mother. And we were running for three days. And the woods had mainly pine trees. And somehow in the, in the flight, I lost my shoes. And I ran and I ran and, as I said, for three days we wandered, and my feet were bleeding and scarred because the pine needles were hurting them. Finally after three days we saw a peasant. And we thought, that's it. He's going to kill us. But, apparently he was a kindhearted person and he didn't. How, I don't remember how many people we were, but mainly women and children. He gave us something to eat, he made some kind of soup. And I remember I couldn't eat because from--no, prior to that the rea--how we survived, in the woods they had hazel nuts. And the hazel nuts grow in such green pods. And those, the pods retain moisture. So we would chew on the pods to get a little moisture and then crack the nuts open and eat the nuts. And that's how we survived, and that's all we had to eat for three days.

ED: And you were praying that God should help me, my mama. Mother wasn't gone yet.

NF: No, my, no then my mother was still with us...

JF: Yeah.

NF: Then too. And, when that man made us something to eat, I couldn't eat because the, my palate, my upper palate was swollen apparently. I couldn't even eat. Finally we were reunited with my father again.

JF: You found your father? You...

NF: Yeah, somehow, don't ask me how.

ED: Yeah, they...

NF: We were reunited. And, I was stuck in, in the corner soaking my feet because my feet were very swollen and cut open. And, all of a sudden the Germans attacked again. And, in the group...

JF: Where were you then?

NF: In the woods. Still in the woods.

ED: You were in the [unclear].

JF: In the woods.

NF: Still in the woods. And my father grabbed my hand and he, you know, we started running. And somehow I had gotten another pair of shoes. I don't know how.

JF: Right.

NF: And I grabbed those shoes and I held onto those shoes for dear life because I knew at this point I wouldn't get another pair. And in the confusion, my mother must have gotten lost, or whatever, but that's when she was shot.

JF: And you never saw...

NF: Then we ran again. We--but that--I was running now with my father and holding onto him and holding onto those shoes.

JF: And your mother you just...

NF: And, we was running, you know, it's like the...

JF: Yeah, you just, you just...

NF: Like, like let's say somebody would yell "fire!" You run in all directions.
JF: You run. Yeah, so you just didn't see your mo-...
NF: And I kept looking, where's mother? Where's mother? And we just kept running. And we assumed she was behind us, but apparently she wasn't.
JF: And she wasn't.
NF: And then after it quieted down, we came back to the same area. My father did see my mother, right? He saw her. But I didn't.
ED: Yes.
NF: And, didn't they bury her?
ED: Yeah. They couldn't, they couldn't put her in a grave because she was swollen. Her body was hot. And after...
NF: How long after...
ED: Three days...
NF: After three days they found her.
JF: Oh!
ED: So they just took soil and...
JF: And covered her.
NF: And, her remains were decomposed from the heat. My father told me all that. And they just covered her with earth. And I never--they never let me see her.
JF: And you were seven years old?
ED: No, not [unclear].
JF: Eight?
NF: Yeah, [unclear].
ED: [unclear].
NF: Eight, eight.
JF: Eight, yeah.
ED: Yeah.
NF: That was 1943.
ED: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
NF: At that point, my father knew that a brother-in-law of his was hidden by a Polish man, this Staszek Jaczkowski. He was a bachelor.
ED: Not far from the Gestapo.
NF: He lived in a house not far from the Gestapo. And somehow, it started whereby he had a very good friend, and when the war started he hid his friend. And his friend had a fiancé. So he said, "Hide my fiancé too." So he hid her too. And then, this Staszek, he knew if the Germans would catch him with one Jew or three Jews or thirty Jews, he would get killed the same way. So, slowly people started coming and it wound up we were 31 Jews there which was completely unheard of.
JF: In his house?
NF: On the, on the, in the cellar, like a underground.

ED: [unclear].

NF: And it was a palace in comparison. We--miracles happened. We--it seems that they were trying to get water. We had pumps in Europe. And for years prior to that they never could find water. They struck, and they found water. And we had a pump.

ED: In the cellar.

NF: We had a pump with running water. The house was located near the Gestapo. And, and they never heard us. And...

JF: And there were 31 Jews living there!?

NF: Yes. And...

ED: Some were eighteen months, some were [unclear] the end...

NF: Not everybody was there the same length of time. So anyway, I came first to the, that hiding place. And I was very sad and quiet and they said, "Why?" I said, "I lost my mother, now I left my father in the woods. I would like to at least have my father here." So they brought my father.

JF: They could find him?

NF: Yes, I--yeah...

ED: Yeah, they, they had a...

NF: A connections. So they brought my father. So now I was with my father and he, you know, we survived together. But to get back to the hiding place. How, don't ask me how, somehow they connected the electricity directly to the power house.

ED: From the cable.

NF: From, somehow they tapped into the cable. And, we had electricity. And we had a luxury. We had a radio, a shortwave radio...

JF: Oh! So...

NF: Whereby we could hear what was going on in the world.

ED: And ten, ten electric plates.

JF: Oh!

NF: So we were really like in a palace.

JF: When, and that was in 1943?

NF: Right in September 1943 till July 1945.

JF: You stayed in...

ED: '44.

NF: Eh, '44. I'm sorry, '44.

JF: You stayed there the whole time...

NF: Yes.

JF: In the basement, in the cellar.

NF: Yes.

ED: Yes.

JF: Did you ever come out?

NF: Yes. Not come out, but we would, since, he was afraid in case people will come during the day into the house and hear us, so we would sleep during the day, and be up at night. And it really was a miracle, because even at night we tried to, I mean, during the day, I'm sorry, during the night when we were up we tried to be quiet, but still you were--you had to make some sort of noise...

JF: Sure...

ED: [unclear].

NF: And we were so close to the, we were so close to the Gestapo, and yet they never heard us. I want to cut short because I want to cover everything.

JF: Go ahead. You've got enough time. You just started. You're just on one side.

NF: And, my birthday as, I said, was July 25th. And I remember they, somehow he got a white tablecloth, a damask table cloth, and they dyed it blue. And one of the ladies sewed a little dress for me. And when we were liberated, soon, that day, I think it was July 26th I think, I came out of, with my father, and the, my new dress.

ED: Dress!

JF: Oh, how wonderful!

NF: You can't im--a little girl always likes a new dress.

JF: Yes.

NF: But especially at that time, I had my little, new little dress.

ED: Tell the lady how your father...

NF: And my father came out with a torn pair of pants.

ED: The pants was in sheets. [unclear] [tape off and on].

NF: And my father had, from sitting all the time, his pants were very worn, and he had a hole on his backside. So, another man who was a tai--a shoemaker, sewed the vest on the back of his pants. And he had like pockets on the back of his pants. And that's how we walked out from that bunker.

ED: In galoshes.

JF: But you...

NF: I could go into detail how he was dressed but that's...

JF: Yes.

NF: Unimportant. And we were liberated by the Russians. At first we thought the Russians would be very good to us.

JF: And that was in 1944?

NF: '44. We soon found out that they weren't that delighted with us. Because at first we would say, you know, we were survive; Jewish survivors, and after a while we no longer told them that we were Jewish survivors, because they--quite a few people got killed from them later on.

ED: Jewish.

NF: But, nevertheless, they were our liberators.

JF: In the house, in the bunker that you lived in, you lived in the cellar, what did you do there at night? Like, you said you slept all day. What, what...

NF: Oh.

JF: Was the life like?

NF: Yeah. My--I had an aunt. She now lives in Israel. Her name is Blima Fink. She was a very well read lady. And she had a daughter, and she was three years younger than I; Rina, her name is. And she, I remember for hours, she would tell us stories of books that she had read, and recite poems that she had learned. And...

JF: Was that, did you know how to read then?

NF: No, I was...

JF: Had you, no, you didn't...

NF: No, I had never gone to school yet.

JF: You weren't allowed to go to school in the ghetto.

ED: No.

NF: Well, I, when the war broke, no, I was too young.

JF: You were too young. And were you allowed anyway when you lived in the ghetto?

NF: There was no schools.

JF: There was no schools.

NF: No schools. But I was too young. When the war ended, I was nine years of age. At that point I started going to school.

JF: So you...

NF: And, my father met who's now my mother, Ethel Dannenberg, and she had a...

ED: Ethel Schweitzberg.

NF: Ethel Schweitzberg at the time. And she had a daughter, Sylvia. And we are the same age. And we really...

JF: Where did--you met in, in...

NF: In Stanislaw. They're, we're all from Stanislaw.

JF: You were all from Stanislaw, so...

NF: And they knew each other before the war, right? As acquaintances.

JF: Right.

NF: And so, we, the girls, we decided, especially my sister, that they should get married so we should be together. [chuckles]

JF: And was this after the war?

NF: 1945.

JF: And you were back? Did you go back to Stanislaw [Polish, Stanislawów]?

NF: Stanislawów, yes. Because in order to come to America, you had to first be in Stanislawów, then go through Germany, and from Germany to come to America. You couldn't go directly from Poland.

JF: I see. So you came...

NF: So they got, they were married, and we became sisters. And to this day, we are the closest of girlfriends, plus sisters.

JF: Wonderful, wonderful.

NF: And, we started going to school at that time. From now on I'll be talking "we" because it was mainly my sister and I. We started leading normal lives, sort of normal lives.

JF: How--let--we have to go back a little bit more to, to the, your life when you were in the bunker. That, that kind of life. You heard the stories. Nobody could go out to work. Nobody could do anything.

NF: No, no, we weren't...

JF: You were sc-...

ED: Work! [chuckles]

JF: What?

NF: We c--like, you know, oh, here they are. Like a, normal people at times. There were quarrels at times. Oh, and, a woman became pregnant and had a baby.

JF: In the bunk--in the cellar?

NF: One baby and it--of course the baby died, because it was, I think born prematurely. And at that time there was still such modesty. Children didn't talk about these things, and so I--what I could piece together at that time. And then, the day when we were liberated, a baby was born.

ED: Not the day. A few days later.

NF: A few days later a baby was born.

JF: Was born.

NF: And that child is now, he's a doctor, right?

ED: He's a doctor, yeah.

NF: Yes.

ED: He's a gynecologist. He was a officer in the army in...

JF: Do you remember your being very sad? Do you remember your father, you said you heard the radio. What did you remember hearing on the radio then?

NF: Well, they, the men would congregate around the radio and they would, if there would be a victory they would cheer. And if they would have a setback everybody would get very sad. But, being a child, I wou--of course I was scared and I knew, but somehow as long as I had my father, I had a sense of security, like a security blanket.

ED: And aunts.

JF: Yeah.

NF: And my aunt was there, and my cousins were there.

JF: Yeah.

NF: So, to me, it was, you know, they couldn't harm me because I had my father with me.

JF: You had your father there. Were people getting killed then that you knew?
Like, every...

NF: Oh every day. Oh, every day another bunker would be discovered. And that
st[unclear]...

JF: When you call it the bunkers, do you mean like hiding places?

NF: Yes, hiding places.

JF: Hiding, O.K.

NF: And that Staszek was such a saint, that, if he would hear of a bunker being
discovered, he didn't want to let us know, we shouldn't be frightened. A funny observation
too...

ED: [unclear] say, one day he changed. He want to... [tape off then on]

NF: That I remember.

JF: O.K.

NF: Every day, different bunkers were being discovered. But Staszek, this
Staszek, who to me was a s--like a savior, that was the point I was trying to bring out. I
always thought that he was a very big, tall man. After the war, when I, actually in America
when I met him, I realized he's really a very short man. But to me, besides being a child,
to me, him being my savior, to me he looked very, very tall. Anyway, he treated us like
human beings, where he would still call us "Gentlemen," "Ladies and Gentlemen," which
was unheard of, because most of the other Polaks, they, they--it was, you were being treated
worse than dirt. And he came down one day and he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I have to
tell you that more and more bunkers are being discovered. And, somehow you'll have to
find your way out, because I, I'm too young to die." So, some people had other connections
so they, they decided maybe they'll go elsewhere. But my father had actually nobody. He
says, "I have no place to go. You know what? Af--if everybody leaves, just close the
opening. My daughter and I, we'll live, we'll stay here and we'll die. Do we have to die
elsewhere? We'll die here." But then Staszek, the, the...

JF: You remember your father saying this? You...

NF: I was told.

JF: Told.

NF: I was told. As I said, I was too young. But, he, being the saint that he was,
he couldn't do it. And he said, "But the only thing, we have to make some kind of provision
in case we are discovered." So, they built a tunnel through the canals. We had, in Europe
there were, where the sewers, sewage lines, they had those huge canals that you could walk-
-stoop, but you could walk--and like in, in the Warsaw...

ED: Here are the same. Here is the same.

JF: Oh, yeah.

NF: I don't know, here, I don't know...

ED: Yeah, same thing.

NF: If they have that.

ED: It goes down and up.

NF: And, how they got rid of the earth I don't remember. I remember them shoveling and it was like an assembly line. And they--the dirt, digging and then shoveling the, like an assembly line of--the dirt was being given from hand to hand and where it was disposed...

ED: It was a hard job.

NF: Where it was disposed of, don't ask me. I don't know.

ED: I know, O.K.

NF: Cert--I can only give you my impressions as a child.

JF: Right, right, right.

NF: Certain things I remember. Certain things I just don't remember.

JF: Sure.

NF: Where do you want me to go from here?

JF: So, did you ever use the tunnels? Did you ever go in the tunnels?

NF: No, we never had to, because then was the liberation. We didn't have to use the tunnels.

JF: You didn't?

ED: No, no, we...

NF: No, we never used the tunnels.

JF: No. O.K. He said, "In case..."

NF: Yes, in case we would have to.

JF: In case.

NF: We, at least we had some form of escape.

JF: So, you all stayed together...

NF: In, yes.

JF: Then in, in...

NF: We stayed together.

JF: The bunkers.

NF: Yes.

JF: Everybody.

NF: Yes.

JF: O.K. Then when you were liberated you were still with your father.

NF: Yes, I was with my father.

JF: And that was your--O.K. It's time now to stand up, heh, to turn it over. [tape off then on]

NF: I remember the, even under the very harshest conditions people tried to make life as bearable as possible. That was the most, and people can't understand it. You tried to, tried to lead as normal a life as possible, which was impossible.

JF: Which was, yeah.

ED: You know, the children were playing.

NF: And children were playing, and...
JF: But you couldn't go outside in the bunkers, so where did...
NF: Oh, you're talking about the bunker.
JF: Yeah, where could you play?
NF: We, you know, we would have, it was like one big room.
ED: One room [unclear].

Tape one, side two:

NF: Being confined in a, such a small place for such a length of time, of course there were disagreements. Fights, eh...

JF: Who cooked there?

NF: Who cooked? Every family sort of cooked for themselves. My father cooked for me. I remember he washed me, and one time I--they had electric, hot plates, so where you could warm up the hot water. And he washed my hair and he put the, the water was too hot. And he burned my head. I mean, these are silly remembrances that you...

JF: Yeah, but you...

NF: Remember.

JF: Right.

NF: And, my father was not, my father was the type where he never did that before. I mean, a man just didn't do these things. So, that was women's work. And yet, he took care of me. He washed me. He tried to cook for me a little bit. And I was a little girl, so there was another man, Moishe Feuer his name is, he was a baker, and he cooked for me.

JF: Were you, were there a lot of children out of the 31?

NF: There was my sister, heh, I'm sorry...

JF: Not...

NF: My cousin, who was three years younger. Then there was another little boy...

ED: Maybe five, six years?

NF: I think he was five. What was his name?

ED: I think five.

NF: I forgot his name.

JF: And how many, and that's all, and the rest were older?

NF: Older adults, yes.

JF: And they were, and mostly, were they men and women and...

NF: Were men and women, yes.

JF: And they were...

NF: Families, such...

JF: Anybody old? Any of the old?

NF: Real old? No, because the old ones they took right away.

JF: They...

NF: You know, they killed.

ED: She couldn't, she couldn't...

NF: Though, it's not important.

JF: Yeah.

NF: The old ones, no.

JF: And when you were in the bunker you were, how many, a year, was that like a year you were that way?

NF: I was there nine months.

JF: Nine months.

NF: Nine, ten months. Ten months.

JF: Ten months in the bunker.

ED: It was ages.

NF: It seemed like ages. You know, I really didn't know dates. But just recently, recently, I wish I would have asked my father more, because unfortunately he died three years ago. In fact, tomorrow, tomorrow's his *yahrzeit*.

JF: Oh.

NF: And, just recently, or before he died, I asked him for certain dates, because I was very bad with dates.

JF: Sure.

NF: To a child, a day was an eternity. Or a day was five minutes. You know, it depends.

JF: Yeah.

NF: So, dates I didn't remember. But it seems like I was there an awfully long time.

JF: In the bunker.

NF: In the bunker, yes.

JF: Yeah.

NF: But it was only ten months really.

ED: She was the oldest.

NF: Yeah, and I was the oldest. I was always told, "Well you should know better." But I myself was a child.

JF: You were the oldest child in the bunker?

NF: Yes, yes.

JF: I see.

NF: So I, and that little boy who was the youngest...

ED: She could not answer.

NF: To me, it seemed like he, he was able to get away with murder because he was the youngest. And I was always jealous that, why could he do it? And they kept telling me, "Well, you're the oldest."

JF: Could you bathe? Did you have a place to bathe?

NF: Well, my, no, we would take a...

JF: Or, toilets?

NF: A toilet? We, yeah, we did have a toilet. We did have a toilet. But we would-I guess a sponge bath or something. You would wash yourself. We tried, that was the main

thing, we tried to keep very clean. As I said, you tried to have it as normal conditions as possible. You always tried to keep yourself clean and [pause]

JF: O.K.

NF: I don't know.

JF: Have you told this story? Do you tell this story a lot?

NF: I ca--now I do. I tell it to, I have two sons. They're both doctors now. And one is married and has children of his own. And I'm very proud because they are really very much interested in the survivors and their histories. My impression is maybe that's why I was left alive, so I should have children and maybe, from their children something, some body important, somebody who will discover the cancer cure, or whatever, will come out of that. Because, you know, I read just yesterday that most people feel: why was I left alive? And that, I feel the same way.

JF: You do?

NF: Why was I left alive? So many other...

ED: [unclear].

NF: Many other people got killed. Why was I left alive? Who knows? You can't question; many things you can't question. But from then on, after the liberation I sort of started having a normal life, normal as possible. We went to a--we lived in Germany for three years.

JF: And that was with your stepmother now, and...

ED: Yes, yes.

JF: And this was [unclear].

NF: And then...

ED: We went in Stanislaw.

JF: You went back to, you went to Germany? How did you feel about...

NF: Well, in order to...

JF: Going to Germany?

ED: No, to get out we had to go to Germany.

JF: Go to Germany.

NF: It was not a, our choice.

ED: In the American Zone.

JF: Oh.

NF: We, in order to come to America, you had to first come to Germany, on American Zone.

ED: We wanted to go to Israel, but they didn't let us.

JF: They didn't.

NF: And my mother had two brothers in America, and they sent affidavits and that's why we came to America. And we settled in Newark, New Jersey at the time. And my sister and I started school right away and we became young American girls. And we

came in May of '49. And we started eighth grade--oh, prior to that, while we were living in those three years in Germany, we were...

ED: They were schooled.

NF: We had a professor teaching us, because we were so far behind. And he was, he taught us, in the three years he brought us up to date whereby when we came to America, we were able to start eighth grade.

JF: Oh my.

NF: No, no, we started seventh grade and...

ED: And then summer school.

NF: Yeah, and so we started, we went into seventh grade, and when school finished, that summer we went to summer school, and in September we started eighth grade. And from then on we went normal, you know, we went through high school and graduated high school. And...

JF: When did you first start telling this story, your Holocaust experience? When, is...

NF: Well I never denied it.

JF: You always...

NF: I always talked...

JF: Never were in denial, no.

NF: I always talked about it.

ED: There are people; no, I don't want make [unclear].

NF: You know, I get very annoyed at some people when they say, "I can't take this! I can't take this!" Somehow they took it while they were going through it. Why not take it now?

JF: It's important...

NF: I always try to stress to my children, you know, you, in the way the children have it a little more difficult because of certain, more responsibilities placed on their shoulders because they are sort of special. But we have proven that they are special, because from the survivors, the majority of the children are professionals. They are doctors, lawyers, engineers, dentists. It's amazing, because, well, the Jewish people have always stressed education...

JF: Always, always.

NF: But we, even more so. We, that they have to...

ED: All of the children are professionals everyone.

NF: They have, we have...

ED: From everybody.

NF: They have to make something. They have to, sort of have to make up for lost time, for the things that maybe we could have been but we were denied.

ED: We were earning \$.75 an hour when we came here, to the United States. My husband's \$.75 and my \$.75. And we paid \$80 rent. Can you imagine [chuckling] how many dollars...

NF: And yet the apartment was beautifully fixed up.

JF: Yeah, yeah.

NF: And, where was I? [tape off then on] The only thing, you know, as a child I didn't give it much thought, but now when I think back, I just can't understand how one person could act against another person in such a terrible, terrible way. Now that I'm a mother myself, and thank God, a grandmother now too, how could a man that was a father kill a child, and in such a way? Do you know that many times, when they would kill babies, they would save, a bullet costs a penny or a *pfennig*, you know...

ED: To the building.

NF: So they would, not so much to the building. They would, let's say if they would gather Jews on a cemetery. So rather than kill that infant, they would take it by the legs and hit the head against the tombstone and then...

JF: Do you remember seeing that?

NF: Some, yeah.

JF: You remember seeing that.

NF: And they would say, you know, that it costs too much. Now how, when I think about it, how could a person...

ED: A bullet costs five cents. It's too...

NF: Too much money to...

ED: Costly. So this way...

NF: But I can't understand...

ED: In a life...

NF: I can't understand...

ED: How many people alive?

NF: How can they, how could, you know, even the worst outlaw you see in the movies, the worst outlaw or something has compassion for a child. How could a person that was a father, and some of them had their families with them. And they would go home at night to their families, to their own children.

JF: The Gestapo, you're saying.

NF: Yes.

JF: Yeah.

NF: How could they all day long kill Jewish children then they go home and play with their children? I just don't understand that.

JF: Do you remember thinking about that then, or you just...

NF: At that time, no.

JF: You didn't. You were just...

NF: I was just too young.

JF: Yeah.

NF: But now, and not only now but when I started understanding these things, these things were coming to my mind. I remember when we left the--right after the liberation, and I was six? No, how old was I?

ED: You were about then eight.

Man's voice: You were eight?

NF: No, what am I saying? Eight, nine, nine. I was nine.

Man's voice: Nine? Nine, right.

NF: At that time, for the first few days I had such hatred I could kill any, any German that I knew. But, fortunately my mind was a healthy mind and that disappeared very quickly. And, but...

JF: How did you meet up with this Staszek?

NF: Staszek?

JF: Staszek.

NF: He came to America in 1964. I think it was '64 he came to America. He now lives in Miami, in Florida. And he--they just--the reason why he's so rare--because they just didn't have that many people that...

JF: No.

NF: Saved.

ED: He was in Yad Vashem too.

NF: He is, yeah.

ED: They honored him.

NF: They honored him in Yad Vashem.

ED: Oh, there is a tree. And, [unclear].

NF: He has a tree in the Avenue of the Righteous. He has a tree. And he was just. Because, the Germans themselves couldn't have done it without the help of the Polaks and the Ukrainians. And to find a Polish man who was such a saint was such an unusual thing. See, the Germans when they came in, they didn't know, not everybody looked Jewish with a hooked nose and the *paeos* and the *tefillin* or whatever, you know. And the, the *tsitsis* hanging out.

ED: You go to Germany, you will see women and the...

NF: They didn't...

ED: So my husband used to say, "Look! They look like Jewish!"

NF: But you see, they, not everybody looked Jewish. And they wouldn't have known. But your neighbors knew.

JF: So they told.

NF: They would tell. They--it was a sport, I guess, to say like, like, for instance now if you see a rat, you say, "Oh, there's a rat!" That's how they, "There's a Jew! Kill him! Kill him!" That's how...

ED: They gave us out.

NF: They really betrayed us more than anybody else. Your own, your own people. That's why I'm stressing the point that to find a man that hid 31 Jews is such a rarity that...

JF: Sure.

NF: It's unusual.

ED: Luckily that he didn't have his wife that he has now! [chuckling]

NF: No, the problem is that, [chuckling] strike that! [laughing] [tape off then on] is that he could only do it because he was a single man. Had he had a family...

ED: He said, he said himself. [tape off then on]

JF: How do you feel about your childhood now?

NF: I didn't have a childhood. I never did. I was always older than my years. As I told you, when we started high school we became sort of normal young ladies. But somehow we could never date the young boys our own age, because they were always much younger than we were. Because what we went through, my sister and I, we always felt that they were just not mature enough. So, we had no childhood. We were little old ladies right away. And the memories of childhood, I, I, of just being scared all the time and the fear, the constant fear. But, when you have a healthy mind, you sort of adjust to a life, and a normal life and, thank God I did.

JF: Thank God you did. And thank you for telling your story too.