HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MARY CITTRONS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Gerry Schneeberg
Date: November 1, 1995

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MC - Mary Cittrons[1] [interviewee]
GS - Gerry Schneeberg [interviewer]
Date: November 1, 1995

Tape one, side one:

GS: This is Gerry Schneeberg recording on November 1, 1995, an interview with Mary Cittrons.

MC: You see my life in Poland as a young girl was very antisemitic.

GS: Let's begin please when you were born, and I have it on the record -- but tell us here -- the place and the date when you were born.

MC: Well, I was born in Brzezany and that was September the 13th, 1919.

GS: And can you tell me a little about your family and your life when you were a child?

MC: Yes. My parents were in business. They had a shoe store and, you know, all kind of men's accessories like hats and shirts and ties and they were, you know, we were a middle class family. And I, myself, I was always very like happy-go-lucky. I didn't worry about things too much. But all my worries came in the minute the war broke out.

GS: And Mary, I really am anxious to know what it was like for you growing up in your town with your family, brothers, sisters, friends?

MC: No, I just, at the time I just had one sister.

GS: Was she older or younger?

MC: No, she was younger. She was three years younger. And we got along pretty good. And you see, we had a house. We owned a house on the outskirts of the city, and it was a very nice house. And it was, I even remember the number of the house and the street. Do you want me to tell?

GS: Of course.

MC: That was Słowackiego *osiemnaście*[2], Słowackiego 18. And we had a big garden. And my father always used to garden. Vegetables, we had a lot of fruit trees. And in the back of the garden was, a river was flowing. It was really a very nice house. And. . .

GS: Were you able to swim in that river?

MC: No, no.

GS: No?

MC: No. No. But it was nice. And, but I used to like to lay in the grass and get a suntan. That's what I liked. Now we also had a big yard and all kinds, you know,

[1]née Grad.
[2]*osiemnaście* – eighteen in Polish.

chickens and things like this. That's what my mother liked. And a dog. It was really, you know, that was, until the war broke out.

GS: Can you tell me something about school, the school you went to?

MC: Yes. Well, I went to public school, but I went to a school, I don't know why they signed me in there because the school, that they did not teach religion, the Jewish religion. You know, not every school taught. And we cou-, well they taught, you see that was a public school, and it was also, it used to call, we called it seminary, that you could study there. If you finished this school you could study in order to become a teacher. But after four years I switched to public school, and then, you know, after I finished public school I went to this business school. But...

GS: What did you study in the business school?

MC: Well, bookkeeping and . . .

GS: Had you thought that you would become a secretary or a bookkeeper?

MC: I just, no, I really don't know. It was just, you know, just to study. My sister went to *Gymnasium* and she very much wanted to study medicine, but the Jews were not, but in the meantime the war broke out. But there that was impossible because the Jews were not accepted to higher education. And that's why a lot of young people, they left the country. They went to France, to Czechoslovakia, to other countries.

GS: Before the war?

MC: Before the war, to attend a college, because they were not accepted. My husband was accepted because his brother-in-law worked for a prince. And he had, you know, and he backed him up. He gave him the opportunity to go to college.

GS: You knew your husband when you were going to school?

MC: Well, I saw him. He comes from the, he used to, I mean his parents used to live in the same town. But I remember him, you know, when he used to come to our town to, you know, like vacation. So he, once in a while he used to come to our store. But he was older and he was, and I just...

GS: He had ...

MC: Took a …

GS: Gone away to school?

MC: Yes. He, that's where this prince gave him that opportunity. So he went to Lvov, and he studied in Lvov. He studied chemical engineering.

GS: All right. Did your family go to synagogue regularly?

MC: Oh yes.

GS: They were...

MC: Oh yes.

GS: Religious? An observant family?

MC: My father was a very observant Jew. He was not a fanatic, he wasn't. But he was a very, he was a religious man. And we belonged to the synagogue and of course the holidays, and he used to go every day, you know in the morning for morning prayers.

GS: Did the women go to synagogue on Shabbat or...

MC: Yeah, well the women...

GS: Holidays?

MC: The women used to sit upstairs, and the men used to be downstairs. That's what I remember. But, I don't know if I remember my mother should go that often to synagogue, but my father was every day in synagogue.

GS: Do you remember any experience that you or your family had with antisemitism before the war?

MC: Yes.

GS: Can you tell me?

MC: That was you know, in 1938 they started to boycott. You know what it means, boycott?

GS: Yes.

MC: Because it's a different...

GS: The businesses.

MC: The businesses. And in front of our store used to be those you know, anti-Semites. And they used to, whoever wanted to go in they used to say, "Don't buy from the Jew." That was started in 1938. But until then, you know, we did not experience any special, you know, persecutions. So that was until the war broke out.

GS: Tell me about your town. Were there many Jewish people who lived there?

MC: Yes, yes, very many.

GS: Was it a well-organized Jewish community?

MC: Yes. Yes. It was a very nice town.

GS: Was there a *kehillah*? A formal organization that took care of the...

MC: I cannot tell you that, but I remember we had all kind of organizations that the young people used to belong, like *Mizrahi*[3], the all kinds of *Halutzim* and...

GS: So there were Zionist activities that you knew?

MC: Yes, yes, yes.

GS: Was anyone in your family active?

MC: No, no.

GS: No. Did any of the men in your family, your father or anyone else, ever serve in the Polish Army?

MC: My father served in the ar-, not in the Polish Army, but he served I think in the Austrian Army in the First World War. And he came, that's when my sister died. He was at war and my sister died of a epidemic. That was the time. But he served in the Austrian.

[3]Mizrahi (also spelled Mizrachi) was a religious Zionist party in Poland and Eastern Europe (www.ushmm.org) and Hehalutz– a Zionist youth organization.

GS: Now tell me what happened at the time of the German invasion in 1939.

MC: What happened is first of all they told us, they put us in a ghetto. We had to leave the house with everything what it was in, whatever we could put, you know, just to take. And...

GS: This was very soon after the invasion?

MC: Very soon after. And so, you know, we were in the ghetto.

GS: The ghetto was in your town?

MC: Yeah. Yeah.

GS: Was there any help from any non-Jews?

MC: Well, I will tell you. We had a offer from a mailman, from our mailman. That was a offer for my father he should let my sister and myself, you know, he will put us someplace, you know?

GS: In hiding.

MC: In hiding. But my father did not have any faith in him, didn't have. But then he came again, and again he said, "You're gonna all die here. And in this way I can save your daughters. But," he said, "I need shoes for my wife. And I want to be paid." So my father used to pay him with gold money. You know, gold. And at the time, so we were hiding in his -- it was a building, not a finished building. So that's where we…

GS: You and your sister?

MC: My sister and later my parents came.

GS: And how long were you there in that building?

MC: I don't know. I don't remember. But you see, he wasn't a too honest man. He was not honest. I mean he visualized this that if he takes us in, he will have two mistresses, my sister and myself. And beside this money. So, a few times, you see, when he brought us something to eat, so he said, "If you don't agree to my what I am offering you, you have to, nothing will happen to you. But you have to be my . . ."

GS: Mistresses.

MC: Mistresses. So, we said, "No. If that's the price we have to pay, so we're gonna get out." And one day it was very bad, and he really meant it. So I said, "Okay, but before we go I have to say good-bye to your wife." And that scared him, and he left us alone. I said, "You know, after all, she, you know, she sent some food down." I said, "But I have to say good-bye. But we want to go." And he left us alone for a while. You see, after the war I wrote to *Yad VaShem*, because he asked me for money and for this, and I asked *Yad VaShem* what they think, I should. You know, he didn't want a small thing. We promised him our house. And after the war, you know, he moved in. We lived in one room. He moved in and lived with us. Then we transferred, we left this part of Poland. We went to west Poland, because the Russians came back and occupied it back. And you know, if the Russian occupied something you could never get out. So he remained in the house. And he was, then when he came to west Poland, too, and he asked us for the big money. You know, $500 he needs this. And every time we, you know, it

was right after the war. So I wrote to *Yad VaShem* and I told, you know, told them about the situation. And so they told me I shouldn't give him anything because he also wanted to be this, how do you call it?

GS: To be recognized?

MC: As a Gen-. . .

GS: As one of the Righteous?

MC: Righteous Gentiles. And *Yad VaShem* said, "Under those circumstances he does not" Oh how do you say it, oh . . .

GS: He didn't qualify.

MC: He doesn't qualify.

GS: All right.

MC: He didn't qualify.

GS: But during this period when you and your sister, and then later your mother and father, came to live in this building, he brought, or his wife would bring, food for you?

MC: Once a week. Once a week he used to bring a quart of water, and one loaf of bread.

GS: Once a week?

MC: Once a week, one loaf of bread and sometimes it was something cooked. You know, like this yellow, like cornmeal cooked. They call it *mamaliga*[4] there.

GS: Yes, yes, yes.

MC: Yes. And so that's how we lived, you know.

GS: You didn't eat very well, did you?

MC: No, you see this quart of water had to be for washing and for drinking. And the loaf of bread. You see we got caught in the winter. It was under the ceiling, you know? And it was not a finished building. So the snow fell on us and the wet froze. So my, so we gave our ration, we gave to father. You know he, and the mother, they should have more to eat. But bef -- you see, the end...

GS: This was...

MC: I was, I was...

GS: This was before you went into the ghetto?

MC: This was, I went, we went before but my fa-, my parents came later. But we were, you see before this, I worked with my sister in labor camps, all kind of labor camps. This was the finale, you know, with this hiding.

GS: All right, let's go back a little, when you first went to live in the ghetto.

MC: Yeah?

GS: Were you able to leave the ghetto in order to work...

MC: Oh no.

[4]Mamaliga is a pudding made of corn.

GS: Outside?

MC: No, no, no, no.

GS: No, there was no, all right. And there was no work inside, I guess.

MC: No.

GS: So how were you able to su -- your family able to support yourselves during that time?

MC: We, well you see, sometimes let's say if the Germans needed a amount of Jews for work, so they used to, there used to be a *Judenrat*, you know?

GS: Mmm hmm, yes.

MC: And so they used to tell the *Judenrat*, "We need so and so many Jews." So, in the beginning I worked in a gardener's thing and then we dug all kind of holes for nothing, you know, and they...

GS: So, you would go to the *Judenrat* to register to work and they would assign...

MC: Well, we were registered.

GS: You, these jobs?

MC: We did not have to register.

GS: Oh, so that...

MC: And if the Germans came and they said they need 500 Jews, you know, to be killed, so they came with the *Judenrat* and they give me five...

GS: There was police? Jewish police?

MC: Jewish police. Give me 500 Jews. And they took people away and they killed them. You see my father, my husband, lost his parents like that. They took them away in a different city, to the city, I think Rohatyn. It was my husband's...

GS: Excuse me, how would you spell Rohatyn?

MC: It's R-O-H-A-T-Y-N.

GS: All right.

MC: So they used to, they took him there, and you see, my husband's sister was a teacher. And they did not have any children, so she had a Ukrainian boy that was very, was talented in art. And she noticed that he has a talent. So she, with her money, you know, she let him study art. So when this action was in Rohatyn, who comes in but this boy that she helped. And she said -- I think his name was Brushlak -- she said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "Yes, I remember you." "Do you remember what I did for you?" And he said, "Yes." And that's why he said, "I'm gonna pay you back now." And he shot her on the spot. He said, "I'm gonna save you from a misery." And his mother and father, elderly people, they were digging their own grave in I don't, I really don't know exactly where it was. And then they were shot and killed. But he did her a favor, because she was good to him. And she, he killed her on the spot.

GS: I think I'm going to stop. [tape off then on] This Ukrainian boy was someone who had worked for this family?

MC: No, he went to school. She was his teacher.

GS: Oh, she was a, he was a student of hers.

MC: Yeah, she was his teacher. So that's why he did her this favor. He shot her on the spot. My husband, he was in all kind of labor camps and, you know? And they, the Germans, they found out that he is a specialist, you know, in making alcohol. So they looked for him all over and finally they found him. And he did not know. They one day they appeared, and they took him away, and in ...

GS: Excuse me, where was he at this time?

MC: At this time, you see, I don't remember, because he told me the story this way.

GS: Oh, all right.

MC: But, because I think he must have been...

GS: But he...

MC: He must have been in Brzezany, you know?

GS: Mmm hmm.

MC: And they told him to get into the car. They were two SS, and they kept driving and driving. And he did not know what they intend to do with him. So finally he saw the terrain was very familiar. And that was the factory where he used to work. And they told him, "You are going," you know, they gave him a little room, and, "You are going to stay here and work." And he called to this SS, called the workers and he said, "He is a Jew, but you have to listen to him. Because he will tell you." He said, "You probably know him from before, because he worked." They said, "Yes." And so they, he gave him, this SS, they gave him a little room and he was managing this factory, this --. And later they, he was making this gasohol, because they were in dire need of fuel. So every night this SS, he had the gun in his hand. And my husband had to give a report, what he did and how much he produced and this. And if it wouldn't be to his liking, he would have killed him. He would have killed him. But, you know, and he says he went through torture. He was the only one Jew. Everybody, it was already *Judenfrei*. And he was there until they started to retreat. I mean, from Stalingrad, when the Germans started to retreat. And then one worker, you know, came to him, to my husband, and he said, "Look, they are retreating. And they are going to be on the border on a river." I think it was Zbrucz. And he said, "And they expect that in about a week or two they are going to move west." He said, "I talked it over with my mother, and my mother said that she would allow you to stay," that he'll make a bunker under the kitchen. And he said, and the mother said, "I will give him something to eat, and in this way maybe he will survive." So that's what happened. But he had to leave the factory. He had to leave the factory and around were dogs, those German Shepherds. But somehow, I, whether they knew him, the dogs, but he left the factory grounds and he went. It was a very long walk, and came to this worker's house. And they put him in this hole. And the next morning you have to work. He is not there. So they looked all over. They, you see, when you

make alcohol, you have such big cisterns, you know, with the yeast. So he, they thought maybe he committed suicide and drowned in this. They emptied out those cisterns, and he wasn't there. So they put signs in the whole city, if somebody finds my husband, they offer 50 liter alcohol and 100 pounds of sugar. Whoever will tell where he is. They looked all over and they did not find him. And this woman was dying a slow death, the mother of this boy. So, finally they started to retreat, because they were, they got stuck on this Zbrucz, on this river. Instead two weeks, so they got stuck for maybe two months. It's, and they knew, and he was there, underground.

GS: This was in the winter?

MC: Yeah, I think so. It must have been the winter. So, then the after the Germans left, so this worker said, "Now I want you should leave. And you have to leave at night. You have to leave at night because I don't want somebody else should know." And you see, before this little town became where the factory was became *Judenfrei*, so my husband had two cows, he had horses even. So he gave it to certain peasants that you know, they should keep it for a while. And so he said, "I will give you a cow or something. I don't have any money." He said, "I don't want anything." And we never heard from him since. We, that's how afraid he was. He said, "Don't write me and don't, because I'm afraid they are gonna kill me."

GS: His life was in danger.

MC: His life was in danger. And the nicest-

[Tape one side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

GS: This is side two of tape one, of the interview with Mary Cittrons. But this man, this factory worker, was a righteous man.

MC: He was a righteous man, but he did not want, he begged him, "Don't write me. Don't send me anything. I don't want to hear from you." But, you see, a few years ago we received a telephone call from New York, and they were looking for my husband. Because this SS that was his superior, that always had the gun, you know, to kill him, he was looking for my husband. His name was Morinos [phonetic]-- this I remember my husband telling me -- Morinos. He was being prosecuted, and he was looking for my husband as a witness that he was good to him and he survived, he survived. This what he escaped and that's, this way he saved his life. This didn't count. But he want, he was looking for my husband as a witness that he survived, that he wasn't as bad as a. His name, I remember, he told me, it was Morinos. But my husband refused. He said, "I don't want to have anything to do." He used to get very, very emotional, very emotional.

GS: All right, Mary, can you continue your own story and …

MC: I was in...

GS: Tell us what happened after the ghetto if you can?

MC: I was in labor camps. I was in...

GS: Do you recall the name of any of the camps?

MC: No, no.

GS: No.

MC: No, no, no, no. But the main thing, I survived.

GS: Of course.

MC: And...

GS: Your sister...

MC: My sister...

GS: Was your sister with you during this time?

MC: My sister survived.

GS: Was she with you...

MC: She was, yeah.

GS: After the ghetto?

MC: After, yeah. And my sister, you know, we were working, that was forced labor. So she, one day she had a offer from a SS -- she did not look Jewish, my sister. So she had a offer from this SS. He said, "I see you're a good worker. And I would take you to Vienna. I come from Vienna. And I, in Vienna I have a wife, a family. And she has a house. And she could use you as a worker." And my sister said, "No. I want to share my whole family's fate. I do not want to."

GS: So she stayed with you.

MC: She stayed, yeah, she survived. She died three years ago of cancer.

GS: And your parents also survived?

MC: My parents survived. They came, I'll show you how my parents looked when they came.

GS: All right. You mentioned that your grandfather died.

MC: Yeah, I'll show you my grandfather.

GS: In Siberia.

MC: You see when the Russ-...

GS: You told me that your grandmother died before the war.

MC: Yeah, I...

GS: And how...

MC: Never knew her.

GS: Right. But...

MC: I never knew her.

GS: Tell me how your grandfather came to go...

MC: To Siberia?

GS: To Siberia.

MC: You see, my grandfather was, I will start from my uncle. My father's brother has, had a very nice store in Rohatyn. I mentioned Rohatyn.

GS: Yes.

MC: And he had a family. He had three daughters, and wife, of course. So when the Russians occupied the, you know, this part of Poland, his helper in the store, I don't know how you call it, he told the Russians that my uncle was, they call it *pomyeschik*. Well he was a very rich man. And the Russians did not go for a rich man. That was poison for them. And they arrested my uncle, because he was a rich man. And they, he was in jail for months. And finally one day they shipped him to Siberia. So, if he was already in Siberia, one night they came and they took my aunt, the three daughters, and my grandfather, and her old mother. And they all took them to Siberia. Not where my uncle was, but in a different part. And that's where they, you know, and my grandfather died from hunger there. Hunger and cold. The, my, after I think about two years, my uncle was released, and they told him where this family lived. So one day he came, you know, when he was released he came to the family. They did not recognize him. With a long beard and thin and sick and this. And when the war came to a end, they could come to Poland. So they all came to Poland.

GS: Other, the rest of the family survived?

MC: The rest of the family, yes. But my grandfather died there, only because somebody squealed that he was a very rich man. They were not much better than the Germans. They were not much better. But at least you see you could survive. You could live. If you could somehow maneuver, you could live. They didn't kill you. But with the Germans was...

GS: Do you know what the family did while they were in Siberia, in order to live? How did they earn any money for food?

MC: Well, I don't know. They were working. I don't know what they were doing, but you see, my cousin, she met a man, a boy, that was also they took him to Siberia. But he was very clever, and he used to do a little black marketing. And he was a plain this, but my cousin she finished *Gymnasium*. She was a very intelligent girl. So he liked my cousin, and he always used to bring some grain, some flour, some this, and that helped them out. And in the end they got married. And it wasn't a happy marriage. It was not. But you see, he did it because he wanted her.

GS: Because of her.

MC: And he helped them out. He died, actually it's a very sad story what happened to families, you know, during the war.

GS: Were you able to be in touch with other people in your family?

MC: No.

GS: Or friends?

MC: No.

GS: No.

MC: No, no, no, no, no.

GS: So from the time the war began and your family went into the ghetto...

MC: We lost touch.

GS: You lost touch with...

MC: With...

GS: Everyone else?

MC: With the whole world, with the whole world. I had relatives in America. I had my father's sister, she lived in New Brunswick, New Jersey. And one lived in California. And one lived, a cousin in Boston. But we could not get in touch.

GS: Did you get any news from...

MC: No.

GS: What was happening in the outside world?

MC: In the outside world?

GS: When you were in the ghetto, or in the labor camps?

MC: Yes, yes.

GS: How did you learn what was going on outside?

MC: Well you see it's from mouth to mouth, from mouth to mouth. But you see, what bothered us the most, especially when after we survived, that the American Jews did not do much to help us. At the time they claimed they were afraid of the antisemitism it shouldn't get any bigger. They did not want to believe what is going on in Poland and the other countries. And we didn't, instead to bomb the trains that were going to Auschwitz to burn those people, to bomb those rails, you know that this should stop

for a few days, nothing. And they bombed Terezin, they bombed any other places, but they did not do anything to alleviate our pain.

GS: Unfortunately that was the policy not only of the American government, but the British government...

MC: Well of course, but the Americans...

GS: And the western world.

MC: But the American, you see, Roosevelt had so many Jews in his, he had Bernard Baruch. He had what is his name...

GS: Morgenthau?

MC: Morgenthau. I mean actually Morgenthau at the end he...

GS: He tried.

MC: He tried. He tried. But they were afraid of whatever.

GS: Do you remember when you first knew or heard of people being gassed, in places like Auschwitz?

MC: We knew. We knew. Even in the ghetto we knew what's going on. We knew.

GS: So there must have been people who got out from one ghetto to reach another and…

MC: Not only this, but…

GS: And...

MC: There were people they did not look Jewish. And they used to get out from the ghetto and they used to bring in stuff, you know, some they used to sell in the ghetto.

GS: What kind of stuff?

MC: Like butter, like flour, like, you know, anything to eat, especially, you know. That was in every ghetto but especially, you know, in the Warsaw Ghetto. There were a lot of people that lived on the outside, because they didn't look Jewish and they had passports. You see my…

GS: So the same thing happened in your ghetto? People…

MC: Well, yeah.

GS: People brought food from outside?

MC: Yeah.

GS: And news?

MC: And then sold it at a higher price. You know they made business like that. As a matter of fact, you see, my husband had a uncle -- I don't know whether this pertains.

GS: Yes, it's all important information.

MC: He had a uncle that was very you know, he was very rich. They did not have any children. And he, before the war he converted to Catholicism. And he married a woman from Drohobycz. And this was…

GS: Can you spell that?

MC: D-R-O-H-O-B-Y-C-Z, Drohobycz. And she, you know they were, those, how do you call, you know, Naphta and all kind, I'm missing a word.

GS: For cleaning?

MC: No, no, no. You see like oil and things. In Drohobycz that was a very big city, very, very. So she originated from there and she was very rich. So they got married and she converted to Catholicism, too. When the war broke out -- they had a lot of real estate involved and everything -- when the war broke out, they left everything and they went to Warsaw. They rented a apartment, a little apartment, and they lived there, as Gentiles. And this was two weeks before the war came to a end. And she was downtown in Warsaw. She was doing a little bit shopping. And I think it was a policeman, and he came to her and he says, "You are Jewish." And she said, "No, I'm not Jewish. I'm Polish." And she shows him the document and they bickered and argued. And he said, "I'm gonna go with you home." And he did. And they came home, and the uncle was home. And he told him to put the pants down. And he was circumcised. So two weeks before the war came to a end they were killed, both.

GS: They thought they would save themselves by conversion, I guess, earlier.

MC: Well they had an awful lot of money in the Swiss banks. They had a awful lot of money and they were very rich. At first he was a military man and then he retired. He was in business and that's what happened.

GS: Were you aware of any resistance group in the ghetto...

MC: No.

GS: Or elsewhere?

MC: No.

GS: No.

MC: No.

GS: How, did you ever think about doing anything in opposition, in resistance to...

MC: No.

GS: The Germans? Or it didn't seem possible to you?

MC: No, no. It was without it wasn't possible.

GS: You never mentioned the kind of work that you did when you were in the labor camps.

MC: Labor, labor, labor.

GS: But what kind of work?

MC: Digging and you see, in order to employ the Jews you had to do work that does not have any meaning. It didn't have any meaning to dig holes, to take away stones, to do things like that. Just to…

GS: Hard, physical labor.

MC: Yes, yes.

GS: But not for the construction of anything...

MC: No. It wasn't…

GS: Like a railroad or…

MC: No.

GS: A highway or... [pause]

MC: No food or nothing.

GS: And yet somehow you lived through this experience.

MC: It's a miracle, I'll tell you. If you can hear…

GS: Can you think of anything in particular that helped you survive, a religious conviction?

MC: Yes.

GS: And

MC: I would say the religious…

GS: That helped you?

MC: Yes, yes, my religious convictions.

GS: Because you couldn't expect any help from...

MC: No.

GS: From people.

MC: No, no, no. I'll tell you, my father was, he was a very clever man. And he was a great believer, a great believer. And being, you know, how do you say. In hiding, he wrote a calendar, a Jewish calendar. It's a matter of fact, after the war, my sister donated this calendar to her rabbi, Rabbi Chinitz. You know, that's the way he killed time. But he was a great believer. After the war when I asked him, I said, I asked him a question, I said, "We are considered the Chosen People." I said, "How come that," -- my father's youngest brother was a very religious man, really very religious, and such a innocent man, such a pious man -- and he was the one that they took away and they killed him. I said, "Could you tell me why, why he was," his name was Gertsel, "why was Gertsel killed at the first, and why did we survive?" He said, "We never ask questions like that. That's God's will. We never ask questions like that." My father was a very clever man, and very well-liked. Not only by Jews, but by Gentiles too.

GS: When you were separated from your parents, during the time you were in the labor camp, did you feel that you would be reunited with them?

MC: You didn't...

GS: Or you...

MC: You didn't…

GS: Did you have hope for that?

MC: You didn't feel anything. You just didn't make plans. You just didn't. You lived, I wouldn't say from day to day, you lived from minute to minute. That's it. Do you think that's enough?

GS: I'm anxious to know one more thing. In the time that you were in the ghetto, in the camps, were there any non-Jews, guards, or a *Kapo*, who acted decently?

MC: No.

GS: You never had such an experience?

MC: No, no, no, no. On the contrary.

GS: Was there any one person who befriended you, a Jew? Is there anyone that you could look back on as having been a friend...

MC: Nnn nnn [negative].

GS: To help you? You were entirely on your own?

MC: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

GS: And alone.

MC: And I'm just, I just told you, this man that saved our lives actually, you know, this Gentile, he wasn't a good man. He wasn't. He wasn't a honest man.

GS: He was doing it for his own profit.

MC: For his own, yes. And I remember, we went to Israel and I met there a woman that, you know, her father had a store, a candy store, not far from our store. And she asked me, she said, "How did you survive?" I said, you know, you talk this, I said, "And where did you finally, where did you go?" I said, "This postman he actually saved our lives." She said, "I would never go to him, never, because he was such a," she called him *zhulik,* such a cheater. And she said he, "Whenever he delivered to our mail, he never delivered it on a Friday, on a Saturday. He only delivered it on a Sunday, to get a tip. And he," she said, "this is the last person that I would think that he could save somebody." And I am also surprised, because you see, his wife, after the war, after we survived, she took in a German. You see, when the Germans were retreating, and she liked this German soldier. And she told him that she will save him. After that she will save him. So he remained, and one night they, you see, it was a Polish organization, a underground organization, very antisemitic and all this. They were called *AK*[5]. They came with a truck, they took this German, and they killed him in the woods. So he could do the same thing with us. I don't know why he didn't do it. That was after the war.

GS: There are no easy, no answers…

MC: No.

GS: Are there, for...

MC: No.

GS: How people behaved?

MC: And this German, you know, she introduced me to him, you know, after the war. A very good looking German, but she fell for him. And she said he should not go with his soldiers, with the soldiers to retreat. She said, "I'm gonna save your life." And he remained. And that's what they did to him.

GS: So when the war ended, where were you at that time?

[5]AK – Armia Krajowa - Home Army, an underground military organization in occupied Poland, which included units that were openly murderous of Jews. The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-194 by Nora Levin, 1973: p 382.

MC: We went back to our house.

GS: Now you say we went back, you and your sister?

MC: And my father and mother.

GS: Oh. You had been reunited with your parents, and you were in hiding then?

MC: Yes.

GS: And before the war ended?

MC: Before the war ended.

GS: That's amazing that you were able to come together.

MC: And when we, so he let us, he said, "Get out." The same thing like with my husband, [unclear]. He said, "You get out." So he...

GS: This was the man who had your house, who was living in your house.

MC: Not at the time. At the time the Germans occupied the house.

GS: Oh.

MC: It was such a beautiful home that the, I forgot, the head of the city, you know, the *Burgermeister*, the...

GS: Like a, the mayor...

MC: Yes.

GS: Of the city.

MC: He took over our house. That's the kind of house it was. And, so he said, "You go." So three o'clock in the morning we left -- it was dark, nobody should see -- and we went straight to our house. I mean everything was gone. It was completely empty. And then somehow people found out that we are there. So few surviving Jews, they came, and we stayed together. And I mean it was nothing to eat and no money to buy, so some of the neighbors, then, one was a butcher so he brought a piece of meat, and one was so they brought some...

GS: These were non-Jews?

MC: Non-Jews.

GS: Oh.

MC: But they started, they became, you know, friendly, after the war finished. But before, when the war was still going on in West Poland. That wasn't the end. And later we left this part. We went to Poland. And then in Poland they started with the pogroms, so we went to Germany.

GS: You kept moving towards the west.

MC: We kept moving. And then after Germany, we came to the United States. And in Germany my husband worked for the ORT organization. And they had a lot of schools, you know, these trade schools. So at first he was a head of one school, and in [unclear]. And then he was a head of a few schools in the different camps. And they had weaving and knitting and sewing and, you know, to prepare those people for the life in...

GS: Another country.

MC: United, no, in Israel, in Israel. Because a lot of them left for Israel, although it was not permitted. It was, you know, the English people...

GS: British.

MC: The British, they did not let them in. Remember it was the *Exodus* and things like this.

GS: Yes, yes.

MC: But they prepared them for their life after the camps, because those people, some of them, they were very young. They didn't have an opportunity to learn a trade. So my husband was the manager of that. I have a lot of pictures, you know, from this time, a lot of pictures.

GS: What kind of experience did you have with any German people during this time when you were living in Germany?

MC: I wasn't, I didn't have contacts with...

GS: Mmm hmm.

MC: Them. You know, it's...

GS: So you can't speak of what attitude...

MC: Well, I cannot say...

GS: People had.

MC: That I had the best attitude, because with them, because they did so much ill. They killed so many people.

[Tape one side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

GS: This is side one of tape two of the interview with Mary Cittrons.

MC: You'll have to excuse me. You see I'm on the [tape off then on]

GS: One last thing before you tell us something about life after the war. I know that you shared the religious feeling of your family, particularly your…

MC: I'm still reli-...

GS: Your ...

MC: I'm still religious.

GS: Good, good.

MC: I'm still religious.

GS: But I'm curious about one thing. Were there ever any religious services held, secretly…

MC: No.

GS: In any of the camps…

MC: No.

GS: Or the ghetto…

MC: No.

GS: That you were aware of?

MC: No.

GS: No.

MC: No.

GS: So…

MC: Not that I know of, no.

GS: I know in the Warsaw Ghetto…

MC: There were.

GS: There could, there were.

MC: I don't know of any.

GS: But not where you were.

MC: No.

GS: Were you aware of when Jewish holidays occurred?

MC: No. But yet my father knew, because, I told you he wrote a calendar.

GS: Yes.

MC: So he knew when something is coming. He knew.

GS: But there was no opportunity...

MC: No.

GS: To do any celebration...

MC: No.

GS: Observance of any...

MC: No, no, no, no.

GS: Holiday, was there?

MC: It's a matter of fact, you see, towards the end my father got so sick that he was dying. He was dying. And this man, every time he came he said, "The old man died already? So we will bury him." In this house, you know, where we...

GS: Where you were hiding.

MC: So it was terrible. And then it was the time when the Germans were retreating, and my father was dying. So we took him out, you know, under the roof he should get a little more air. And when he started to get better, the Germans started to retreat, and this man said, "You have to go down in the hole." You know, because we had a hole in...

GS: Underground.

MC: Underground. And we went down there, and good enough the Germans came. The Germans came because the windows in this building, they were not, I mean the house was not finished. So they put, how do you say *maschinengewehr*?

GS: A gun? A machine-gun?

MC: Mach, you know, guns.

GS: Mmm hmm.

MC: In every window they put guns. And they were looking in this building, and we could see the hand of the German. So we were standing all four for three days, until the Germans moved. And all this time, I mean, there were some hidden Jews. And they chased them out, and they killed them in front of this building. So all night long, I remember they kept calling, "*Der Jude! Der Jude! Der Jude!*" And, "*Schiess*!" And, "*Der Jude!*" And the Jew was killed in front of the house. So finally, but they didn't find us.

GS: And for those three days you couldn't...

MC: Nothing.

GS: Have anything to eat?

MC: Not to eat and not to go to the bathroom, and not to talk, and not to breathe. So, but before it happened, he knew, this man, that something is gonna happen. So he brought us this cornmeal, this cooked cornmeal. And of course nobody touched it. So after the Germans left, it was that much of mold, that much of mold in…

GS: The food was covered with mold.

MC: Yes. But then they left, the Germans. Yes.

GS: And there was no toilet.

MC: No.

GS: In this space, underground?

MC: No, no, no.

GS: But you survived this.

MC: You know, if you have to live, I think, it's, sometimes it's hard even to think about that. That's why I never wanted to go through this.

GS: I...

MC: Yeah...

GS: I have to admire your willingness to speak.

MC: I did not want, but she practically forced me. You know Hardy?

GS: Hardy Kupferberg.

MC: She practically, she said, "I want you should." She wanted when my husband was still alive, but he was too sick and he, it was out of the question.

GS: But what you're doing helps to give an answer to those who would deny that the Holocaust happened. You were going to speak about after the war.

MC: You see, after the war, because this what I went through, my daughter was born prematurely. She was born one day in the eighth month.

GS: Now you were liv -- where were you living now, when the war ended?

MC: At the time, when the war ended, I was living in, when the war ended we, first we were living in Brzezany and then I started to work. I worked in the bank. And then I met my husband, in the bank. And then we got married. And after the few months we left Brzezany and we went to West Poland. And he got a job. Actually when the Russians, they found out about him, and they told him to start this factory again, the how do you call it? The refinery. So and then we left this and we went to West Poland. And then they started the pogroms. So we left this again and we went to Germany. So when we left for Germany we, so my, I was eight months pregnant. Seven months, one week in the eighth month. And my daughter was born prematurely. So she spent four-and-a-half months in incubators, in Berchtesgaden, you know, where Hitler had his residence. So that was in a way it was good and in a way it was bad, because I always had the fear that since it was only for the SS, that was only for SS children…

GS: You mean the hospital.

MC: The hospital, the incubator hospital. And she was the first Jewish child, and she was the first foreign child. And when she was born, she did not weigh four pounds. The only thing she had was a lot of hair, no nails, nothing. So she was there. So I always was afraid that they might do something to her. And as a matter of fact she cried, and she got herself a rupture, too. So after four-and-a-half months we couldn't live in Berchtesgaden because Eisenhower had his headquarters. So, but they let me live there, not far from the hospital, I should take out my milk and deliver every day, because they claimed that this would be good for the baby. So...

GS: Excuse me, was the American government running this hospital now?

MC: So far it was a SS. That was right.

GS: It was still German...

MC: In the beginning.

GS: Still German.

MC: It was still German. But, I don't know. Maybe, maybe they're-. So anyways...

GS: You don't remember if they were American doctors?

MC: No. I don't remember.

GS: They were all just Germans who...

MC: I don't remember. No, I don't think they were American doctors. So anyway, after four-and-a-half months there, one of the nurses told me, she said, "Mrs. Cittrons, it would be good if you would take her out, because we have now a epidemic. We have a epidemic of whooping cough. And that's all she needs is whooping cough." And she got a little, you know, like a rupture here. And the doctor there, no, she was German. They were all Germans. So she told me that she has, it's called *leistenbruch* [inguinal hernia], but she does not know what it is, whether it's a *driza* [phonetic], I don't know how -- it's a, or it's really a rupture. But an-...

GS: A hernia perhaps?

MC: No.

GS: No.

MC: A hernia, a rupture isn't a hernia.

GS: Well I know there are different types of hernias.

MC: No that was a hernia, but they called it a rupture. So anyway, we took her home, to the camp, in Ainring. And all of a sudden at night, she was crying the whole night. And her terrible pains. And this whole side got very red. So I called this doctor, the camp doctor. That was a, also a DP. I said, "Why?" He was a Hungarian Jew. And he came and took a look at her and he said, "Right away to the hospital." Because, he said, that her rupture was closed in. It's called *Eingeklemmt Leistenbruch*, [pinched inguinal hernia], closed in. You cannot live with a rupture like this, with a hernia, more than 24 hours, if it's not operated. So we had to rush her to the hospital in Berchtesgaden, in Reichenhall, it was Reichenhall. And the doctor that was supposed to operate on her was a SS. Here is another dilemma, maybe he will kill her. But it was no way out. So in the morning he operated on her. In the afternoon he was arrested, because he was a SS man. And they told me, "The patient will, the operation was a success, but whether the patient is gonna live, that's another question." But she lived. And they said, "If she will live to be a year, so she will live." So you see it wasn't so good. But today, God bless her, she is taller than me. She has two lovely children.

GS: And she is in good health today?

MC: Yes, yes.

GS: That's wonderful.

MC: Yes. So I didn't have easy sailing, not at all. And then we come to America and it's a start from all over, without a...

GS: Did you have any relatives here in the United States?

MC: Yes, I had my father's sister in New Brunswick. So we came to her, but…

GS: She was able to sponsor you to come?

MC: Yes, but he had, we had another sponsor. I don't remember who, but we came to her. And we couldn't find any work. We couldn't find. So finally we moved to New York and I was working for a while as a operator. I didn't have the slightest idea what sewing means, you know, how to operate a machine. As a matter of fact I went for work so the man, the owner asked me what I can do. I said, "I can sew." He said, "Yeah." So for a half a day I was sitting and afraid to push the pedal, because it was a electric sewing machine. So, and...

GS: You had never used a sewing machine?

MC: No. No. So after 12 o'clock he comes and he said in Jewish, "Well, let me see what you did." I said, "Nothing." He said, "How come?" He says, "If you know everything?" he said. "I lied." I said, "Because we are five people, we don't have any means to make a living and I lied." So he showed me how to first, to put together a coat. They were children's coats, without a collar. And they paid 18 cents for the whole this. And so the first, a half a day I made 18 cents. I put together one coat. But then I made, you know $40, $40, yeah. $40. "Oh," he said, "you are not a *Dummkopf*!" He said, "I will teach you how to be a forelady, because my forelady is, she is leaving me because she expects a baby." But I didn't work there long because we borrowed some money and we bought a little bit, a little such a delicatessen store. That was not a store, but it was slavery. It was from six o'clock in the morning until 12 o'clock at night. So I had to change over to him, you know, to work. So I couldn't work there any more. That was that. And then Publicker, here was a...

GS: Oh, the distiller.

MC: Distiller. You know, he made, my husband made an application, you know, and showed him his qualification. So Publicker said that he would take him, he would hire him. And we sold this delicatessen store and we moved to Philadelphia. And so he went to work and Publicker told him, "I'm awful sorry, but you are not a citizen, and I can not employ you." That was the Korean War was. And he said, "I'm, here we lost there everything, you know?" And so he didn't get the job. He said, "When you become a citizen, after five years, then I can give you a job." So, we had to do something else. And it was hard.

GS: Your husband didn't go back...

MC: No, he never...

GS: To Publicker.

MC: Well, Publicker went out of business.

GS: Oh, right.

MC: Publicker went out of business. But in Germany they offered him you know, once Ely [distiller] wanted to buy a factory from a German and wanted to hire, you know, my husband he should go to Israel and he would take care of him. But he wanted to go to the United States, you know? So we didn't go to Israel.

GS: And then here, besides your parents, who were able to come...

MC: Yes, then my sister and my brother-in-law came.

GS: So your family was able...

MC: Yes.

GS: To be together.

MC: To well, I call it together. They also had very hard beginnings. And, but later he worked for the United Engineers. And she worked in insurance company. And they were okay until they got sick.

GS: But did your parents come with you?

MC: No.

GS: No.

MC: They came later.

GS: They followed.

MC: We came first. We came first. But it took a lot of determination and hard work.

GS: Sure.

MC: To be where we are now, you know? A lot of work.

GS: Well, your experience during the terrible years in Europe...

MC: That's terrible…

GS: Were devastating. But you had the strength to survive that, and to make a new life here.

MC: To make a new life, that was really hard. And one thing I have to talk, to tell about my husband. You know, some people when they had it, let's say a engineer or a doctor or something like this, they did not want to hear from something different, to do something different. They have to do this, and if I don't do, this is what I did in Europe I'm not working. But he, whatever came along he forgot about his degree, about his you know? And he just, everything just to make a living. He was a good man.

GS: You had a good life with him.

MC: Well, I had a good life, you know, a good life with him, but a hard life. That's why I told you in the beginning, until the war broke out I were, really I was happy go lucky. I didn't worry about a thing. But right when the war started I turned 360 degrees. Now I am a compulsive worrier.

GS: I certainly appreciate your being willing to speak...

MC: Okay.

GS: And share this.

MC: I...

GS: If there's anything else you feel you want to add...

MC: …no, I don't...

GS: …that I hadn't questioned...

MC: …want to add anything.

GS: …you about? Well then I...

MC: I spoke more than I intended to.

GS: Well, I much appreciate it, and your record will be part of the testimony of many others like yourself, for the future.

MC: You see, my daughter…

GS: …so I thank you.

MC: …never wants to hear anything about it, never. My granddaughter, she approaches me a lot, you know, to find out.

GS: To speak.

MC: As a matter of fact, she had a paper, she had to make a paper about you know, if somebody had a grandmother who has survived. So she asked about a lot of details. And she read a few books about it anyhow, the Holocaust. And she was now in Israel and she told me she enjoyed it very much. She went to *Yad Vashem* and to other things. And she, but my daughter, she says, "I don't, I can't hear this. I can't. I can't."

GS: Well, it's been hard for you on many levels, but I want to thank you again.

MC: You're welcome. You were very nice.

[Tape two side one ended. Interview ended.]