HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

BESS FREILICH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: June 5, 1981

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BF - Bess Freilich[1] [interviewee]
JF - Josey G. Fisher [interviewer]
Date: June 5, 1981

Tape one, side one:

JF: This is tape one, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Bess Freilich, on June 5, 1981. Mrs. Freilich would like to share some of her thoughts with us before we start this interview.

BF: It's very sad for me to talk of this bitter period of my life. It's carved in my heart and in my soul and I try to push it away in my under-conscious but I feel in order for me to function normally, that's what I have to do. There's many nights when all this comes back to me and sometimes I feel like I'm going to explode from sorrow and from pain but the world must know and it must be told. We must stay on the guard that the Holocaust, God forbid, shouldn't repeat itself, that what I went through should never happen again. That this should be the last Holocaust on earth and that my children, my grandchildren and their children's children should never experience what their mother and grandmother and great grandfather went through. I pray to God that they should never know from such sadness, humility and pain, starvation, suffering and desolation. It's for them that I'm revealing the story of my tragic childhood. My mother's last words were reported were: "I raised such a beautiful angel and now only God knows what will happen to her. Go, my child, you must try very hard to survive and if you will ever meet your father, tell him to say *Kaddish* after us. Try very hard to stay alive and if you will live, you must tell the world what they did to us." And for her, for my dear beautiful mother, that was so young and didn't live at all, that I'm telling this story to fulfill her wish. My peers that survived, the survivors, are dying very young. The heartache and pain is catching up with them. Soon, there will be no one to tell and again, must be told, for what I'm telling today I once told my first born, my daughter when she was 12 or 13 years old, and when I finished telling her she said, "Mom, but you always acted so normal, I never knew what you went through, that you went through so much." Yes, I did act normal. I had to function. But behind this normality, there was a broken heart. I disguised myself under a face that was always smiling. God, I pretended that I was happy but I really weren't. Always I thought why did I remain alive and my family didn't. I have guilty feelings that I'm living. It's like I'm feeling humiliated for being born. I hope in time that the world will realize that Auschwitz bears no comparison with no other tragedy in the history of the world. And God, where was our God? But I don't think God turned away from us. I think all humanity did. The world knew of our intense suffering, of the floating rivers filled with Jewish blood, they smelled the stench of the burning flesh in the crematorium. They knew our suffering; they heard the cries for help and they didn't lift a finger and they turned away their heads

[1]nee Anusz, former first name Basha.

and were passive. My peers. Therefore, the whole world is responsible for the Holocaust. I'm very surprised that nobody by now even came out with a book, with a title, "I Accuse." I accuse the whole world for remaining passive and participating in the murder of six million Jews including the murder of my family.

JF: Can you tell me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your family?

BF: I was born in a little town, Pruzany.

JF: Do you know how to spell that?

BF: P-r-u-z-a-n-y. It's near Brest which was the biggest. Pruzany was the small town.

JF: This is in Poland?

BF: In Poland, yes. It was a time, there were so many Jewish organizations, Zionist organizations, and the Jews were really trying to give their children a good Jewish education. They sent them to Jewish schools.

JF: When was this?

BF: I'm talking about in the 30s.

JF: You were born in what year?

BF: 1928.

JF: 1928. You said that there were many Zionist organizations at that time?

BF: Many.

JF: Were your family involved?

BF: Yes, my family, my mother and also--went to the Zionist organizations and they tried--the children were really small then, but they tried to let us know who we were and to give us a good Hebrew education. In fact, we were speaking Hebrew then, when we were children. Some families that was a must. They only bought school supplies from the storekeepers that knew how to speak Hebrew.

JF: You spoke Hebrew in your daily life?

BF: Yes, in our daily life. It was just to prepare us, you know, for later on in life to maybe emigrate to Israel, to give us mostly a Hebrew education.

JF: Where did you learn Hebrew?

BF: I went to Hebrew school. It was a private school. My family were, there were a--you can say, on the poor side. Most of the Jewish people in the town were. If you had food on the table every day, you were considered rich. So, they were poor but my grandfather was in the United States. He worked here in New York and he came back because he had to work on *Shabbos* and he didn't like it so he came back to his family and while he was here he accumulated a little money and I was--his wife's name I carried because his wife died very young from the flu that was then like an epidemic in Europe, and he cared for me so much because I carried his wife's name and the little money that he brought from the United States while he was working in New York, carrying coal on the

top floors, he put away his money just to give me an education because it was very expensive. It was a private school and that's how I got educated.

JF: Was this a co-educational school?

BF: It was considered C.E. You could go to school, the Polish school, which wouldn't cost you anything. This was like a private Hebrew school.

JF: Like a day school?

BF: Yes, a day school.

JF: Was this both boys and girls?

BF: Yes. But it was very expensive.

JF: What subjects did they teach?

BF: Everything, but everything in Hebrew, and from 8 o'clock till 3, everything was in Hebrew and like I said, it was very expensive and we could only afford it because of my grandfather. He took care of this.

JF: Was your family very religious?

BF: Yes, my mother was very religious. My father was [unclear], my father was [unclear]. I had six brothers and a sister and none of them survived.

JF: Where were you in the family?

BF: I was the oldest. I was the oldest.

JF: Was your father or your grandfather ever in the national army in Poland?

BF: [unclear].

JF: The town that you lived in, did you have much contact with non-Jews?

BF: Yes, they lived close by but we lived in harmony. In fact, my grandfather, he borrowed money to the *goyim*. They never gave him back. I remember as a child, I used to go every Friday and they used to give me some scallions and radishes and this was like the interest for the money and he worked so many years, so hard. He used to tell me how hard he worked. He lended them the money, they wanted meat and he wanted to live with them, you know, like human beings, he wanted peace with the neighbors. And they asked and he gave, he never got it back, of course. But he used to give him back a few radishes and I was the one who used to go and I hated it because I felt like I am a beggar, you know, here they had all his money that he worked so many years so hard for. But I later--but I jump from one to the other, later, I returned to my town and I met with a woman that he borrowed the money, the mother of the household, and she told me that her son-in-law was the first one to rob our furniture. That was the thanks that we got from giving them the money at that time and it was a lot of money. They were the first ones to enter our house after the Germans evacuated us and they robbed all the furniture and cleaned the house out. That's what she told me.

JF: Her son-in-law stole the furniture that was in your own house?

BF: All the furniture and everything, practically cleaned the whole house. That's what she told me after I met her so many years later.

JF: Did you play with any of these children? Did you play with the Polish children?

BF: Yes, we played and they were neighbors, we were neighbors and we lived in harmony. This was until the war broke out and then it was a different period all together.

JF: In those early years in the thirties, your father was doing what at that time?

BF: My father tried everything to make a living. Like I said, we were a lot of small children in the house and he used to be a butcher for a while. This didn't work. He used to go in the villages and buy a horse and sell it later to make a profit in order to bring bread for the children. We were a very close family and life and floated beautifully and you didn't have to have a lot to make children happy in those days. It seems nowadays, children have so much and sometimes they're not happy but we were happy with very little. If we had a dress made once in three-four years as a child, I was happy. I was happy when I came home and I saw a smile on my mother's face and I knew that she can make *Shabbos*, that she has food to put on the table because she was smiling and that made me happy, that made my day when I came home from school and I saw her and I saw that the house is peaceful and everything was fine, that made me very happy. And if the war wouldn't have broken out and if the family and children would have grown up, those were the days that my mother looked forward to, that things would get better and it would be easier for her and easier for my father. But those days never happened.

JF: Did your family experience any antisemitism in those days before the war?

BF: Yes, there was antisemitism. That was nothing, you know, you lived through such bad periods that it was like a part of life, it was like a part of life. Like I said, my father was a butcher and there's a certain part of the cow that Jews are not allowed to eat; the bottom part. And there were times when it was hard, which was under the Russians, that it was hard to get meat. And we knew a family, their name was Markovitz, and I as a child, I always used to carry the meat for them, the bottom part, and it wasn't allowed, it was against the law--Russians didn't let the Jews slaughter so you weren't allowed to have meat, kosher meats. So my father used to give me the bottom parts to sell to the Markovitz's, to bring it to them and I brought it and this was going on for years and they always had meat on their table. They paid my father of course, but it was hard to get and it was easy for them. I used to bring it used carry it under my coat. A lot of times coming to school, my dress was stained and I felt horrible but I did it because my father told me to because it would make life easier for the family because that's where money came in, and I became very friendly with those Markovitz's, they had children my age, they were very wealthy people, they lived in a villa. And when I used to come to their house, I remember when the mother, early in the morning, she used to bake and she used to give me something, you know, like a piece of cake to take to school and I was there all the time. And when the Germans evacuated us from our city and our family was sitting on the sled and just tears were pouring out of our eyes and my poor two brothers they said to my mother, "Mom, we want to live so badly," they were so young, "and let us jump off from the sled," and my

mother, I remember like it was now, she said, "My children, she said, do you want me to see you dead," she said. "How will I be able to take it, they'll shoot you." The Germans were sitting on the sled with us and it was during this conversation that we were passing through this city and all the non-Jews were standing like it was a parade. They were standing like it was a parade, you know, and clapping with their hands because they were evacuating all the Jews from the town and I remember thinking to myself, "My God, I just want to see the Markovitz's out there too standing," and it wasn't long after I was thinking about it that I noticed the whole family--this I'll never forget until the day I die--was standing there and applauding. And my eyes caught theirs and they were standing and clapping and I said to my mother, "I don't believe it, you see the Markovitz's, I don't believe it." Well I said then I guess I just feel that I didn't want to live at all because I couldn't believe it that they would do that, even them, they were considered already the better *goyim* that they could do something like this. I mean after all, when I used to come to their house, they were nice and they were good to me and everything and here nobody pushed them to go in the street, they did it voluntarily and they were standing and they saw me and the children too and I was crying and they just looked and kept on applauding. Right then and there, I lost all faith. [unclear] It seems like they were, you know, dancing like every wedding, the way you know, the situation was that's the way they were.

JF: What are your earliest memories in the thirties of news of Hitler, news of things changing in Germany that might possibly affect you in Poland?

BF: I was a child.

JF: Yes.

BF: I was 9 or 10 years old and there were rumors that the German Jews are suffering, that Hitler is killing them and my mother took notes to the neighbors and we children tried to hear what they were saying and they said that a lot of people had run away from Germany and they told such horror stories but we didn't want to believe, we couldn't believe that something like this could ever happen in the 20th century. We thought it was just rumors. Nobody, in our wildest imagination, we couldn't believe such things. But later people came and they said what was going on and we just couldn't believe it. If we would have believed that's what they were doing actually, I think more people would have survived.

JF: Did anybody in your town talk of leaving?

BF: The young people, this was already when Hitler took over in our part of Poland. See, first the Russians came. This was the pact that Stalin made with Hitler. So two years, we were under the Russians and then when the Germans attacked Russia, our town was the first one to be bombarded and that's when the Germans came.

JF: But earlier than that, earlier in the pact, before Hitler invaded Poland at all, was there any talk of leaving, going to Palestine or to other parts of Europe?

BF: All the children I would say about 18, 19, they tried. They went to the *hakhsharah*[2] and all the organizations helped them to get them certificates which wasn't so easy to go ahead. Could we, or if Britain or England would have allowed, I think half of the town would have evacuated but it was impossible. They had a quota, you had to wait for your certificate. At my age, I couldn't think of it, I was still a child. If my family if they could have received a certificate, which my father was praying for, then we would have all gone. We didn't accumulate it. We tried but nothing worked.

JF: Your father did try to get a certificate to England?

BF: To Israel.

JF: To Israel.

BF: But he couldn't, they gave it mostly, there were very few of those certificates, we used to call them, and they gave it to certain people--like the head of the organizations at the time. Those were the ones that you know went to Palestine. I'm talking about '38, '39, before the war.

JF: Was there a very active Jewish counsel in your town like a *Gemeinde* or *Kehillah* [community organizations]?

BF: Yes. Yes. It was a town that was vibrating with Jewish life. It would touch us through many ways, it would touch in a lot of Jewish schools . They taught Jewish in those schools, it was strictly Jewish.

JF: How big a town was this?

BF: I think it was around 3,000 Jews.

JF: 3,000 Jews?

BF: And later many more because it was the ghetto then so they brought from the other little towns, all the Jewish people to our ghetto, and then the population increased.

JF: How much of the population originally was Jewish, that 3,000 represented what part of the whole town, before the ghetto?

BF: What do you mean?

JF: What part of the town was Jewish, was it half or was it less?

BF: About half.

JF: About half.

BF: About half of the town. I came to my town after the war and the Jewish section was all wiped out only the non-Jewish section was still intact and everything was normal like it was before I left. And myself, I couldn't find even the place that our home was standing, it was just a hole and grass was growing already on top.

JF: What happened the summer of 1939, before the invasion?

BF: The Russians. Before the invasion of Russia [probably means to say Poland], the Russians came in. Of course, they took a lot of Jews and they arrested them. They accused them of being Communists, but otherwise they let us live. They let us live,

[2]*hakhsharah* - agricultural training camp for preparation to immigrate to Palestine ("Resistance in the Smaller Ghettos of Eastern Europe: Glossary," accessed June 11, 2011 www.ushmm.org.)

like I said before, we weren't allowed to eat kosher meat. The whole Hebrew books you weren't allowed. I remember myself I had so many, I had to bring them. They closed right away, the Hebrew schools. You weren't allowed how to learn Hebrew. You weren't allowed to talk Hebrew.

JF: They forced you…

BF: They forced us to go to their schools. You weren't allowed to say one Hebrew word. If they found a book in your house, a Hebrew book, then you were arrested as being Zionists. Even then.

JF: And you had to burn your books?

BF: I burned my books. I was very much afraid to keep them in the house because it was like, against the law. Some of the Hebrew teachers they arrested, a few of them they let them stay in the town but they started to teach Jewish to the kids. The Jewish school was allowed to remain but not the Hebrew. In other words, you were allowed to speak Jewish but not Hebrew. They arrested many Zionist leaders.

JF: They could teach Jewish subjects?

BF: Yes, you could teach Hebrew and Jewish literature and everything but nothing in Hebrew, that was completely forbidden. Some of the teachers that they let them remain in our town, that they didn't send to Siberia, they knew Jewish and they started to teach Jewish in the Jewish schools. Hebrew was completely out, wiped out, you weren't allowed to say a Hebrew word. We were afraid to.

JF: The people who were arrested who were teaching Hebrew or possessing Hebrew books, they were sent to Siberia?

BF: They were sent to Siberia, yes. Quite a few of them.

JF: Did you then go to one of these Jewish schools?

BF: Then I went, yes, to one of those Jewish schools. This was for two years. Two years until the war broke out between Russia and the Germans.

JF: Were the synagogues permitted to continue to function under the Russians?

BF: No, I remember my mother used to pray on the holy holidays in the house. [unclear]. She didn't allow us got to the synagogue.

JF: They closed them?

BF: People were afraid, they were afraid to go to the synagogue. My mother always prayed in the house.

JF: Could any of the Jewish organizations continue to function under the Russians?

BF: No, nothing. They started to train the youth in the communist ways, they made organizations like the *Komsomol*[3], the Pioneers, and they were the pioneers we were

[3]*Komsomol* - Russian syllabic abbreviation of Vsesoyuzny Leninsky **Kom**munistichesky **So**yuz **Mol**odyozhi, (English: All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth), an organization for young people aged 14 to 28 that was primarily a political organ for spreading Communist teachings and preparing future members of the Communist Party. (Encyclopedia Britannica, www.britannica.com, "Komsomol" accessed November 20, 2006.)

too young and I remember they taught us how to march and they taught us military things which was very unusual.

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape one, side two of the interview with Mrs. Bess Freilich. You were telling me about the Russian education.

BF: The schools they emphasized that the children should have a good education. They gave us a good education. But it was only the way they wanted us, what they wanted us to know, nothing we wanted. Only Russian [unclear].

JF: You were in a Jewish school but the Russians had control of the curriculum?

BF: Yes, it was, let's say, half Jewish and half Russian in the subjects. Half and half.

JF: And they were permitted to teach some kind of Jewish history?

BF: No.

JF: No history, no Jewish subjects?

BF: No.

JF: The language, however, was Yiddish?

BF: Yes.

JF: And the subjects were controlled by the Russians?

BF: Yes.

JF: Were the Christians in the town similarly limited in their church practice by the Russians?

BF: I'm trying to remember. I don't know whether they went to church on Sunday or they didn't. The school at that time was actually mostly Jewish children and so then it was like they separated us. We were in our schools entirely and they were in different schools. [unclear]

JF: Your father's business was affected by the Russian occupation?

BF: Yes.

JF: Because he could no longer sell kosher meat?

BF: No.

JF: Did he have difficulty finding some other way of supporting the family?

BF: Yes, very difficult. In fact my brother was then 11 years old and he became the supporter of the family. My mother was making cigarettes in the house and they used to sell to the Russian soldiers and that's how he made it. When he came from school he used to run in the street and sell and that's how a little bit of money came in.

JF: How did you find the Russian soldiers? How did they treat you?

BF: The Russian soldiers when they were in our town, I mean everything was controlled, we had our family. It was, you know, order in the city. It was under different times then. They didn't bother us. But it was different when I was liberated. They liberated me it was a different soldier altogether, they were different times. A completely different period.

JF: So, the Russians were in your town until 1941?

BF: Yes.

JF: What happened then?

BF: Then what happened, it was June 21st around then. We were on our vacation from school and we went to sleep. That evening, somehow there were maneuvers, all the lights in the town were to be out and we expected--there was a lot of planes were going to be in the sky and they were going to practice and we didn't expect nothing at all but during the middle of the night, there was a terrible bombardment. The Russians themselves didn't know what happened. They said, "What's happening, they're real bullets and real bombs, it's our planes that are flying there." They didn't know themselves it was like a *Blitzkrieg* and they were very confused themselves. Our town was right near the border and we were the first ones to be taken over by the Germans.

JF: What happened?

BF: During the day, there was terrible confusion because we had three airports, our city was surrounded by three airports and right away they tried to bomb the airports. So, the city was like in flames. I remember I tried to sleep that day. It was the first day after the night of the whole night of bombardment. It was not because I was sleepy but I just felt that if I go to sleep that all of these terrible things that were happening was just going to disappear. I knew that God forbid my family is going to be hit by a bomb, I didn't want to see it. I felt if my eyes would be closed I just won't see it is happening to them. I didn't want to see it. Like I wished it should happen to me first, not to them. The whole day, it was terrible the whole time. It was upside down. People were running, people were leaving the city, a lot of them. Apparently the Russians returning to Russia. And of course, if you had little children, we had a baby six months old in the house and one was a year old. Every child [unclear]. There was a house full of children, little children, and how can you leave everything and just run and we couldn't. So, the families that had children remained. The younger adults, some of them with the military returned to Russia and some of them remained alive and some of them were killed in the bombardment.

JF: Some of these people were joining the military or...

BF: They were running with the military, they jumped on their trucks and they went and returned to Russia.

JF: Had any of the Jews in your community taken on Russian citizenship during the Russian occupation or had all of them chosen to stay in the town?

BF: No, they chose to stay.

JF: Was that option given to you?

BF: No. We probably remained because of the religion and conditions. A little, a few, not too many, they went with the Russians?

JF: Not too many?

BF: Not too many. Then it started, a real chaos started right after the Germans came in. The first thing they did, they took our rabbi which wasn't only a rabbi, it was mostly educated men in Poland and they took a horse and they tied him to the horse and

they dragged him all over the town and he died. That was one of the first things they did. A lot of people started to disappear right from the beginning when they came and nobody knew where they were, where they went. Everything was forbidden for Jews. Right away, they made the ghettos in the city and there was no food.

JF: How did they do that?

BF: They just weren't allowed to be found on the non-Jewish side and they made like partitions in the city and this was the Jewish part and that was for the non-Jews. Right away, they brought people from other towns, an awful lot of them, to our town and I remember from one town, it was Garniskin [phonetic], the name of it, that they made the people crawl from their town on their knees, which was maybe over 100 kilometers from our town, and they had to crawl, all the people, the children, the women. They were crawling, none of them was allowed to stand up, crawling like this and they brought them like this to our ghetto. Of course, they brought only maybe 10 percent of the population most of them died along the way.

JF: The name of this town was what, again?

BF: Garniskin.

JF: Garniskin?

BF: Garniskin. These people that remained alive, the population of our ghetto greeted them with open arms. I mean they shared the piece of bread that they had and gave it to them, they took them to their houses. They tried to make them comfortable under the circumstances, and they remained in our ghetto. Later on, they joined our own destination, they were evacuated with us from our town and all the little towns that surrounded us.

JF: You said that the population in your town swelled with the Jews that were brought in and you estimate how many Jews?

BF: Around 15,000.

JF: About 15,000 were then in your town.

BF: They came from all over, from Bialystok from Berleziv [phonetic] and from all over the surrounding towns, they brought them to our ghetto.

JF: Was your home inside the ghetto area?

BF: Yes, yes we were lucky, we were inside so we stayed in our home.

JF: Did you have other families that were living with you?

BF: Yes, we had two women. They were from Bialystok. I, as a child, got very attached to them. I remember when they evacuated us, they wanted all the people from Bialystok first. They went with the first transport. We went with the second. It was only a matter of two days. But I'll never forget those two days. I was attached to these women. There was so much pain in my heart. They took them away. I knew I'm going to be next but I remember crying all day and night just because I had so much sorrow that they weren't with us anymore even though for only two days.

JF: You said that food was scarce?

BF: Yes, very scarce. I used to go out of the ghetto and where our school was there were Germans stationed and they had a kitchen there and I put my life in jeopardy actually, if they would have caught me, they would have killed me. I used to grab a little bit of food, not the potatoes but the peel of the potatoes, I used to bring it to my mother and she used to cook it. I once went, I was very desperate, I remember my little sister, she was very sick, I remember going into one of the food storages and I took a little bit farina and they caught me.

JF: Who caught you?

BF: A German.

JF: A German?

BF: A German caught me. He wanted to kill me and I felt any minute the shots were piercing my back but I started running and he shot like out of nowhere, he shot just in the air. He was shooting at me but somehow I ran away. I was then--originally I wouldn't do it, but my sister was very sick with scarlet fever and she was very hungry and there was nothing actually to eat and my mother used to breast feed her. My mother didn't have anything to breast feed her because she didn't eat nothing herself, my mother, and she was hungry. I remember days when my mother used to stretch out her hands and used to say here my children, bite my hands, maybe you'll still the hunger, maybe you'll feel a little better. That's what she used to do all the time. So, my sister she was very sick like I said and they took her to a hospital in the ghetto and she was getting a little bit better. I used to come every day to see her and one day, I came and my mother, I looked at my mother's face and I knew that the baby feels better because my mother was--like she looked much better and I looked at the baby and she looked very good and then it came, an order from the Germans that all the babies, they should get rid of the babies in the hospital and what I heard and what I believe that they gave her a shot in the leg, a needle that had air in it, to the baby.

JF: The needle had…?

BF: Had air.

JF: Oh, had air in the needle.

BF: Yes, they gave it to her and she died, and she was a beautiful baby.

JF: How old was she?

BF: She was around 7 or 8 months. She was the most gorgeous baby. I was a little bit you know bigger then and when my mother had her I resented a little bit. But I got to love this baby with my whole heart and that's how she died and I remember going with my mother to the cemetery. My mother had such strange feelings and she told me she said: "My child," she said, she said, "if someday, I won't be around, if you come to the cemetery, you will remember where her grave was." And I was crying so, it was just me and my father we went to the cemetery and we buried her. And that's how it happened. After the war, when I came back to my town, the first thing we did we went to the cemetery and I looked for the grave. I was running like a maniac because I went with a group of people

and I was afraid, I was very much afraid they should leave before me, I was afraid to stay there by myself. So, I wanted to find the grave of my grandfather because he died before the war broke out; in a way he was like a holy man because he didn't go through all this. I looked for his grave and just couldn't find it and I looked for the grave of my sister. I tried to remember certain parts of the cemetery, it was in my mind where it happened but they changed so much there. I mean they didn't change all those graves, they were still there but they made some changes there and I just couldn't find it. I was very upset. I was running around. I wanted like, you know, to do it for my mother and I couldn't find it.

JF: The markers were still there? Or the markers had been moved?

BF: There were no markers.

JF: The markers were gone.

BF: There were no markers. But it wasn't like a real *metzeveh* [gravestone] in those days. Just dates my mother marked on a piece of [unclear].

JF: Was this cemetery within the ghetto area?

BF: Inside the ghetto.

JF: And the hospital that your sister was taken to, who ran this hospital?

BF: Jewish doctors.

JF: Jewish doctors.

BF: Yes, they got the order to get rid of the children and that's what they did.

JF: The Jewish doctors did it?

BF: In fact, my husband's mother, she was delivering a child in the hospital when the Germans came in, she was holding the baby in her hands, feeding the baby, they came and they shot every mother in the hospital and every baby. That's how his mother died, with the baby in her arms.

JF: Were the Jewish doctors able to get any kind of medications to really treat people who were sick in the ghetto hospital?

BF: Oh, little things like probably aspirins something like this. I remember my mother giving blood to the baby. They took blood from my mother and gave it to the baby. The baby seemed fine. When I came, the baby felt better and she smiled at me and the next day, she was gone, it was the order from the Germans. They had their Jewish *Kehillah*, like, that ran the ghetto, they were Jewish people but they worked very hard and they tried very hard for the population. In fact, when things got real bad, they saw that they can't tolerate it, they saw what was going on and a lot of them that just couldn't take it committed suicide and those were very brilliant men, very brilliant, all professionals, very highly educated people. A lot of them came from Warsaw, they ran away and came to our town. They were real educated, very fine, nice people. Their hearts couldn't take it, they couldn't take what was happening to their fellow Jews and they looked for a way out and one day, we found them all there, they just got together, all of them in one room, and they committed suicide.

JF: How long after the ghetto was formed did this happen?

BF: About a year after.

JF: Were they in the position of having to round up Jews for the transports?

BF: Yes, they saw this coming. That's why they did it. They just couldn't do that.

JF: So, as a body, they committed suicide?

BF: Yes, and they picked a second committee instead of them and they were all lawyers like I said and very fine people and after what happened, somebody had to lead, we needed some kind of a leader so we picked out honest men and they ran the ghetto. There wasn't much to run. There was no food to be distributed. Everybody was starving but you had to round up people for work, the Germans told them that they need so many and so many people to work in those and those places, somebody had to bring the people together and organize all the working *Kommandos* to go out of the ghetto.

JF: Were you or any of your family involved in these working *Kommandos*?

BF: I used to go out of the ghetto to work, to wash the floors, in German positions in German homes. Not in the homes, in the offices, wash the floors, and attend to their gardens but see, I was still a child. The older people, they worked very hard. They beat them. Even a few of them were killed during that time. They gave a contribution to them that every Jewish woman has to give all their jewelry and all their gold. I can't tell exactly, I don't remember how much gold they wanted, how much diamonds they wanted the Jewish ghetto should provide for the Germans. And everybody gave just to prolong life in the ghetto a little bit. We knew they were buying, they were buying time, in the ghetto. Eventually, it's going to happen to us what was happening to other cities all around us. The cities were wiped out completely.

JF: Were the Germans requesting this directly or did they go through the Jewish council?

BF: Through the *Judenrat* and the Jewish council. They gave them what they actually wanted and one evening, quite a few of the youth ran into the forest. Some of them they went out to work and somehow they managed to run into the forest and they came like the so-called partisans. One evening, there was the highest Gestapo from our town, he came to this *Judenrat* and he stayed there and what was happening was that some of the partisans, they came to the *Judenrat*, too, they asked for boots they wanted which they did once in a while. They needed bread, they wanted, you know, that the Jews should provide them with something. So, that was a time that they entered the ghetto and they went to the *Judenrat* and this Gestapo, they met eye to eye and there was a shooting started and a few of the Jews, the partisans, got killed and there was a watchman near the door. He got killed and anyhow then and there the Gestapo men gave the order that they were going to evacuate the whole city the next day, that there were going to be transports each day, a different transport.

JF: How long had the ghetto been in existence when this order came through?

BF: Close to three years.

JF: Three years.

BF: Two years.

JF: This was 1943 then?

BF: The beginning.

JF: The beginning of 1943.

BF: The beginning, yes. And then what happened was that we find out that it wasn't this incident that made them evacuate us but actually afterward we find out from the *goyim* that they already reserved all these horses and wagons to take us to the station two weeks before. So, actually it wasn't this incident. They had in mind, already the time came, to evacuate us like they did with all the rest of the towns. We were holding on. One of the latest ghettos. There weren't too many ghettos left, I think it was in Bialystok, and of course, the one in Warsaw that still remained. Otherwise all the smaller towns were all wiped out, there was nobody there, no Jewish people in these towns.

JF: During the time of the ghetto, what kind of news did you have of what was happening elsewhere?

BF: We knew that they killed a whole city and we heard something about Makzyn, that they were bringing Jews there and they killed them but nobody nobody wanted to believe that human beings could do that to other human beings. Nobody wanted to believe it until the last moment, we all thought it was only bad dreams, we just couldn't believe that they would take people for no reason just for them being Jewish and just kill them in cold blood.

JF: Did you know anything about the death camps?

BF: I knew something about Malczyn, they were talking about Dachau. I remember listening to the adults and that's what they were talking about but everybody said it must be the one that went away and who brought all those rumors must be crazy or lost his mind. He was just spreading fantasies that were untrue. How can you take a person and kill, just kill him. Nobody wanted to believe it.

JF: Was there any contact with the non-Jewish sector, while you were in the ghetto? Were any of the non-Jews helpful to you at all?

BF: No, they were not, no. They were not--everything stopped, everything stopped, and you weren't allowed to associate with the non-Jews. Sometimes when things were just terrible and we thought that the hunger was going to kill us, so me and my brother took off the yellow star we snuck in, they used to have the bazaars in the non-Jewish section and everything remained the way it was before the war. They had food, they had everything and we used to take my mother's the dress and my mother's the pair of shoes and trade it for a few potatoes. Me and my brother--they still had the bazaars on the same days of the week and life was the same way with the non-Jews as it was before this all started. It's only for the Jews, that it was like hell itself. That's how it was and the day came, they started to evacuate us and that was the end.

JF: Before this time, had there been any possibility of continuing your education while the ghetto was in existence?

BF: No, there was nothing. It was the furthest thing in our mind because if you're hungry, you don't think about educating.

Tape two, side one:

JF: This is tape two, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Bess Freilich, on June 5, 1981 with Josey Fisher.

BF: We always were worried whether I will get this frozen potato for the next day to keep us from dying from hunger or we wouldn't get it. That's what was mostly on our minds, nothing else, and the children ceased to be children. They became adults at a very young age. You didn't think about going to school or getting educated, you just fought for survival, survival of the family, of the parents. That was constantly in our minds.

JF: What about religion in the ghetto? How was it handled?

BF: Religion was that we always thought that God helped us through such terrible times. I remember my mother saying that during the first World War, her father used to tell her that the city didn't suffer too much. She said that it was a very big fire around the city and when it touched the Jewish neighborhood, I mean it stopped and that was like a sign that God is watching over us, that nothing will happen and she was very religious and she believed that God will help her. I was religious, too. I didn't write on *Shabbos* and we observed *Shabbos* and the holidays and everything but right now, it's very hard to go through Auschwitz and believe in God. If you saw the Germans pick up babies that were just born that they didn't seen at all, they didn't touch life yet, and took them and bust their heads in the telephone poles. You have to wonder where was God, where is He, where was He, why didn't He do something about it? It's very hard for me *now* to be religious. But of course, sometimes I think you have to believe in something. I mean you can't just live like a sheep.

JF: At that time, in the ghetto, then religion was still important?

BF: Important, very important. We prayed to God to give us the miracle and it never came. Everybody believed in a miracle but the miracle never came. The only popular word in the ghetto was a *Nes*, [miracle] a *Nes min ha'shamayim* [A miracle from heaven.]. And *Nes* never came.

JF: You said it was the early part of 1943 when the first evacuations started from your ghetto. Can you tell me how it came about?

BF: It's like I said, that's when it happened in the *Judenrat* and the next day they started to evacuate the city. They started to evacuate the city. My grandfather came to spend the day with us, my father's father.

JF: It was your mother's father that you had referred to before? He had died before the war?

BF: Yes, he had died before the war.

JF: This was the man who had been in America earlier?

BF: Yes. That was my father's father that came to spend with us sometimes he felt in his heart, probably, that it was his last day and he wanted to spend it with us. It was his second marriage and he had a wife and two beautiful daughters but he left them and

came somehow to us, to be with his grandchildren. I remember the people that had a little bit, you know, stocked away a little bit of flour to buy bread because he always kept it for the rainy day I mean the people that had a little bit of food, they gave each other and they shared and the families baked bread the whole night to take it with--and the Germans the next day said we weren't allowed to take anything, just whatever we were wearing.

JF: Where did you hear that you were going to go?

BF: Well, we knew that this is it, that they were taking us maybe to a camp. See, what they did before was, it was a month before they evacuated us, they told all the Jews to come to a certain place and a certain street there, a big street, everybody to come and to stand in fives, the whole families, everybody together and then we didn't know what was happening. We thought then they were going to kill us or shoot us. It was the beginning of January. It was a very, very cold day. I remember we stood out there in the street with little children, babies. We were all hungry, we were standing the whole day. We were freezing, the weather was just terrible that day and they let us stay the whole day then the Germans came and they counted us. They counted the whole population. After they counted us, came the order for us to go home back to our houses. I'll never forget that evening. I'll never forget it. We entered our house and we walked in and my little brothers, they threw themselves on the floor and were kissing the floor. They were kissing the floor and then we had a little bit of food and my mother made the oven. The house got warm and then we prayed, that evening we all prayed and thanked God. To us it was a miracle, a short lived miracle, but it was a miracle that they let us go back to our homes. And we thought if they let us stay, they'll let us live but then afterwards, there came the order, the reason they counted us, they wanted to know how many sleds they would need for all the people to take us to the railroad station. It was a different town. Its name was Linova, and there the trains were waiting for us but from our town to Linova, they needed sleds to put us on the sleds, to put us on the sleds.

JF: What kind of sleds were these?

BF: Regular, like a horse and buggy, instead of the wagon, there was the sled, because it was winter time and there was a lot of snow.

JF: These were horse drawn sleds?

BF: Yes, and you could put people in them. They were rather large and they had to order them from the surrounding villages, from the *goyim*, so they wanted to know, the Germans, how many they would need. That's what the count was all about. Right afterwards, it was the real evacuation. Like I said, my grandfather came to spend the day with us and it was like noon and the Gestapo came and chased us out and we were still in the courtyard of our house and my grandfather, who was a nicely built man, tall, I remember he was wearing his better frock like he used to wear on the holidays, a black suit, and he used to wear a cane. He could walk but it was like--he was with his cane in the courtyard. The Germans somehow they thought why do we need him. He probably thought that he doesn't want him to take our place in the sled or whatever. They didn't want to

bring him to Auschwitz, they shot him before my eyes. They shot him and he was laying just in front of me. That was the beginning of the real inferno. That's how it started. My grandfather was laying in the courtyard. It was the last time. I have a picture actually of my home and my last look at my life and my grandfather laying covered with blood. And all of us cried. But we had to walk and they were chasing us and we came to a certain place where the sleds waited for us and that's when we went on the sleds, and like I said before, the rest of the population, the non-Jews, were standing on both sides of the street and clapping and laughing and carrying on terribly that they're getting rid of the Jews and all kinds of antisemitic words they threw at us. That's when I saw the Markovitz's, they were clapping too. We came to Linova and the trains were waiting for us.

JF: How many people do you think were evacuated with you?

BF: We had four transports. I was with the--we were with the second transport. There were four transports.

JF: These were all within a few days of each other?

BF: Yes, thousands of people. In between those transports, it happened like one week it took to evacuate the whole city. I mean the young, the youths of the city tried during the night to cut the wires of the ghetto. [unclear] To cut the wires, it was a dark night and they thought that maybe they would be able to run away but most of them died. They were all shot and they were laying on the grass in the morning, they shot them all. We heard so much shooting during the night and we didn't know who it was or what it was. In the morning, we saw the best kids of our town just laying in the grass and all of them dead. They shot them all. That's how they took care of it to evacuate a whole city. We came to the Linova, to that town...

JF: About how long was that trip, on the sled?

BF: On the sled it took a couple hours.

JF: And you could take only the clothes that you were wearing?

BF: That we were wearing. My mother told me to put on a lot of clothes so I put a lot of clothes on me which didn't help me any later on. That time we didn't know it wasn't such a good idea to put all these clothes on because while they put us in those cars, in the wagons, those trains, those were made you know to transport cows or horses from one place to another and that's where they put us and they started to push us and there was terrible chaos, and they were standing on both sides of each door of the wagon and they were beating us terribly on the head while we were walking up to the train and we lost my father and we were so upset to be traveling without him.

JF: He was separated from you?

BF: We were afraid to be separated from him and we didn't know for how long but the last minutes somehow a miracle happened and he snuck in and the Germans looked away and he joined us on the wagon, and were very happy but we were beaten over the head with big clubs, all of us, and they put so many people in the wagon, you could hardly stand up. We couldn't stand up. There were hundreds of people in this wagon.

JF: You couldn't sit down?

BF: You couldn't sit, there was no room to sit. You had to stand up, and I was wearing all those clothes and it was so hot inside. The clothes made me faint and I was like I was unconscious. [unclear] I was very sick. Three days it took us, without water without food. One day I remember while I was feeling a little bit better, my mother told me, come on my child, she had a little place she sat down once with each of us, we shared this place to sit down and she was there sitting. It was near a tiny little window, very small, very little. She said, "Come my child, stand up on me and see, things are alright outside. [unclear] Take a look," she said, "people are living." [unclear] And I looked and I saw what she said was the truth because people, young people, young women with Germans as escorts, they were going to a theatre and we were passing by and everything was lit up, they were all outside. That's when we knew that they are going to destroy us because [unclear]. After all, if they wanted us to live, they would give us some water or some food and then for three days, they didn't. So, we knew that they probably are going to kill us all. But then a little hope arrived because we saw that we passed Makzyn and some men knew the direction of this small camp that we knew that they were killing an awful lot of the Polish Jews there and he said, "If they would want to kill us, they would stop right here, why are they dragging us farther? If they wanted to kill us, they would kill us here. That means there is hope for us. Maybe they'll take us to a working camp and maybe they'll put us to work." But those three days that we were traveling, I mean, our tongues were out already from thirst. My mother gave her urine to the children to drink. People were doing their necessities one on top of the other. People were just being crazy, from thirst and hunger.

JF: Was there a guard in the train?

BF: They were on top of each, a few guards on top of the roof.

JF: On top of the roof?

BF: Laying with machine guns. They were laying with machine guns. There was one man that pushed himself through this little window and jumped. We heard a shot, they killed him. We heard shots constantly, constantly, through this journey. They were shooting at people right and left that must have jumped, they killed them. We saw dead people laying while the train was passing by. It was probably from previous transports. They were still laying on the road. And then the middle of the night, we arrived to our destination. They brought us to Auschwitz. They brought us to Auschwitz and right away, there was an awful lot of screaming and an awful lot of shouting from the Germans that we heard before they opened up the doors from those three cars. Afterwards, they opened up the doors and we saw a lit up place. It seemed like it was daytime. It was during the night. We saw thousands of Germans standing by and so many of them started to chase us out from the cars. We could hardly walk. Our knees and our feet could hardly make a step. My mother was with the children, the young ones, and she walked ahead with my father and one of my little brothers, somehow he found a little cup and I remember he took the

cup and was picking up pieces of snow and handing it to my mother. She should take it in her mouth, the dirty snow, he was feeding it to my mother and while he was doing it, the Germans shot him with the cup in his hand and he was laying on the railroad.

JF: How old was he?

BF: He was six. He was laying like this with a cup in his hand. There was terrible chaos, just terrible. People were all crying, people were screaming. There was shouting, they were beating us with their guns, they were kicking women in their stomachs. They were confusing us, first they said to stand here and then they told us to stand there and we were running from one place to the other. I wanted to go with my mother then a German came and he said no, you're going some place else and that's when my mother, that's when she told me what I said before. They grabbed me and they put me with the younger girls. I just kissed my mother. They didn't let me kiss even my brothers, they grabbed me away. While I was standing with the group of the young girls, I saw what they did with the other people. There were open trucks and they had--my mother she was a tall woman and like I said, the place was very lit up, you could see everything that was happening and she walked with one child in her hands holding him and one she was holding in her arms and one she was holding the hand. The rest were following her and she walked on that train, on that open track and the Germans were standing and they were hitting each person over their heads. I saw my mother, she was not too far from where I was standing and I saw they hit her and she didn't pick herself up. That was the last I saw of her.

JF: She fell down?

BF: Yes, he hit her over the head. That's what they did, what I found out later they did at the crematorium. So what they did with our transports, first they hit them over the head and then they took them to open pits and they poured gasoline over but first they tried to hit them over the heads to confuse them. That was the last I saw of my mother and my brothers.

JF: All the rest of your brothers were killed with your mother?

BF: Two of them got into the camp. Two of them, my father, they took with the men, with the younger men and they took him to Auschwitz, to the camp for the men, with two of my younger brothers. They were younger than I. One of them was 13 and one was 12. They took them and they were already about six weeks in Auschwitz and this was the hardest time because if you survived a little bit mentally, like if you didn't go crazy, maybe you had a chance to live a little bit longer so they lived six weeks already in the concentration camps and then the Germans gave the order that they wanted all the young kids to register that they were taking them to a camp where they will have it a little bit easier, especially for children. Then my father said that it's so hard because they take all the youngsters and they kill them in this camp and they asked him what they should do. He encouraged them, what did he know. And my poor father had to live with it and they took him and there was no chance for young children. They took him straight to the crematorium and one day, I was in the camp already in Auschwitz myself and a girl came

to me from our town and she told me while she was walking from the *Kommando* on the truck I saw your two brothers and they screamed at me, "If you see Bashka, our sister, tell her that they took us to the crematorium instead of the children's camp." And that's where they took them.

JF: At that point, the gas chambers were in operation?

BF: They were in operation already.

JF: Did you know whether your father was alive?

BF: I didn't know at that time. I found out later. My father was almost dead and my brothers were then still with him. He came from work one day and of course when he came from work, he had to stand in front of those barracks and the Germans were counting if everybody came back, if nobody ran away or anything and it was very cold and rainy outside everybody rushed after they let them, they called it *Appell*, like the counting, when it was over everybody rushed fast to the barracks to warm up a little bit. My father was between them and he didn't notice that the Germans were putting in front of the barrack fresh cement. My father didn't know it and he stepped on it. The Germans said that they were going to kill the whole barrack if the person that stepped on the cement won't come out. So before my father could say a thing, somebody pointed at him that he was the one that stepped in that cement. It was a fellow from our town and it just happened he was afraid for his life. He pointed at my father. The Germans beat my father terribly. That people that knew that we are close, we were with a few people with my town that kept together and they said to me after all this, they didn't think that my father would live. They beat him up terribly, they threw stones at him, they stepped on him, they jumped on him. My father didn't look like a human being no more and practically under the Germans' eyes, my two brothers jumped in. They were still with my father then and they picked my father up and the Germans beat them up terribly and they went into the barrack with my father and somehow they nursed him--they took care of him, they carried him to work, they carried him back from work because he couldn't remain in the barrack. Once you remained in the barrack and didn't go to work, they took you for the selection, the selection was the crematorium. So, they carried him to work.

Tape two, side two:

JF: This tape two, side two, of an interview with Mrs. Bess Freilich, on June 5, 1981.

BF: Somehow my father started to get a little bit better, and he went to the *Kommandos* and that's how he wasn't taken for the selection at that time because once you got sick, then they took those people right away to the crematorium. It just happened that two years ago, at a ghetto [unclear], the survivors of our town, there's only a few of them now left, that this person that pointed at my father at that time in the concentration camp told me the whole story of what happened. See, I didn't know that and he said that he has to live with this all his life because he was the one that pointed at my father and until now he has nightmares about it and he asked me how my father's health was and how is he, and he cried and said he didn't mean to do it and the Germans said they were going to kill every one of them and he doesn't know what got into him, he was very scared, his mind didn't work, he shouldn't have done it but he regrets it until this day and it's eating his heart out. Please tell your father, please tell him he should forgive me. My father still suffers from this with his back. When he came to this country, he had to work in a glass factory and he had to give it up, since then he hasn't been working because his back is really in very bad shape and this is since that time. Now what can you tell to a person like this, after he told us. My husband listened, we both listened, and we couldn't say a thing and now it was--at the time maybe he didn't mean to do it, he was frightened and who knows, the Germans might have killed all the people if my father wouldn't come out. It was just a minor thing but it gave them an excuse, which they didn't need an excuse, they used to kill people right and left each day but it gave them an excuse to beat an other person up, and that's what they did to my father. I was in Birkenau actually. I was in Auschwitz a short while and then they picked girls, stronger girls, and they picked us up to a camp to Budy. When we arrived in Birkenau and they threw us into a quarantine barracks where they kept us like for a week until they took us to work.

JF: Why a quarantine?

BF: I don't know, but each transport, new transport, that came, they kept all the inmates in for a week and I don't know why they did it. That was the first time we came to the barracks and the Germans stood on both sides of the door. This was a usual thing to them. Each girl had to pass by the line and they hit everybody on the head coming into the barrack. Everybody was running on top of each other and I remember being beaten over my head and I ran in real fast and I hid in the barrack, in the bottom beds. There were two...

JF: Like a bunk.

BF: There were three bunks and I hid on the first one just to run away from the Germans. So, it was the easiest one to run into but as the girls came in running and they were beating us, everybody was beaten up so badly, a lot of them--the first bunks were

taken already so a lot of them jumped on top and that's where the bunk bed broke and all of the girls on top of me, with the wood, with everything. I remember them jumping down and screaming oh, there's a girl there, she's lying, she's bleeding. Everything was on top of me, the wood and the bricks there and the Germans ran through the halls and wherever they could, they just beat everyone of them up. When they left, I remember everybody was confused, everybody lost--they lost their minds, they just became crazy, all the girls, some of them undressed, some of them they stood on top and they gave speeches. They didn't know what they were talking. Nobody made sense because right away the shock, the shock it devastated us. I mean here you were with your parents, and there's no parents and we asked for our friends and they say they went up through the chimney. This was the answer. And when I heard it, I remember I wanted to commit suicide. I wanted to--I kept hitting my head so hard in the brick wall, I just didn't want to believe when I heard, what happened to my parents. I knew I just had a family and all of a sudden, I'm all alone. There was no will to live. I remember walking in the hall and seeing a girl laying there and I lost my mind probably, too, and I thought it was my mother. I was sitting near the girl. She was dead already. I only kept on saying that this is my mother. I remember at that time, they gave a few pieces of bread and I was sitting there in the hall and I was feeling her, the girl was dead already, and later on, I realized that this was a cousin of mine but I couldn't connect--I knew she was something to me but I couldn't connect who she was. I thought it was my mother, here she was dead and I was pushing a piece of bread, my piece of bread to her and I cried and I begged her that she should stand up and I cried and I talked to her. I only thought it was my mother. But, you know, I completely, you know everybody was in the same shape.

JF: This was in Birkenau, that first week in the barracks?

BF: In the barracks.

JF: How many days or how long had you been in Auschwitz before being put in this barrack in Birkenau?

BF: That's where they brought us. They brought us to Birkenau, the women they brought to Birkenau.

JF: After how long?

BF: They thought we would be able to work. From where they...

JF: Right away?

BF: Right away they brought us to Birkenau. In this here, in Birkenau, I was a couple weeks and then they picked the stronger girls to send to camp Budy, and that's where they took me. This was hell on earth, that camp was really an inferno.

JF: The name of the camp was Budy?

BF: B-u-d-e-e, I believe. [Correct spelling Budy.]

JF: This was a work camp?

BF: It was worse than a concentration camp. What we had to do we had to build a mountain where the trains supposed to where they put tracks for a train and they built an

artificial mountain and that's what we had to build. And right away when we came to this camp, I remember it was the middle of the night, and they told us to stay in line and we received pieces of bread that they gave us. We received near the kitchen, the bread, and a couple were standing near the barracks and taking it away from us, they took it away from us.

JF: Why was that?

BF: Well, that was the *Kapo*, they took it for themselves. The Germans gave us a piece of bread and they took it away from us. The next day, they took us to work and it was hell, it was hell, that camp was hell. No matter how much you can talk about it, how much you can write about it, there are no words in the vocabulary, you can't talk about it, you can't describe it, it's impossible. They were killing everybody. Just in case, let's say, we used to push little wagons on top of the mountain. God forbid if a little wagon went off the track, they killed all the six girls. Going to the camp, they wrote the numbers and whoever they wanted, they shot during lunch hour. They picked the numbers, we were working in shifts and whoever they wanted to mark down the number, and that girl knew already that she's going to die in the afternoon at lunch hour.

JF: If they didn't give her a number?

BF: No, they just marked a number, who they wanted dead.

JF: They wrote down the number?

BF: They wrote down the number and those people during the lunch hour, it was entertainment for the Germans. They sat on top of the mountain and we were in the valley and they kept on telling us to take the clothes off and start dancing and then walk towards the--they told the girls to undress and I remember there was a mother and daughter. Somehow the mother got in with the girls in the camp. Mostly, they separated the mothers and their children, they took them to the crematorium and this mother somehow, she got in with her daughter and they told her to undress and start dancing with her daughter and then they told her to turn around with the other girl and they shot them. This was going on every day at lunch hour, every day.

JF: They would shoot all the girls while they were dancing?

BF: While they were dancing, sometimes they told them to dance, sometimes they told them to sing and this was just you know entertainment for them.

JF: You said that the mothers were usually taken to the crematorium. About what age seemed to be the cut-off from what you could tell?

BF: If they saw a woman with children, right away she went. They took mostly young girls, starting from 14 or so until 25. They took them to the camps. That's the kind of camp Budy was, it was just terrible. Going back from the barrack, from the work to the barrack, we had to push the wagons. With the dead. There were hundreds of girls. The Germans made us push the wagons with the dead. Mostly all of them were girls from our town.

JF: These were girls that they had shot?

BF: They had shot them working there, in the lunch hour. They were timing us to load up the heavy dirt with those wagons and once you didn't make the time, six girls had to fill up the dirt. They came and they killed everybody. They were running from the top of the mountain and we knew already that this was it. They killed all the six girls, if it wasn't in time that we filled those wagons with the heavy dirt or whether sometimes the wagon went off the track which wasn't our fault. We had to push the dirt on top, load up the dirt, push it on top of the mountain with the heavy dirt and then, it was empty so it was going down the mountain so fast and we were so weak and so tired and so cold, that we were just dragging on the mud like rags and holding onto this little wagon and we were just coming down dragging ourselves in the mud and this was the work. When it was snowing, the whole road was wet. Going to work, there were wells. The girls just jumped in the wells because they just couldn't take it any more. They used to bring from Auschwitz 400 girls and in a matter of two days the camp was empty. They had to bring more. They all died, they all died.

JF: How many girls do you think were in this camp? At any one time.

BF: In Budy, it was 400.

JF: 400 at any one time?

BF: It was small it was smaller than Auschwitz. There were so many thousand because when I was this was already a few thousand, and so many were there then most of them were dead. So many came into the camp.

JF: You were given your number in Auschwitz?

BF: In Auschwitz, right when we came in, yes. They gave us the numbers, they undressed us, they told us to give everything, whatever we had before we left the house and my mother had some money that her father, like I said, he worked here, that he left her at the house and she sewed it in my clothes and I remember looking for the money because they said if they find money with anybody, they're going to kill them right away and here I was looking until I found the money in my coat, sewed in, I was just throwing the $20 bills in the middle of the room and part of me went with it because I knew that the family could have lived on this money and we were saving it for a rainy day. My mother always thought she would keep it and the kids will grow up and maybe she'll need it to, you know, to educate them further and give them something later on in their lives they'll need something, so that's why she kept the money. Here, I was throwing it and had a hard time finding it and I was happy that I found it because if I wouldn't and they would find it on me, then they would have killed me. Like I said, part of me went with the money because I knew that when we were hungry maybe in the ghetto, the money could have helped us a little bit but yet still, my mother said it might yet be worse than it was then, it could be even worse times. She thought maybe it will help us to pay for our lives maybe. Here, I was giving it away, in this room all this money that my mother saved for years. Her father used to give it to her. Then, in camp, I got sick and everybody had dysentery everybody had typhoid, everybody and my time came too and I felt very, very sick and one day, I could

see that I couldn't last another day because to live in Budy, one day it was like struggling through life for years. It was really like you're fighting, it was resistance. Just one day to live three. The strongest girls could last a couple days. There was a family of girls with four girls from our town and they were strong, very healthy girls, and one after the other they went just like that and one day, I was pushing a wagon, they forced me and the youngest. The youngest was on that wagon and she was shot. The youngest, she was only maybe 12 or 13 years old. Somehow, she got into that camp, too, and all the four girls died in that camp. I felt that my day had come, I felt like a hollow on my chest because the dirt we had to haul, some pieces with the grass--how do you call it, turf, so we had to carry this and it was very heavy and on rainy days and cold days, and your hands were cold and it was very heavy to carry and somehow I found out if I keep it to my chest, it was easier for me to carry it and I managed to do it and finally, I got sick and I felt something very hollow like in my chest and I got very sick, burning up with fever and one morning I just couldn't go to work. So, I thought to myself that I'm going to rip a piece of blanket and I felt like if I put something on my chest it's going to help me and maybe I'll be able to go through the day and it was punishment for ripping a blanket. They beat you 25 times over that. I miscalculated, the blanket didn't help me any. In fact, it made it worse for me. The *Kapo* grabbed me by my striped dress and she noticed the blanket and that was it and they beat me. I counted the 17th time and then I don't know what happened and I found myself in a pool of blood and water. It was raining that day and I was laying near the barrack and there were puddles there from the rain that used to come from the roof. It was a deep puddle with water there and I laid in this puddle and when I regained my consciousness, I saw that it was all filled with blood. They beat me so hard and I looked at the sun. I remember I could always tell the time by looking at the sun because there was no other way of knowing what time it was and I knew that around twelve o'clock they came from Birkenau from the crematorium and picked up all the dead and the people who didn't go to work, they took too. The dead and all--we called them the *Muselmann*, the ones that couldn't already walk and they looked like actually dead people. So, I looked at the sun and I saw it must be around twelve o'clock or so and that was the time they came and they take you. Being in Birkenau, you knew already that everybody was going to the crematorium, that they would take me from here. Somehow with all that I went through and with all that surrounded me, there was still like a will to live, I don't know whether it was youth or it was just to touch life a little bit. Actually, I can't explain what it was that kept me alive and I crawled, I crawled away from this puddle to the barrack, back where the toilets were and I hid under a whole pile of dirty clothes that the girls took off because they all had dysentery. Somehow, some girls would give away the piece of bread for a different dress because you couldn't work. Once they saw you with all this on you, then they would kill you. So, the girls were afraid and they dropped those dresses there in the toilet and there was a whole pile and I went underneath this pile and I just lay there, and I laid there and I didn't care what was going to happen. I figure I'll postpone it for a couple of hours. But they wrote

my number down already and the little truck, it was like a Red Cross and it had a Red Cross sign on it, and then it came and they were looking for me all over because my number was marked and I heard them scream 33-3-27 and calling my number and I just pretended I wasn't around and just laid there. I couldn't walk, I was bleeding all over. I was living, I was not living, I was conscious, I wasn't conscious, I didn't care what was happening to me. But at that minute, I wanted to lay under those filthy clothes and I laid there when the *Kommando* came back and the girls came back from work, somehow I mixed with them because I couldn't be on the camp, I couldn't show myself because nobody was allowed. So during the day I laid there and when the *Kommando* came back, I mixed with them and I walked into them, into the barrack, with the *Kommando*. I couldn't already go on top so I laid down on the bottom bed and I was laying and in the middle of the night, I see the night *Kapo* waking me and she tells me she picked me to carry these two big buckets. We weren't allowed to go during the night to make in the barrack where the toilets were. You were supposed to do it in the barrack and they had two big buckets and I could hardly stand up. I couldn't walk, I couldn't stand up. I didn't even look like a human being and she picked me to carry those two heavy big buckets. I begged her to give me a chance, not to beat me, that maybe, I said, with God's help, I will manage to carry it to empty in to the toilet. That's what she wanted me to do. See, I couldn't stand up. She had a stick and she was holding it against my back to hold me straight, so I would be able to stand up straight. So, here I take the buckets and I just couldn't carry them. I managed to take it out of the barracks and there was a German standing there, you know, the guard, on top with his gun and he was started to flirt with this here *Kapo* and she started to show off and she started hitting me. I begged her, I begged her "*Bitte schlagen Sie mir nicht, schlagen Sie mir nicht* [Please don't beat me, don't beat me] because I'll never be able to carry those buckets." And she started to scream at me I should shut up and started to hit me again. And then, I'll never forget it till I die, I turned to this guard and I begged him please--in German—"*Bitte schiessen Sie mir,"* please kill me. "Please do me a favor, kill me, I can't go on like this. I don't want to live no more." He said, "You *Alte Sau* [you old pig]," he said. "I don't want to waste a German bullet on you, you'll die any minute anyhow." She started to push me with the stick and there was like a little piece of wood because on both sides, there was mud, there was an awful lot of mud in this camp everywhere, only mud and there was a little piece of wood and I had to walk on this piece and hold my balance with the two buckets. It was impossible for me to do and I fell down and all those buckets on top of me with their dirt, with everything and she hit me again and then I gave up and I gave up and they threw me in the morgue. They had a morgue in the barrack, for the dead people they kept that died during the night, and they kept me there and there were dying girls laying there and they were pinching me. I'll never forget, I was laying in a pile of dead bodies some were dying, some were dead already. And I was laying like this on top of them I spent the night. That night, I was conscious and I knew what was happening to me. I knew that the next time the Red Cross car would come, this will be the end and that would happen

the next day at twelve o'clock exactly. The car came and I walked in--I remember like it was now. I picked my right foot, my right foot, I picked it up like this. I knew why I was going and somehow in my mind the thoughts passed by, I knew it then but I prayed to God it should be easy and it should be fast. And that's the only reason I picked my right leg. Like it was a superstition. I walked into that little truck and I remember there was olives laying there all over. Because they were probably taking--there were transports from Greece at that time and they were probably taking the people to the crematorium there and the Greek people, they lived on olives, they probably brought it with them and there were olives laying--for years, I couldn't look at olives here. It brought back the memories to me. I still don't keep them in the house, the black olives. Then I just prayed to God that this journey shouldn't end because I knew where the stop will be, that it was going to be in the crematorium. Sure enough, it was a small trip, it wasn't too long of a trip.

Tape three, side one:

JF: This is tape three, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Bess Freilich, on June 5, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

BF: I found myself surrounded with men in striped clothing which I knew they were from Auschwitz and they just pulled me out with the rest of the dead from that little truck and they let us sit there on the ground.

JF: All of the people that were with you in this truck were...

BF: This truck picked up all the dead.

JF: Everybody was dead in this truck? You were the only person who was alive?

BF: I was the only one that was still alive but they knew that I can't go to work and I'm not good for them no more so they took me with the dead to the crematorium. So, they took me off and it was the *Sonderkommando*, those men, they called them that they--the Germans forced them to work in the crematorium.

JF: Was this crematorium in Budy or was this back in...

BF: In Birkenau.

JF: In Birkenau.

BF: They brought me back. That's why I knew where I was going because I was in Birkenau before and I knew. So, I was sitting there and there were an awful lot of people, thousands of thousands sitting like this on the ground waiting for the alarm to go into the crematorium and there were people that they just brought to the transports from different countries and they were in civil clothing. They didn't come from the camp or anything. They didn't know where they were. They saw me and they saw that I looked different, that my head was shaved off, I didn't have no hair. The way I looked, they knew that I am coming like from a different place, a different world and they thought maybe I know something and they all started to ask me questions and mothers were standing and giving pieces of bread to their children and begging me, "Tell us that they'll let us live, tell us, assure us, if we're going to live," and I just could not move my mouth. I just lost my voice. I just sat there and couldn't tell them the truth and couldn't deny it. I couldn't tell them a lie. I just was sitting, and waiting for what they'll do with us the next couple minutes and there were thousands of Jews, thousands and thousands waiting and they were giving everybody, a towel with soap. And the German my next came closer to me. He tried to give me the soap and he saw the way I looked and he asked me from where do I come from. See, they didn't want me around with all those people that came from the free world and I told him I came from Budy so he gave an order to take me and bring me back to Birkenau. I actually walked out from the crematorium standing already. There was like to the end of my house, that's how, you know, they were pushing the people.

JF: Toward the gas chamber?

BF: Yes, into the gas chamber. And I was as far as from here to there when the German came and tried to give me the piece of soap and a towel. And they told the people they were going to get washed, and then they're going to go to another camp.

JF: They didn't want you there because they were afraid that you would upset the groups of people?

BF: Because everybody was asking me--I was the only one that looked the way I looked. They all came from the free world, they looked still like human beings and they saw me the way I was and they thought that I am from a camp and maybe I could tell them something what's going to happen to them. Like I said, I just didn't know what to say. Mothers were trying to comfort their children and some of them were feeding them and some of them were talking and saying that really they're taking us to give us a bath and if they wanted to kill us, they would kill us another time. While they were talking, they were moving closer and closer and closer to those open doors and the German just came to me and he handed me the soap. He said, "You go to Birkenau. Your next will come some other time." That's what he said and gave the order and they took me to the same Red Cross truck and brought me back to Birkenau. So, I lay there in the hospital, it wasn't actually a hospital, the camp for the real sick, the barrack for the real sick and while, I don't know whether you were watching them "Return to Auschwitz,"[4] Kitty's, if you watched, I recognized the places where I was laying.

JF: This was in Birkenau?

BF: In fact, I remember, her mother, because she worked for the hospital and I remember, I saw the picture, and I remember their mother because their mother was old and very few older women were there and while I was laying there, her mother used to come and tell me, "Get up, get up, because you passed already a few selections and the next one you might not pass and they'll take you to the crematorium, get up." I remember her mother's hair started to grow out. She had dark hair. She stands like before my eyes, she had white skin and I see her before my eyes. It didn't click on me right away but afterwards I saw a picture of her mother exactly. I remember she used to come to me tell me. She said, "Please, don't push your luck. You go out. Here they'll take you anyway and over there maybe you'll have a better chance. Get out of here," she told me all the time. Because there weren't too many, like I said before, her mother was a little bit older and that's how I remember her.

JF: In this barrack, hospital barrack in Birkenau, who were the people who were taking care of you, people like Kitty's mother, were there any doctors?

BF: In the hospital?

JF: Yes.

BF: Like Kitty's mother, Jews. They took care and there were Germans, too, women that beat us and hit us and I remember just laying there and I didn't know what happened to me and I was laying on this so-called bunk, it wasn't even a bunk, and I didn't-

[4]A film in which Auschwitz survivor Kitty Hart relates her experience on site.

-just in complete confusion and like I woke up and probably was in a coma or whatever and I asked another girl which was laying near me, "Oh," I said, "do they give you so much bread now in Birkenau?" So she says. "No, so many days they gave you the piece of bread and you were just out completely and that's how it accumulated. This girl she saved me.

JF: She saved the bread for you?

BF: Fourteen pieces of the bread that they gave to us and she saved them for me. Like I was talking to the girl and she was talking to me and a minute later, I see something is laying on me and it's so very heavy and I turned around and she was cold already. Yes, she spoke to me and she died already. She died and I was just laying there and looking at the ceiling of this bunk and there wasn't a centimeter of wood that wasn't filled with lice. The whole thing was moving, moving, moving, moving, one on top of the other and then I started to come to myself and I noticed that I had here on my breast a big hole and it was completely filled up to the level, my breast, with lice. They came and they went and they went out and they came back...

JF: A hole in your skin?

BF: Yes, a big hole in my body.

JF: What was the hole from?

BF: From the beating that they gave me when they found the blanket on me. It still didn't heal up. When I came back to Birkenau, all these wounds, they filled up with lice. The lice just laid in heaven there. They came and they left whenever they wanted. I remember a sweater, they gave me a little sweater and it was itching me terribly and I threw the sweater down and the sweater was picking itself up from the floor, up and down.

JF: This was in the hospital?

BF: Yes, the lice were picking the sweater up, it was moving like it was alive. It was moving actually, because was the lice picked the sweater up, it was unbelievable.

JF: Were there any medications at all?

BF: No, none. They didn't give you nothing. You just laid there and every day, there was selections. Every day, Mengele come and picked as many as he wanted and he burned them, every day. I passed through three selections already.

JF: While you were in this hospital?

BF: While I was there. One day I knew that I must leave or else I will die, that he will take me away so I learned how to walk. Actually, I couldn't see how a person could stand up on his two feet and move his feet forward. I just could not understand that something like this could happen. I mean where a person can get the strength and stand up. I just couldn't stand up. I was falling.

JF: How long had you been sick?

BF: I was about two months in the hospital.

JF: This was typhus?

BF: It was typhus. I was burning up with fever. Everybody had typhus there.

JF: Let me ask you another question. You mentioned before that a Red Cross truck had taken you to the gas chamber and brought you back again. Where did this Red Cross truck come from?

BF: The Germans used it to transport the people from Budy back. Every day they came, with this little Red Cross ambulance like. It was like an ambulance and they used to take the dead and bring them to the crematorium every day.

JF: They were just using a Red Cross truck for this purpose?

BF: Yes, I don't know why they had the Red Cross sign there and everything. It was an ambulance actually and it had a Red Cross sign. I don't know why. I saw many of those. They used to deliver even the Zyklon, the gas to burn the people. Sometimes they used those ambulances to deliver the Zyklon [unclear]. Most of the time they had big trucks but a few times, I noticed while going to work. It was later on that they used them--they used those ambulances for everything. I finally learned how to walk and holding on and stopped crawling, and started walking and while I was trying to make my every day walk which was a few steps and I heard somebody on top of a bunk crying aren't you the girl from Pruzany and I said yes, and this was a girl from our town and it happened that I knew her and she was also in there. She had a big hole in her leg and her leg was actually rotting away and we just sat and we became friendly and then we were liberated together. And we are sister-in-laws now. But she always reminds me I was walking naked, holding on to the bunks and learning how to walk, to walk again. She's now my sister-in-law.

JF: How did you get through those three selections, being so sick? What do you think got you through that time? Why didn't they pick you?

BF: They always knew how many they wanted and this known was filled that when they stopped, it just was my luck that I wasn't in that known and the same thing was in the crematorium that they had so many people there, they couldn't burn fast enough and that was my luck that they brought me back. If I didn't have to wait, if there weren't so many people, they would have put me in there right away. We just sat were we were brought and that was people from Greece actually.

JF: The women you were with were Greek, the women with the children?

BF: Yes, in the crematorium, in the courtyard there, they were all Greek, transfer people from Greece. So many times later on while I was in Birkenau, we saw brides and a groom, they were just married, she was still in her gown and they pushed her into the crematorium. Some other people it just happened that they made a selection. Those people still lived in their town, they grabbed the people and she was still in her evening gown, in her bridal gown, was still in her bridal gown. The cries "*Shema Yisroel*" could open the skies and the sky was always red for miles from the fire and the smell of the human flesh you could smell for miles. No matter how far you were from Auschwitz, you could smell the burning human flesh and people, German people, were living all around there and they saw and they saw what was happening and yet after the war, they say they don't know. They saw us walk to work, they saw the dogs eating up the girls alive. What they used to

do in Budy, they used to disconnect the electrical wires and there were two wires and the middle was like empty space so they grabbed the 10 girls and put 10 dogs for each girl and the dogs ripped them alive, just eat them up alive. The dogs were trained to do that. Just eat them up alive. This happened every day, every day. Everyday I thought that the next minute I'll be there.

JF: The soldiers would do this?

BF: Yes, put the girls in 10 and for each girl, a dog.

JF: These were German shepherds?

BF: German shepherds especially trained to attack them, yeah. I came back to the--like I said, the hospital and after about six weeks or two months, exactly I don't remember, something like this, I knew I had to walk out of the hospital. I wouldn't last too much longer so I went out and they took me to a different barracks and they put me in a *Kommando* where we used to go and walk around the area from the camp and pull the weeds and we had to take the weeds to the men's camp in Auschwitz and that's where they were cooking them and giving them to the men. This was our food. This was the soup that they cooked.

JF: It was just regular weeds?

BF: Just weeds and we had to pull it and put it in baskets and I couldn't work and I remember two German women and they were very nice. They were from Germany and they carried me to the basket, like in the basket. Two girls that carried the basket in this *Kommando* and they put me in the basket going to work and somehow the German, the *Kapo* let them do it. I don't know, it was sheer luck and that's how they carried me back and forth and while we were working once in the area around the camp, I heard that the German *Ausser*, that was an SS woman, and the German *Kapo* they were talking very quietly between them and I overheard it and I was thinking to myself, what is all this here the talk between them. Soon I found out that they took us, we were not too far from there and they were very anxious to see it for themselves somehow. What I saw before my eyes, I will never forget it, there were mountains and mountains of human ashes. That was the remains of most of the European Jews that lay there. The cemetery of ashes, just mountains and mountains of it. It's like I found myself in a desert with these--mountains of it. They used to burn them and that's where they kept the ashes and they were talking, the *Kapo* and the German Nazi women and they joked about it and were laughing but we knew what it was and in my heart, I felt that those were the remains of my brothers and of my mother. Then, I knew that there was no hope. That nobody was alive, that I'm left all by myself in this world and in order to survive to fulfill my mother's wish actually, I had to take care of myself and try to live like this alone. While I was with this here *Kommando*, one day they took us to this camp where the men lived, to empty those baskets, and I found a man from my town and I recognized him and I told him who I was and he screamed at me, you know your father is here and he was not too far from there and somehow he managed to bring my father and I was standing there with the *Kommando* and my father came out and he

screamed, "Where is she, where is she." He was standing right before me and I was wearing an apron, a small apron like you wear in a kitchen and I wrapped myself with it three times, that's how much was left of me, and my head was of course shaved and I was a real *Muselmann*, I was a walking skeleton and my father said no, it's not her, it's not her, I don't recognize her, it couldn't be her and I didn't look like a human being at all and he couldn't bring himself to believe that it's really me and I screamed, "Yes, I'm your daughter, I'm Basha, you're my father," and he screamed, "No, no, you're not my daughter, what did they do to you, what did they do to you?" He didn't look any better. He didn't see it in himself and he saw it in me.

JF: Do you think he believed after a time that it was you?

BF: Yes, afterwards, yes, he recognized my voice but he just couldn't bring himself to believe what became of me, the way I looked.

JF: At this point, the two of you had been in the camps for how long?

BF: We were separated already about a year at that time. I remember asking about my brothers and he said they're alive, they're alive just keep your head high and try to survive and we'll be together again, and don't forget after the war when you go back to our town, that's where we'll all meet there, and he said, they took my brother to Maniewicze, to a camp, he still believed it, to a camp Maniewicze and he said you try to stay strong and try to survive, just try to survive. That's what he told me and it gave me like a boost a little bit, I knew that my father, I had somebody and that helped me probably to carry on, to live this miserable life that was put upon us.

JF: Was there any chance for anyone that you knew of to have contact with the outside or to try to escape?

BF: There was a girl that did escape. Her name was Katyah and they brought her back, and I once saw part of it on television. All those years I was wondering why somebody didn't write about it because she was a real heroine. Nobody showed it on television; nobody discussed about it. She was a *Schreiberke* [phonetic] they called her, the Germans used her to write down the numbers whom they wanted to send to the crematorium and then came the truck and then they called the numbers and then they took the people and she was the one that used to write down the numbers, a lot of numbers, and she did it intentionally that she wrote them wrong and those people didn't exist and that's how these people, that really the Germans told her to write on, remained alive and we knew that that's what she was doing and she escaped somehow, she had contact because she was like, you know, the Germans. She had a better job and she looked a little bit different than the rest of the girls and she had contact with the men and she knew a man then and he helped her and somehow they escaped but they brought them back. They found them in a little place and from what I found out later, the Germans just walked up to her. She was supposed to meet that fellow in this and this place that she escaped with and while she was sitting and waiting the Germans approached her and they just picked up her sleeve and they noticed was branded and they took her out of the place and brought her back. Brought her

back to the camp and they tortured her for weeks and weeks, they tortured her and then they finally brought her back to the camp and the whole camp had to stand and watch it and they tried to hang her and she screamed out like, "Long live freedom," and those were her last words, and she slashed--she had a razor and she slashed her arm and she was bleeding but she was still alive and they took her to the crematorium and the whole camp had to stand and watch it. And I, they mentioned about, of course they can't show, they show just 1%, or when even the writer or somebody tells you just a tenth of 1% how it really was. And they didn't show much about Katyah but she was really--she tried to help you out, she was really a Jewish heroine. She was from Czechoslovakia. She was a beautiful person.

JF: They tried to hang her?

BF: They tried to hang her but she slashed--she spit in the German's face and slashed her arm.

JF: Before they could...

BF: She cried out, "Long live freedom," and they took her away.

JF: Did they also catch the man that was to meet her?

BF: Him, too, they brought him, the same thing happened in the men's camp. They hung him, too. They caught them both. There was no way of escaping. It was a camp within a camp within a camp and every camp was with electrical wire. I remember so many girls, there were wells going to work, they jumped in the wells and the wells filled up with bodies the commander stopped from going to work and then they had to bring all the girls up, to write down the numbers and everything was German you know, their punctuality everything had to be written down and they had to know which number, they wrote it down to find out if nobody escaped, that everything was--that nobody escaped, that they had all the inmates in the camp. They figured that the number was exactly what they expected it to be. I was in this camp in Birkenau and they took me to a shoe *Kommando* and I worked there.

Tape three, side two:

JF: This is tape three, side two of an interview with Mrs. Bess Freilich. This *Kommando* was for what purpose?

BF: It was all the shoes that they took away from the people that they brought to Auschwitz and we had to take them apart and somehow they recycled the leather and made German boots out of the leather. There were millions and millions of pairs of shoes and we had to take them apart and that was the work that I was working. My father worked not too far from me and I knew that my father was smoking and a man, while we passed by, he told me that--see, while the *Kommandos* passed each other sometimes they threw a word if the Germans didn't see us. So a man told me that my father is not going to last long because he's taking his bread and he's selling it for cigarettes, it was like a black market, they were selling for a cigarette because my father was smoking and to him the cigarette was more important than a piece of bread. I felt very bad about it so I used to take my bread and give it to my father. I was working, I was already swollen, swollen from hunger because I took my portion, this tiny piece of bread, that's all they gave us and some brown water like with the weeds and everything that you couldn't really drink it, it was sickening, it tasted like vomit and so only this piece of bread sustained us but I gave my bread to my father.

JF: So, you were not eating anything at all?

BF: I wasn't eating nothing at all. I threw it to my father over a fence where he worked and one day there was a very, a Nazi that accompanying our *Kommando* and he was actually the worst murderer, between all the Germans I think he was the sickest, he was the worst. He used to stand up on the roof and the girls--it was like an ammunition factory there and he was the head of this ammunition factory and at lunchtime, he used to go on the roof and while the girls were in the yard having their piece of bread and their water, he used to sniper shoot, he used to shoot them all in the back yard. That was the day that somehow he was assigned to our company and he was walking with us and I threw that time the bread--I shouldn't have, I made a mistake. Like Sunday, they gave us a day off and I was afraid that my father would be hungry. I threw the bread and he caught me. I thought it was the end then and he, like I said before, he was the worst murderer of them all and I knew I didn't have no other choice. I tried to talk to him, to this crazy man and I opened up my mouth and I told him, I said I just gave him only a piece of bread and I said it was my bread, I didn't eat it myself. He said what was in the bread, did you put a letter in the bread. I said no, I didn't put nothing in the bread. That was the time when the Jewish girls helped the men from this ammunition factory and they gave them explosives and they tore up the crematorium. And that was a bad time to do what I was doing because the Germans were very suspicious.

JF: The girls had given the men...

BF: The girls that worked in the ammunition factory gave somehow the men from the men's camp, ammunition and somehow this ammunition got to this S*onderkommando*, those men that helped in the crematorium. They made an explosion in the crematorium, a few of them, they ran out, they started to run everybody. They took the Germans and pushed them in the hole, it was an uprising. The Jewish men took the Germans that were in the crematorium and pushed them in the oven and they burned them. And this happened in all the four crematoriums at once and a few of them exploded and somehow they cut the wires but the Germans started an alarm and there was so much shooting and I don't think anybody survived of those people, they killed them all. Then, the crematoriums, one of them or two of them didn't function. So, they stopped a little bit the burning then because two of them didn't work. That's why we prayed that finally the Russian or American airplanes would come and bombard those crematoriums--to stall those shipments of thousands of people, to stop the burning, to stop the crematoriums. Had they bombard the crematoriums at that time, I'm positive that it would have been stopped and so many people, so many more people would have survived and so many lives would have been saved. Each plane that we saw that passed by Auschwitz, they just passed by very low and didn't do a thing, just passed by. Then, they were targets and just passing us by and they saw the trains--and this is what we can't believe; if they don't know what's happening to us, that they're shipping innocent people, civilians, and mothers and children, and old people in those trains, if those planes don't know those are civilian people, so they probably think that this is military trains coming constantly--but why don't they bombard them? They were after those German trains. But see but they didn't bombard them. They usually bombard the German trains but they didn't bombard them so they knew that it was--what was going on, they knew about Auschwitz but nothing happened, they just let us just bleed to death, that's all.

JF: The ammunition factory that you were describing before, you had switched *Kommandos* again and were working in the ammunition factory?

BF: No, I just passed it by. That's where I used to see my father. I threw in the bread and I knew what he was going to do to me, this Nazi. My fate was already sealed because I figured the minute we'll come to Birkenau, he's going to take me straight to the crematorium but to this crazy murderer I started talking and somehow, I don't know what happened, he let me back into the camp and everybody jumped on me. They said my God, you're like reborn. I mean the girls couldn't believe their eyes and I used the last tool that I have, which was, I used my tongue and begged him and prayed. I told him--I said, "If you would have a father some place and you would see him starving, I think you would give him your last piece of bread, too." That's what I told him and somehow this murderer's heart maybe was touched. Who knows what he thought. Maybe it was a miracle. Maybe I don't know just maybe I remained alive to tell the story, that's all. That he let me go in back to the camp and he didn't kill me then, it was something that he never did before. He used to put girls into a barrel and push the barrel straight into the

crematorium, like this, in the barrel, closed up the barrel. He used to roll the barrel to the crematorium. That's what he used to do.

JF: Do you know the name of this man?

BF: No, he used to work in the union factory. We didn't know their names. We were numbers and they were the Nazis. We were just a number and nobody called us by name. There were no names, never mentioned them.

JF: Mengele though was known to the people?

BF: Mengele was. I was a lot of times in front of Mengele. So many times. Right after this incident, there was a selection and then somebody told us we're going to work in the ammunition factory. I didn't want to work there, because this way I used to fix the pairs of shoes for gentile girls that worked in the kitchen and I learned to be a shoemaker and that's how they gave me an extra piece of bread and I could help my father and I knew that this would have to stop once I worked in the union factory so I didn't want to go to the union factory and everybody said that we were standing before Mengele and he's going to pick for the union factory. They said he was picking only the stronger ones. Everybody was covered with all kinds of tumors and open sores and all kinds of sores and I tried to make it worse. I was scratching myself. I should look terrible that he shouldn't take me to the union factory. And here was this a selection to the crematorium and I could have--so that's what happened, somehow he put me to the right and I remained alive and went through so many selections, stood before Mengele so many times, but it was fate and maybe it was meant somebody from my family should remain alive and who knows, maybe like to continue to live because that's why I have my grandchildren. Had I been, had he pointed to the left, I wouldn't be here and I have such beautiful children and their children. And God if He would have saved a million and a half children, can you imagine what they would contribute to this country, what they would do to this world, a million and a half kids they killed.

JF: Was there any religious activity that was going on in the camp when you were there?

BF: No, there weren't any, we just--I remember that we knew when it was Yom Kippur and we were fasting a whole year but still we didn't dare to eat the little bit of the brown so called soup that they gave us. We didn't want to eat it during the day and we carried our bowls back to the camp and we planned on drinking it or eating it in the evening as we entered the camp but the Germans took the bowls and spilled them all out and somehow they knew it was our Yom Kippur and they didn't let us--this is the only religious thing I can remember. We looked for God and we couldn't see Him. In Auschwitz, you couldn't believe that God existed. Not in Auschwitz, no.

JF: Your rations were one piece of bread?

BF: It was a very tiny piece of bread and the brown, that cup of watery soup.

JF: And that was only one time a day?

BF: Yes, that was all. Every third day they gave us a piece of margarine, and that's all we had. Then, the war progressed and the front was getting closer and they took us out from Auschwitz, it was January 18, '45.

JF: Who took you out?

BF: The Germans, and they started a march. They were chasing us deeper into Germany and we had to walk in the snow and so many of us died, so many. By the thousands we died from exhaustion, from pain. We died with the potatoes that we grabbed that we saw on the road that peasants were carrying on their sleds and we jumped on the potatoes, we were so hungry to grab them, and the Germans went after us and they shot so many girls and they died with a potato near their mouth. We were walking, the march, we were walking on bodies, thousands of bodies. We didn't walk on the road actually, we were walking on the bodies from people that walked before us, from all the camps, there was an evacuation going to Germany because the Russians started to come already. I didn't know what happened then to my father but he also was on this march. Everybody was evacuated. From Auschwitz deeper into Germany and they took us to so many camps and they were all full of people and I remember once they took us to Ravensbrück, they took us, and they let us sit before we could enter the barracks. I remember the dress that I was wearing froze to the ground when I stood up. The dress was torn up I was sitting like this the whole night. Then we could walk into the barracks and the barracks were filled with water, filled with water, and that's how we sat, in the water.

JF: This was in Ravensbrück?

BF: This was in Ravensbrück. There was no food given to us. One German woman grabbed me, she punished me, and I had to stay in a hole filled with water and she put yet two bricks on top of me, I had to hold it like this and she was beating me--I couldn't let my hands down for a second. I lived through this, too. It was like it was meant for me to survive. Somehow, I believe it.

JF: How long were you on this march before you got to Ravensbrück?

BF: We were on it three weeks.

JF: That was the first camp where you were for any period of time?

BF: Yes, then they took us to a different camp. It was Malchow.

JF: How do you spell that?

BF: M-a-l-c-h-o-w. We saw that the end is coming, that the Germans were cutting their electrical poles, the electricity and telegraph and the telephones and we knew that something was happening. A Swedish--Swedes came, a whole delegation, and they looked in our camp and they observed everybody, with tears in their eyes and a couple of weeks later huge buses came, by buses, I remember and some girls, the Germans, just took off their numbers from their dress and they told them they were free and those buses took those girls to Sweden. To Sweden actually from this hell, from an inferno to life in just a few minutes. But, when our time came, we were supposed--our barracks were supposed to go on those buses, the previous buses from the day before were bombarded and the

whole thing stopped, all those girls got killed, they were bombarded somehow. Somebody made a big mistake and they thought it was soldiers or military buses, and they were all killed.

JF: None of them...

BF: Some of them did remain alive, get--yes, some of them, but a lot of them got killed. It was buses and those buses stopped, they stopped coming and we still remained in the camp until around the 5th of May, 1945, that they chased us out of the camp and we were marching again farther and we saw a camp *Kommando* in civilian clothes passing by with a bicycle and we knew this was it and they just plain walked away. We saw the Germans getting undressed in civilian clothing in the forest and they just mixed with the military and they left and we knew that somehow it looks like it's really coming to the end, all of this, and we walked away and nobody looked and we came to a little school and that's where we stayed and in the middle of the night, one girl--I don't know whether she went berserk or something and she told us that we can't stay in this place, that we should leave this place and started walking in the middle of the night and actually walking into the front. I mean there was *Katyusha* firing, machine guns and explosions all around us, everything was burning and we were in the middle of it all. We saw what we were doing, we were going to the front, the front was right there. It was a terrible experience. We saw what we were doing and we said, "No, we can't go farther because we're all going to be killed," and we turned around and went back to the same place and at ten o'clock we saw the first Russian soldier, a young kid the first one came in [unclear] and we knew then that the ordeal was almost over. That's all...

JF: Where was it that the Russians found you?

BF: Near Malchow.

JF: Near the camp?

BF: Near the camp, it was actually on the road, in a little village that's where we escaped because there was so much chaos. It was the end of the war.

JF: How many of you were together at that time?

BF: We kept ourselves together, a few girls together, and we spent the rest of the time together before everyone went their way. Actually we found out that the liberation didn't solve all our problems. That we were all alone in the world without family, without anybody to care for us. No place to go, and everything so much confusion, and we didn't know whether to go back to--the Americans were on one side, the Russians were on another, and we wanted so badly to go back to our house to see if anybody is alive and then going back meant going back to the Russians. Everybody advised us not to because within a few steps of this place, the American army was stationed, we could walk in to the Americans and could save so many heartaches that we had afterwards but we chose to go see what happened to our homes and to the rest of our family, that we chose to go back to Russia and I went back to my house to my home to my hometown, and it was a big mistake.

JF: Why?

BF: The Russians took us into a concentration camp. The minute we entered, we were right near our town and they kept us there for a long while, questioning us and they kept on saying that we were spies, the Germans killed the whole Jewish population and they found we were alive and we must have been spies and they questioned us and of course they questioned us separately and each girl told a different story like they asked, "What time did you go to work?" And we didn't know what time, we didn't have watches. Each girl gave them a different time and this they took against us because they said our conversations didn't match, what we told them and that means that we probably were spies and therefore we had to stay in this camp, and we stayed in that camp. They didn't put us to work but we lay there without food, without anything. Then they kept on questioning us and torturing us and torturing us.

JF: Torturing you in what way?

BF: Just how come we're alive. That was their only question, how come you're alive, how come they killed everybody and they left you, I mean why?

JF: Where was this camp? Had it been a German camp?

BF: No, this was already under the Russians. It was in a town named Brisk. It was near Warsaw and we had to pass by this town in order for us to reach our destination, to go home, and they took us off the train and that's where they kept us for a long time.

JF: How long were you there?

BF: We were there for a couple months. Then, they let us go to our town and I came to my town and like I said, I didn't find nobody. Then, the *goyim* kept on looking at us and they didn't like our presence there, they were afraid we had come to take back all the things that they robbed from us and we stayed in a little broken house there and every time, during the day and in the night, they threw big stones and they broke all the windows and kids went after us tearing our clothes and said in Polish, "Look the Jews are coming back." I remember passing by a factory once and the people, I saw the windows full of people that ran to the windows to look at us like we were some kind of people landed from Mars, just to look at us because they weren't used to seeing a Jew anymore and they couldn't believe that somebody survived. And, of course, they didn't like it because they knew that maybe we'll want our things back but we weren't interested in it, we didn't want nothing back, we didn't have no place to put it even if they gave us our things back and we came just to see if anybody was alive and nobody was there. I remember sitting just at the place where my house was and sitting and crying and just staring with a few hairs that had started to grow on my head, from agony and heartache. That I knew once it was my home, where I spent my happy childhood and we were such a close family even though we didn't have much, we didn't need much we had each other and this was everything for us. There was so much love and devotion to each other and there was nobody now and I was only by myself sitting there and it was dusk already, sitting at a place where once my home was and I was just torn to pieces, torn to pieces. That's when the old woman came that told me that her son-in-law was the first one to empty out our house of the furnishings.

JF: Were any of the non-Jews in the town helpful to you? Did anyone give you food or offer you anything?

BF: No, they didn't like the idea of us coming there. They were afraid that that's what we came for. We, it didn't enter our minds, we just wanted to see if somebody remained alive and came to the town because before we left, we promised each other once we remained alive, that's where we were going to meet and that's why actually I could have stayed on the American side and avoid all this trauma that I went through after the war but I felt like something was pulling me, I had to know I had to know if somebody was alive.

JF: How were you getting along during those days? How did you get food and clothes?

BF: Well, we had what we had on our backs. I walked into German homes where I could just pick anything up but I didn't reach for that much because I never knew that I would need someday something that I'll require for anything, that I would live a normal life. It never dawned on me that I would be a human being again. I only kept on looking if I see a German with a gun in back of me and even when I was free, I really couldn't adjust to it. I thought I was still in camp. I just couldn't believe that it ended, it was constantly with me even though the concentration camps were already empty of us.

Tape four, side one:

JF: This is tape four, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Bess Freilich, on June 5, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

BF: I was living after the war in my hometown, in the town of my childhood. I recognized the streets and sometimes I walked where the gentiles lived and everything looked just the way it was before. The gardens were tended, the houses looked nice and neat like there was no war, like nothing happened, but the Jewish quarter, the ghetto, was all wiped out and I knew that somehow I was living like in a cemetery but we wanted to get out and we couldn't already. The Russians didn't let us. Again, there was questioning every day, every night, every night, every day. Once I picked myself to the courage to tell them, they investigated us--what I think is that you are the biggest antisemites, you're just like the Nazis were, what bothers you actually is that you saw from a whole town that a few from so many thousands of girls, a few of them remained alive and they came back to pick up the pieces, to see what happened to their homes and to their families and it bothers you that they came back and that they remained alive. I think this is what is really in your heart, why you're questioning us because there's no other reason for you to torture us like this and I tried to run out of the room after I told him, and I remember I was crying terribly and he grabbed me and prolonged the investigation and tortured us and tortured us and there was a Jewish boy that worked with the NKVD from our town. He didn't work and they hired him, he worked there like an orderly and he came one night to us in the middle of the night and he said that they gave him, the Russian NKVD gave him a letter to throw it in the mailbox and he knew somehow that it had something to do with us and he opened it up and he read it and it was in the letter, it was written that every girl says a little bit different to the stories, the stories don't match, which they couldn't match because like I said, nobody knew the time exactly. Those were the things that actually every girl said it different. I thought that when they woke us up to work, it was two o'clock, another girl said 2:30, we didn't know the time when they woke us up to go to work so they decided that we were spies and they decided to send us to Siberia, to Celábinsk, which is a coal city and coal mines and we thought after the concentration camps, to Celábinsk, to Siberia, we knew that after all we lived through the war, we lived through so much horror and we lost our families and there was a chance for us to remain alive and once we'll go there, it would be the end so we went away and we came to this...

JF: Who do you mean when you say we?

BF: A few girls, just a few girls. It was my sister-in-law and myself and another two girls, only a few of us remained alive from the whole town, only a few and we kept together, and we came back. Only a few, it was maybe four girls from the whole city so we came back and we decided to run away after this fellow told us what they were trying to do with us, that they're trying to send us to Siberia. So, we ran away from our town and we ran back to a little town where the trains passed by and there, we jumped on a train and

somehow we passed the border, and he gave us papers, this fellow, certain papers that he somehow made for each of us and we showed the paper and it worked and the letters passed us through the border and we came to Poland, it was 1945 during Rosh Hashanah. People were walking to the synagogue in Lodz, in Poland. There were a lot of Jews then after the war.

JF: You went to Lodz then, from your town?

BF: Yes. We went to Lodz.

JF: How long had you been in your town, how long was that period of time?

BF: We were about two or three months in our town. Around Rosh Hashanah it was *yontev* [Jewish holiday] and we came to Lodz. It was *erev yontev* and people were rushing to the synagogue and we came with no place to go and no place--we didn't know nobody, it was a strange city but we saw a lot of Jews. This was the center of the survivors in Poland, all concentrated in one city because if you lived in the small towns, the *goyim* used to take the survivors, used to cut out their numbers and they killed so many of us after the war, it was a pogrom in one city where they killed so many girls that survived Auschwitz. They just ran in at night and just massacred all of them and so everybody was afraid to live in the small towns. They all concentrated who ever survived in Lodz and we saw that we are between Jews and somehow we wanted somebody would help us with something to get a roof over our heads. There was already there a committee that we went there and the Joint was helping and they gave us, I remember, like chopped herring and Crisco, some flour we got very sick from the Crisco but this was our diet and they used to give this to us constantly. And then, a lot of the Israeli agents were after us we should join a *kibbutz* because they saw we were single young girls, that this was no way for us to wander around without a family, that nobody should live like this. But my desire was to go back on the American side and see if somebody was still alive. Somehow in my heart, I hoped that my father is alive and that's the only reason I didn't join the *kibbutz* and afterwards I met my husband and we knew each other only a couple of weeks and we got married.

JF: This was in Lodz?

BF: In Lodz, and we got married.

JF: Your husband was also a survivor?

BF: Yes, also, yes and we got married and that was after the pogrom in Kielce and we knew that we had to leave Poland that it was very dangerous for us to stay there because there were a few *kibbutzim* that went to a wedding, to a different town, and on the road they stopped the trucks and they killed all the young people, they killed all of them on the road and we knew that the whole thing is starting all over again.

JF: The Poles did this?

BF: The Poles, and it was [unclear] or some kind of organization they were antisemites and we knew that the Polish soil was still wet with our blood but still, we knew that it was time to leave this place. We felt it became a cemetery for us and the sooner we

leave, the better it will be. We tried to cross other borders and somehow we came on the American side. It took many times, you know, back and forth crossing the border. They caught us and brought us back and we tried again and somehow we managed to come to Berlin on the American side. Being there, I found out that my father is alive and we got together.

JF: In Berlin?

BF: No, it was in München on the American side and I met my father but in Berlin...

JF: That's where you found out?

BF: Somebody told me that my father is alive. In fact, my father sent somebody from Munich to Berlin to bring me to Munich and then we left Berlin and we came to Munich, and I got together with my father.

JF: You were married at this time?

BF: Yes.

JF: You and your husband went to Munich reunite with your father?

BF: My father sent a boy that he hoped that I would marry this boy and it was right after my wedding and I told him that his journey was in vain, that I am already married. In those days my father [unclear] I was still young, marriage didn't enter my mind, but I was alone and I was lonely. There was no place to go and we couldn't manage to make a living, to work, there was no work or nothing. We had to eat somehow. I met these two brothers. I met my husband first and then he told me he had a brother. I said good because I have a girlfriend. It was my sister-in-law. They were two brothers and they married two girlfriends.

JF: How long did you remain in Munich?

BF: In Munich, I remained--it was Feldafing actually, it was a DP camp.

JF: What was the name of the camp?

BF: Feldafing.

JF: Do you know how to spell that?

BF: F-e-l-d-a-f-i-n-g. In fact, Eisenhower came to see us there. Once he entered my room where I stayed and spoke to us and I knew a little bit English--we spoke to him. We stayed there for about three years I think, no two years, in the DP camp.

JF: Two years. What was the experience there like?

BF: We were just sitting and waiting and waiting until something will happen. That the United States will release the quota and they will finally let us come to the United States. I wanted to go to Israel but then it was the [unclear] the War of Independence was going on. They wanted only young people. They wanted me and my husband because I was young. I was then around 17-18. They wanted people like us to take into the army and they didn't want my father and I didn't want to be separated again so that's the reason why we didn't go to Israel. We didn't want to stay in Feldafing. We knew that we had enough of camp life and we wanted desperately to come to the United States but it wasn't

easy. Somehow they had a quota and they allowed just so many people and you had to wait for your quota until Truman became president for the second time, I believe, and he changed it and they started to move us and we came to this country. He allowed more of us to leave the camps and then I came here in 1949 pregnant with my daughter and she was born here already.

JF: Were you able to work when you were in this DP camp?

BF: No, there was no work there. There was nothing. I regret I could have gone back to school there but the university there was far from the camp and I was still weak and after liberation we had to learn how to work. I was malnutrition; after I was liberated I was 67 pounds [large section unclear] and it took a long, long time, I was very, very sick. I couldn't eat nothing for months. The minute I ate, I had to give everything up. My stomach was [unclear] from not eating because during the march, we ate dirt actually. We ate dirt, we ate whatever we could find. We ate pieces of wood. We didn't have nothing to eat. This was going on for weeks and weeks and weeks. It wasn't just for one day that you could tolerate hunger but it was going on for weeks and we became desperate and we ate anything that we found and our stomachs became such that you couldn't tolerate any food and right away, we brought the food up and there was blood from our body and blood from our mouths. [unclear] and it took a long time until this went away and we were cured. Of course, I was liberated by the Russians and they didn't care about our welfare, not like on the American side, they helped the people, took them to hospitals and taught them how to eat. You weren't allowed to eat nothing, you were supposed to be first on fluid and then get adjusted to the foods but there nobody cared, nobody cared and we had to find the food in the gardens and we lived on some cucumbers from the garden that was like poison to our stomachs and we got sicker and sicker.

JF: You're talking about where now?

BF: Right after the liberation. So that's why our stomachs were very--we were in very bad shape and we were very sick.

JF: How long do you think it took until you were stable physically?

BF: It took quite a long, long time physically and I think mentally, I'm still not to this day. None of us is because you can't be stable and live through what we lived through. You can't--for the most stable person, it had to leave scars, mentally and physically.

JF: Was there any opportunity in the DP camp to share your experiences with any kind of professional people, talk about what you had been through?

BF: In the camp?

JF: In the DP camp?

BF: In the DP camp, there was something between us that we couldn't talk. I couldn't talk like this, the way I'm talking now. Let's say ten years ago, I don't think I could have talked to you about it. I don't think that I could have talked about it--I can't even now but I'm trying to. There was something between us like we just couldn't talk,

we couldn't talk about it. I'm talking now of things that my sister-in-law and all those years we lived together, I mean we were so close and everything and things that she tells me that I didn't know and I tell her things that she didn't know because right after it happened, we couldn't talk about it, we just stopped talking, it wasn't just with me or with her, it was, I found out with everybody. We couldn't talk about it. It's just lately that I noticed people started--the survivors started to write books, they started to talk about it because they see that time is running short, that it has to be said for the future generations to be on guard and to watch that something like this should never happen again, to stay alert and see what's going on. That what happened to us should never happen to any Jewish person again.

JF: At the time in the DP camps though these kinds of thoughts were not shared? This was not a time of sharing experiences?

BF: No, no, no. We just couldn't talk. We just couldn't talk. I remember in camp, there was a man there and he always used to say, "My God, I look at you girls and my heart swells up with joy. I see you all without your hair and dragging in the mud and now when I look at you and you look so much better and you started to lead a so-called half normal life," that he said, "in my heart, I'm just overjoyed." He was also like a little bit older than us. That's what he used to say and I didn't like to pass by him because he reminded me of this, I just tried to not to touch it, that nobody should remind me about it or I would go berserk. I felt that I was going to explode once I talked about it and I'll disappear, that once I start talking about it, it will be my end, and everybody felt--I'm speaking to my friends now, they all felt the same way that I did. And at that time, we didn't know, we just couldn't touch the subject.

JF: What about religious observances in the DP camp, was there any increase?

BF: Yes, it was increased. I remember Berlin during Rosh Hashanah I never experienced anything like it. I mean the cries, you could hear for miles. Because it was the first *Yizkor* and all the survivors gathered and we realized then how--a *khurbm* [Yiddish: Holocaust] we saw what we lost, what we had, and what became of us, that we are people just wandering around looking for a place to build a new life.

JF: What was the treatment of you like by the Germans when you were living in Germany for that couple of years?

BF: In Germany--well...

JF: The townspeople.

BF: The townspeople they said they didn't know about it. They said they didn't know. I remember one incident that they attacked the camp, they came in the forest, the Germans advanced and they attacked the few survivors. That's how they felt about it after the war.

JF: Was anything done to those people, were they caught?

BF: It was on the American side and they caught them and they arrested them. That was their feelings about us. I can't say that every German participated but most of

them all knew what was happening. We passed, we went to work through their cities, they saw us walking to work, they saw the way we looked, they saw we carried our dead, they saw the Germans beating us. They were standing right there and looking, just looking on and not doing nothing. Once, just once, I remember we passed by and some woman, I don't know who she was, threw a pickle, the only human gesture at the time [unclear].

JF: Is there anything else that you want to add?

BF: Well, what I regret is I told you before, that after the war, they didn't take a better interest in us, to help us to start to lead a normal life again, to get adjusted to a normal life, to help us endure all of this fear and trauma and loss of family, the shock and all the torture, to ease our wounds, to help them heal and there was nobody there and this is what I think was a mistake from all the Jewish organizations, that's what I feel.

JF: There was no one from a professional standpoint?

BF: There was no one.

JF: Who could help you talk, and sort it out.

BF: Help us talk and help us lead a normal life, help us to constantly look behind us because we constantly saw the Germans, even if he wasn't there, behind my back I always felt him there. I felt him for years there. I was afraid to walk from one place to another by myself, I wasn't used to it. I thought that I am not allowed. Even when I came to this country, they told me that I'll come to Philadelphia. I was afraid to go to another city. I thought I came here and that's where I must stay. It was always with me and I just couldn't shake it off. I could have been helped but I wasn't. The years that I spent after the war would have been easier if anybody took an interest.

JF: Is there anything else?

BF: The reason I touched, actually the open wounds are still there. Like I said before, that my grandchildren and their children should stay on guard and watch that nothing like this should happen again and that's the reason I told this story, tragic story actually, of my life.

JF: Thank you very much for talking to us.

BF: Thank you very much.