

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

FANNY ROSS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Ellen Rofman
Date:	June 27, 1983

© 1993
Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

This page left intentionally blank.

FANNY ROSS [1-1-1]

FR - Fanny Ross¹ [interviewee]
ER - Ellen Rofman [interviewer]
Date: June 27, 1983

Tape one, side one:

ER: ...Ross, [gives address]. Testing. This is Ellen Rofman. Today's date is June 27, 1983. I will be interviewing Mrs. Fanny Ross [gives address]. Okay, where were you born?

FR: I was born in a small town in Poland, in Gwozdziec [sounds like Gvoszhjetz], near Kolomya.

ER: Can you spell that please?

FR: G-W-O-Z-D-Z-I-E-C, near N-E-A-R...

ER: Yeah.

FR: Kolomya, K-O-L-O-M-Y-A [Kolomyja].

ER: Okay. What year were you born?

FR: 19-, it was November the 11, 1922.

ER: Okay. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

FR: One sister. She got...

ER: Okay.

FR: Killed.

ER: Was she older or younger than you?

FR: Older, older, older.

ER: How old were you when the war began in your country?

FR: 17.

ER: 17. Were you married or single?

FR: No, single.

ER: Single. And now, are you married or single?

FR: Married, married.

ER: Married. How far were you able to go in school?

FR: It's like here, public school, junior high, and one year in college.

ER: Okay. Did you attend a Jewish school?

FR: Yes.

ER: And was it...

FR: Hebrew school.

ER: A Hebrew school.

FR: Ten years.

¹Nee Birnberg, former first name spelled Fani according to her personal history documents.

FANNY ROSS [1-1-2]

ER: Ten years. Did you, part of your schooling, was it secular, non-religious,
or...

FR: Non-religious, non-religious.

ER: Most...

FR: Non-religious, non-.

ER: Okay. But in addition you also went to Hebrew school.

FR: Yes. After the public school I went to Hebrew school.

ER: Okay. Did you work, well, you were a student before the war.

FR: I didn't work.

ER: You didn't work. Okay.

FR: I tutored two children, two small children.

ER: What was the economic and social status of your family before the war?

FR: Middle class.

ER: Middle class.

FR: Mmm hmm [affirmative], farmers.

ER: Okay. What extent did you have of contact with Jews prior to the war?

FR: Very good, with all of them, not, with the Jews and non-Jews. You know,
a small town.

ER: You had social...

FR: Three thousand...

ER: Social relations with them?

FR: With, not too much with non-Jews, only the Jews.

ER: And how about in school?

FR: In school with non-Jews, too.

ER: And...

FR: Yeah, all together. There was only 3,000 Jewish family living in the town.
So, and about 10,000 Christians.

ER: Did you experience any antisemitism in school?

FR: No, uh-uh [negative].

ER: No.

FR: No, before the war, no.

ER: No. When the war started in 1939, where were you living?

FR: With my parents in this small town, Poland.

ER: Did you make any attempt to leave the country before the war began?

FR: No, uh-uh [negative].

ER: Okay. Excuse me one [tape off, then on]. Could you please describe the
conditions in your town after the war began?

FR: Oh, after the war, no...

ER: After the war.

FR: I wasn't in, no, not before the war...

ER: No, no, this is after...

FR: After the war? After the war I wasn't in my town. I was in Germany after the war.

ER: You were sent to Germany?

FR: I was in Germany.

ER: You were in Germany.

FR: Of course! When they later on, because first they made the ghettos in, to this small town. Later they picked up all the 10 young girls and 10 young boys to work on a farm.

ER: Okay. All right, well let's get back to that. In the area that you were living...

FR: Yeah?

ER: Was it populated by many Jews or a few Jews?

FR: Three thousand Jews then.

ER: Three thousand Jews. And how big was the town?

FR: Oh, the town was about 40,000.

ER: Okay. And what was the main religious composition of your town?

FR: The 3,000 Jews religion? Hebrew religion. And the rest was Catholic and Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox.

ER: Ukrainian. How would you describe yourself in terms of trusting others?

FR: I trust, very much, very much, very much.

ER: And after the war began you said you were sent to Germany. How was...

FR: I wasn't sent to Germany. You know, they picked out the Jews from the, was left over, they pick us all up in the trains. And was '42, in August '42, they pick everybody up from the, where they can find somebody. First they killed. First they kill them in the towns.

ER: And they picked you up and where did they, where did...

FR: First they made ghettos.

ER: Right.

FR: And we were lucky because our street was in the ghetto street. We took in 18 families, all from our family, was 18 families.

ER: Your house was in the ghetto.

FR: Was in the ghetto, yeah, in the ghetto street.

ER: Right.

FR: Were streets. And on the street was all families, cousins and everybody. Those we took in from the other towns, from the, from their down town. Then we took them in in our street. And our street was the main street in the ghetto.

ER: Yeah.

FR: So after this, when they made a ghetto, so after maybe about, let me see, about three, four months, they tell everybody in the morning one day 10 o'clock to come

FANNY ROSS [I-I-4]

and register. Everybody goes to the bigger ghetto. We didn't know where we're going. Then later they took us in the bigger ghetto to Kolomya. And they were, there they picked from all the small towns all the Jews, about 50,000 Jews. 50,000.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And they put us all on trains, like cattle. It was all the train, in the night. So this, I was thinking, already the big ghetto we hope to manage to save me, myself. I was thinking.

ER: Were you with your family?

FR: No, no, no, no, no, no. We were all apart. My sister was in the bigger city. My mother and father was in the ghetto. They picked me later up, and I was on a farm sent. And I was thinking I will work over there longer. But then when they picked every Jew up, they pick us from the farm up, too, with the 10 girls and 10 boys who they picked out from the city to work.

ER: And from the ghetto, the larger ghetto, then they sent you on the cattle trains...

FR: From the ghetto they told us they will send us to the ghetto, but they send us in, this was, and we came in and there was a big, a big like a jail, a big jail. And then I saw all the girls from my school, from my [unclear] when I finished my school in the small town. I was in the bigger city I went, to learn one year college. It was not a small town. I went to the bigger city to learn that.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And over there I was. And after, they sent all the Jews, when the Russian left, you know, the German came in, well, I went home. And I went home and I didn't know what will be happened later.

ER: Yeah.

FR: First couple months and they said, you know, the ghettos and the ghettos. And later they said, they picked out 50,000 Jew. Everybody went, you know, to register, was sent there to go for work.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And they took us in the cattle, you know, in the wagons, the cattle wagons.

ER: Right.

FR: And it was, then it was end, I think in August. I remember it was the first day I was sitting on dead people, everything. And I was thinking, my goodness. A couple next to me, was a cousin she lives in New York, she was next to me. She says, "You know, Fanny, we, I think we will jump." I said, "My goodness, how can I jump?" I was afraid. So one man, you know, he was, took off his clothes. He said, "All the children who want to jump, let's jump." And I was lucky. I jumped.

ER: You jumped.

FR: Yes, I jumped. And I was there with my cousin, with her, the boyfriend. They said, "No, no, no." They pushed me away. Then three together will not go.

ER: Right. So where did you...

FR: So I went myself first. Oh gosh, I went, oh, my dress was torn. The boys got the, you know, after three days, no food, nothing, living in these conditions. They got crazy, the boys. They [changed and left to go the girls unclear]. But I was lucky. I don't know how it was, I did it. And I was in the sewer first for a while, in the sewer.

ER: In the sewer.

FR: I washed myself up in the forest. I washed myself up, and I'd drink fresh water. And I left my coat in the forest. I was scared with the pictures. I had some pictures from my home.

ER: Now you were not alone? You were with some other people.

FR: No, alone.

ER: You were...

FR: They didn't want to have me with them.

ER: Okay.

FR: Was three of us.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And they said, "No, no, no, no," the boyfriend and she and me. So I, she pushed me away. She said, "[unclear] my family, Fanny, you go your own."

ER: Okay. So what did you do after?

FR: And so, at night, you know, I see so many people running and then, they're killing and killing and I hear, "Pow, pow, pow," [unclear].

ER: You were still in Poland? The trains hadn't...

FR: It's still in Poland, yes. And they went to the big, you know, camp over there. I didn't know. The people from the small town didn't know what's happened.

ER: Yeah. So you didn't know. What year was this?

FR: In 1942.

ER: Okay. And you didn't...

FR: So, at night, when everyone was quiet down, in the forest quiet, so, I went in the houses, in a small wooden shack. And I came in and she says, "No, no." She says, "Oh, I cannot hide you. You are a Jew. You are from the forest. No, no." So I went the next door. And she took me in.

ER: Okay.

FR: She took me in and I slept over till her husband came at night and said, "No, we cannot hide you."

ER: So you just stayed with her one night?

FR: One night.

ER: One night.

FR: She dressed me up in her clothes and when...

ER: And she knew you were Jewish?
FR: Of course, she knew.
ER: What was her name?
FR: Well, I don't tell you...
ER: You don't know.
FR: I didn't even took her name. I don't know.
ER: Yeah.
FR: And so what happened, I, the next day, I told her to take me to my aunt's in the big city where I was going to school. No, I went one year in college.
ER: Yeah.
FR: I start my college. So, she dressed me up like a peasant. And I [unclear] the big city. And the neighbors, nobody knew who I was. They knew me...
ER: Yeah.
FR: Before I went, weekends I came...
ER: Yeah.
FR: In my aunt's and uncle's. And they came from Germany, spoke German, from Germany.
ER: And what did you do, you stayed with them?
FR: No, the uncle wasn't, already they pick him up two o'clock at night. So he wasn't anywhere living. I don't know where he was. But she was, her daughter. So when she came in, it was 11 o'clock day. She saw me sitting, and she right away took me in. And I told the lady I'd give her the clothes when she came back. [unclear]. So, I was staying my aunt six weeks in a cupboard, you know, cupboards? Hidden, too. And she used to go with her daughter for food. And me she closed all the time up.
ER: But your aunt was Jewish.
FR: She was Jewish.
ER: Yeah.
FR: She was Jewish from Germany; she was a German Jew. [unclear] Germany.
ER: Yes.
FR: A born German. So, and one night she came home and they said to her, downstairs, the neighbor, "You know, Mrs. Greenberg, when you go away, somebody's stepping in your kitchen."
ER: This was a non-Jewish person that said that to her.
FR: Yes, of course.
ER: Yes.
FR: So she got scared, too. And she had a little child, too. And she didn't look Jewish at all, my aunt. So at night to me she says, "You know, Fanny, I must, you know, I want to save you, oh gosh, I want to save you. But, downstairs the lady tell you make noises when we go." She, you know, she's [unclear] she's afraid.

ER: Yeah.

FR: So, we must, I must move. I didn't know where to move. But she arranged for me by a family what he was a tarecater [phonetic- she means caretaker] of her apartment, a caretaker.

ER: Yes.

FR: Apartment house. And she took me in and gave me clothes. She was...

ER: Jewish or non-Jew?

FR: No, no, non-Jewish, non-Jewish. And I went in over there, and I was staying over there a couple weeks. I didn't went out either.

ER: Did you know their...

FR: Just, you know, clean up and everything.

ER: Did you know their names?

FR: No, no. I didn't want [unclear], you know, I had a bad experience [unclear]. So, I was over there five weeks. One night, it was December the 20th--I remember very well--'42. The police came in. No, no, she tell me at night, you know, "Fanny, you go in the kitchen make me some tea." She was drinking and the boy sitting, drinking beer. The policemen came, the Poles. They're looking for a young, Jewish girl, blonde girl. "She is hiding here." And, you know, on the same floor was German, too. But when you go to a German family in this time, so they can do nothing. And the Polish family they can search.

ER: Yeah, yeah.

FR: But the Jewish family, no, the German family, no.

ER: The Germans they can't.

FR: No. So in the meantime the Germans had [unclear] two small children. So they liked me very much. So in the meantime when the policeman talked to me, he said to me, "You know, it's 11 o'clock now," he said, "but when the Jewish girl comes in here," you understand...

ER: Yes.

FR: He's talking to me!

ER: Right.

FR: "So you would right away call the police." I say, "Okay." The meantime he goes over there to my, where I was living and tells the lady, "You know, when the Jewish girl comes in now, then you call me right away to the police."

ER: Yeah.

FR: In the meantime when he is talking to me, I left the kitchen, and I went to the German girl and played with the children, pretend it's nothing happened to me.

ER: Yeah.

FR: He doesn't mean me. Now when the police left, I came into the kitchen. She says, "You know, Fanny, you can't stay here anymore." It was night, 11 o'clock. I was very scared. And I couldn't, where should I go? I said, "I'll go," one thing, to

myself, "I'll go under the train. That's all I go. I don't know what to do." Go back to the Jewish community, to the ghetto in Lemberg. It was in Lemberg, a big city. Then you, you know, you'll get again, what I will do from there? I'll go back to the ghetto.

ER: Can I just ask you some questions about this caretaker who kept you for five weeks?

FR: Yes, yes.

ER: Did you have to pay him for this?

FR: My aunt paid, yes, of course.

ER: Your aunt paid for the two children.

FR: [unclear] family, of course.

ER: Was there any kind of agreement?

FR: No. No, no, I don't think so. No, no...

ER: Yeah.

FR: She just promised my aunt she will keep me for, you know, for a couple weeks or something till everything straightened out. In the meantime my aunt went to the ghetto buy for me papers. See I didn't have no papers.

ER: Right. Are you aware that that person helped anybody else?

FR: No, no, no. She didn't help anybody else, no.

ER: What do you think that that person's motives were? Why do you think, I mean, they would, if they had been caught, they could have been sent to the gas, also.

FR: Yes, yes.

ER: Why do you think that they helped you?

FR: It's, I don't say they was very nice people. I think they was, I think religious people. A little religious, not too much religious, middle, poor people. Not middle class. No, I wouldn't say middle class. I was sitting in the basement, that apartment. No, it was a young couple.

ER: Did you think that they were taking a large risk by helping you?

FR: They would, but see, I didn't look Jewish. So it wasn't, this reason what they took me. I think so.

ER: What would have happened to them had they been caught?

FR: Well, they put them in camps and put us in camps, with me together.

ER: So, you were not caught there. You left on your own.

FR: Well, to protect them.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And to protect myself. I was afraid the police will come again at night. So, this night I was standing out. It was raining. I was standing out and then three nuns approached, three nuns. They said, "My goodness," they said, "[unclear] such a young girl stay in such a big city now?" I said, "Oh," I said in Polish, "But I don't have where to sleep." So they took me to the church.

ER: The three nuns.

FR: They took me to the church. And you know this night, I believe in dreams all the time. My mother dreamed.

ER: Yeah?

FR: See [pause; tape off, then on] And so at night my mother, I dream of her. She gave me a big, green apple and she says, "You go ahead," she says, "you fight for your life, and you will live." And from this day, you know, the next day the nuns told me I could stay in the church. And I, she gave me peeling potatoes. I started to peel potatoes, and the caretaker from the church came. And sitting with me, he said to me, "Are you not Jewish?" He was a Pole. And I said, "No, I'm not Jewish. What's happened?" He said, "Did you know," he said, "they pick up the Jews here, and they sent them some place?" And he said, "They will never come back." And...

ER: They picked them up from the church, that's what he...

FR: No, they pick them up in all places.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And he tried to scare me. I said, "I didn't hear nothing." I said, "I'm not Jewish." But he said, "Well, you don't have no papers," he said to me. "No," I said to him, "well, I will get papers. I can go home today and I'll get my papers. No problem to me." I was assured of myself, but I didn't sleep in the church anymore.

ER: So you just stayed there.

FR: No, no, no, no, no, no.

ER: Oh.

FR: I ran away well, I didn't have what to pack, you know.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Well, I went the other church. I was sitting in the church and praying, you know, my own language.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Then an old lady maybe 75, 85, maybe, she walked, she can't walk. And I help her to walk. It was winter. Must have been the 20 of December, something. Oh gosh. In the, you know, these windows beautiful dress and what for Christmas. And oh gosh. I envy a cat. A cat passed by. I said, "Oh, you are so free, so nice, so free to go where you want." You know, this, only to live [unclear] you can be killed rather, you know. So I said to myself, I help her. She said, "Oh, you are such a nice girl. I'll take you home." Okay.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Yeah.

ER: You'll go, right?

FR: You go! Then it was an old age home. And the steps upstairs was so jittery I was so afraid I will break it down, too. So when I, I had with me a pajama on, a long pajama. So I went with her upstairs. Oh God, she gave me coffee. And the coffee pot was

FANNY ROSS [I-I-10]

so high with suds, you know, what she washed. An old lady, how can she wash? But first I did, I clean up her apartment, a room.

ER: What was her name? You don't remember her name?

FR: No, no, no.

ER: No.

FR: No, no. It's a Polish name. I didn't [unclear] names. But I always remember her. So, at night she starts, she says, "What do you want to do tonight?" I said, "Well..." And she says, "I, I lay some cards." I said, "Okay." We played cards. And she didn't know what I was. She didn't know nothing. She said she was just...

ER: She didn't ask.

FR: But by the cards, you know, [unclear], she said to me, she was a 85 year-old, she said to me, "I know you're hiding." I said, "What I'm hiding? I don't hide nothing." I said, "I'll go tomorrow home." "Oh, no," she says, "you can't go home. Well, you're Jewish." Oh, my goodness, and all, and I start to cry. And I start to cry. And I started to cry. And she said, "You know, the First World War I had a lot of Jewish people." And I start so much to cry. She says, "Don't cry. But you will live," she says, "you will live." And I start to cry again. At night I took my pajama. I put on [unclear] the room. I said, "I don't know." I'm thinking what to do. What, to stay with her? Well, I stayed the next day, too. Then, all of a sudden somebody came from the social service. Somebody came to, somebody told she kept a young girl, from the neighbor told.

ER: Yeah.

FR: From the elderly home.

ER: Right.

FR: And she comes, "A new person is here." So they can check on her. And they checked and I was, I don't know where I was this day. I was [unclear], probably. And she says, "Nobody's here," she says. "Nobody's here." So when I came at night she says, "You can only sleep one night more and that's all." I'm again on the street.

ER: Again on the street.

FR: [laughs]

ER: You must have had to be very ingenious to figure out where to go next.

FR: Where to go, yes. So, I'm going on the streets. It was the 22nd of December, oh my goodness. Christmas is coming. Everybody's running, flowers and all. And they sing on the [unclear] and I'm just going, crying my eyes out. I don't know what to do. Do I talk or do I? All of a sudden I saw the police from our town, the policeman's wife. She was like Zsa Zsa Gabor, tall and blonde. "Oh my goodness!" She started to kissing me. "What's happened?" [unclear]. "Oh," she says, "you are so stupid!" I says, "What?" [unclear]. She says, "You are young, you are beautiful," she says. "You don't look Jewish. Go ahead and fight for it." I said, "What should I do?" She says, "Go look in the papers and look in for jobs."

ER: Yeah.

FR: “And don’t think about your religion, you stupid...” I started to cry and she kissed me again. Again, I don’t know her name. But I know her very well. The policeman used to be our customers, used to buy cigarettes. We had a cigarette store. And she used to always pass by, and always look for the girls, you know. You know, she was maybe under 40.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And I was then 17, 18. So, you know...

ER: Yeah.

FR: You always have some in common.

ER: Sure.

FR: So when I left her, I said, “Okay, okay.” I said to her, “I will do it,” I said. So I bought a paper and I went to the, you know, employment office. I came to the employment office, and she says to me, “Well,” she says, “we can hire you right away,” she says. “But you have no papers.” I said, “My goodness, papers.” I said, “Papers I will have. But first let me go...”

ER: Yes.

FR: “Sleep out a night again.” So she says, “There is a big S.S. doctor. He is looking for a nurse, for her, to his three-year-old son.” And I took the job.

ER: Yeah?

FR: And she said to me, and she typed up my name. Matter of fact she gave me the copy. “You go Grohoska [phonetic] 125 and a villa over there.” It’s like, you know, you go Palm Springs, you see in the woods the villas.

ER: Yeah.

FR: So, I ring the bell, then the lady comes, not the lady from the house. You know, they had chauffeurs, they had a cook, they had all kind, you know, about six, seven people, only downstairs. And the lady came in. She says, “Oh,” she says, “we are looking for our girl.” And, “You come in and you’ll sit in the den.” The floors and the smell, and the...

ER: Were you nervous?

FR: I was a little but what can be worse?

ER: Yeah.

FR: They can beat me up, put me to jail, and kill me. It’s better, you know, like in the train was already bad. So I said to myself, “My goodness” this doctor, I know what’s his name, Dr. Diedrich. He was from Hanover, Germany, they said.

ER: Do you know how to spell his name?

FR: Diedrich, D-I-E-D-R-I-C-H, Dr. Diedrich, Werner Diedrich.

ER: How, how ol-, he helped you?

FR: Well, not him, not him. But I, you know, we’ll just go step by step.

ER: Okay.

FR: Yeah.

ER: Because when we get to the person that helped you I would like...

FR: [unclear] the person helped me.

ER: Oh, okay.

FR: So, when I came in the den and sit down, then a lady comes down. Maybe she was then about 40, 42. She says to me, first she opened the dress, I have nice underwear. She wanted to know I am sick or something. I am a street girl, too. She says to me her husband is not home. He is on, he went on shooting, you know.

ER: Target practice?

FR: No, no, in the, you know, like they go shooting here, you know, the men goes away and...

ER: Hunting.

FR: Hunting, yeah.

ER: Yeah.

FR: He went hunting. He went with his friends. "And he'll be tomorrow," she says. And I have to [unclear] tomorrow, too. Okay. And she said to me, I come tomorrow. You think, can you imagine to go again on the street? "Oh," she says, "in the meantime you can go pick your clothes up. You can come and sleep." So then my, I don't know, and my aunt has my clothes. So, I wouldn't go to my aunt. I was afraid. And so I give her a small call. You know, I got to call her. I said to her, oh, she was so happy to hear from me. She didn't hear from me a couple weeks. And I was on my own already, running and running.

ER: Did you have any contact with the rest of your family at this time?

FR: No, no, no. They were not living anymore.

ER: They weren't living anymore.

FR: No. My father was, they took away. My mother took away. My sister was in a camp already.

ER: You knew this?

FR: Yes, I knew already [unclear] around. But people would say, you know. So, the next day I was, anyway, she took me in and gave me my own room, can you imagine? Oh gosh. Then again she closed. Well, again I started to cry. I cried so much. I fell to my knees, and I thanked God. "Oh gosh," I said. I told God, "When you want to take my life, take it from here." You know, I was very much afraid to look at my, take your life and you, you know, somebody takes your own life. So I was happy. Then she te-, she, the first time, she come down, she says, "Now," she says, "you will iron some shirts for my husband." You know, I have nothing to do [unclear] this child came in, till she introduced me, you know.

ER: Yeah.

FR: So I started to iron. You know, I never iron a shirt. And I started to iron the shirts like that. The other lady came in. She says, "Oh, I know you can't iron," she says. "I'll help you." So she ironed the shirts. The next day I call my aunt, you know, in

the ghetto. And she says, "Fanny, I'll tell you good news." I said, "What?" She says, "I went to the café, café, coffee house..."

ER: Yes.

FR: "And I met a German lady. And I bought it for you a birth certificate. It's all in Latin. And I'll meet you today, and I'll give you your paper. And you'll have something to show when somebody asks."

ER: Right.

FR: We met. Oh my goodness. God, there I was. I was so lucky. But my aunt showed the lady the picture from me. She says, "From this girl I will make a German."

ER: Did you speak German?

FR: Yeah, yeah, I spoke German when I used to go on vacations with my family to Germany. And they used to come to Poland. We used to go to Germany. So what's happened? And then in school I took German, too, in the fifth grade. So, when I got my paper already at least once...

ER: Yeah.

FR: The next day I met the doctor. He looked over the papers. He said, "Well," he said, "we will not go to the office about, you know, register to you." It's like an employment office. You must go. "And you have only your birth certificate." And I told him, "You wait, doctor. I will get some more papers from my town." How and what, I didn't know nothing about it. So, passed by, I had beautiful days over there and beautiful evenings over there. I had my own room and I had, I was lucky. The boy liked me very much, and was parties after parties. Was all the S.S. came. Can you imagine? With the family, they had parties and parties.

ER: Yes.

FR: And in the dining room was, [unclear]. They took over the [unclear] from the villa.

ER: Sure.

FR: Took it and they used it. Anyway. So you know, I had bad, very bad experience. But life must go on, and you do the best you can do. One day the employment office called me up. I don't have enough papers. I should come to the employment office. So the doctor took me with his [unclear]. He picked me up and took me to the office and they, the lady told me, "Well," she says, "you can't stay with the doctor too long. You must have more papers." I said, "Well, when I go home I'm..." She said, "How long will it take?" "About eight days," I said. And she said to me, "Are you not Jewish?" I said, "No." "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes." And she starts in, when I went already by my Christian name.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Franciszka Wiarzbiecki. So she says to me, "Where is the other paper?" I said, "The other paper, I will go home and I'll bring it." I went back, and packed my, all clothes by my, you know, where I was in there.

FANNY ROSS [1-1-14]

ER: Yeah.

FR: And I must go again. So in the meantime my aunt called me and the German lady comes to pick me up. You understand?

ER: Yes, the one that got your birth certificate.

FR: Yeah. My aunt bought it. My aunt paid for it. But she saw it. So, she comes, and the lady where I was, the doctor, they were so mad. She took all my gifts away. You know, she gave me gifts for Christmas.

ER: Yeah.

FR: She took everything away from my valise, you know, when I said-

Tape one, side two:

FR: ...back to her. And when I just step down already the lady, Mrs. Niederman, she is the one who really helped me.

ER: This German woman, this German...

FR: When I came in in the, you know, in the streetcar, I saw big signs, "Jews can not be here. Jewish people can not sit here." And Jewish this and Jewish that. And she says to me, pushed me, "Sit down." She says, "Don't look on there."

ER: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, "You just sit down, and just relax." I was sitting down, and she took me to her apartment. And she says, "You will stay here for a while. And you will be my maid."

ER: This is the primary woman that helped you?

FR: Primary.

ER: Okay. Can you spell her name?

FR: Niederman, N-I-E-D-E-R-M-A-N, Niederman.

ER: Okay.

FR: Ellen. Ellen Marie.

ER: Okay. And how old do you think she was when she was help-...

FR: Fifty, fifty five.

ER: What religion was she?

FR: I don't know. I think she was a Methodist. She wasn't Catholic. Methodist.

ER: All right. And do you know if she was politically affiliated?

FR: I don't know. She was working for the S.S.

ER: She was working for the S.S.?

FR: Yeah. She helped more. She helped six people.

ER: She helped six people. Okay.

FR: Not only me...

ER: And you knew her from your aunt, okay? Okay, how long did she help you for?

FR: Till I got on my feet. Till, you know, I stayed with her for a couple months or more. And later she said to me, I must, you know, oh, she sent me to school, to typing. And I was at night in school. Then they [unclear] started to talk about Jewish people then I got scared. I stopped over there. But later on I got a job in a, on my own. Oh, she took me, one night she, I don't know how it happened. She took me with the truck, and we moved to Radom, near Warsaw, a big city. And over there I stayed with her for a while. And later she, one day she introduced me to her boyfriend. He was an S.S. man, a doctor, *Obersturmbannführer* doctor. And I had only the, you know the, my birth certificate. I needed some other papers. So she says to me, "Don't worry. You'll have it." One Sunday

morning I'm sitting in the kitchen filling up some coffee cups. She talked to her boyfriend. This Lu, his name was Ludwig, "Lu, we must make Franciszka some papers." And he said to her, "Mutti," he said to her, "how can I make papers? I don't know what the grandfather's name was." "Oh," she said to him, "how can she remember, a young girl, what the grandfather's name was? I don't remember even." Of her grandpa she doesn't remember.

ER: Yes, yes.

FR: So they start, you know, my mother was born Smith. My father was a Pole and my mother was German in my birth certificate.

ER: Right.

FR: My father was born in Hamburg. And he said to her, "Okay, okay, we will see what we can do." The next day I had so many papers. I had the whole thing with papers--where I was born, my papers, all my cards. I had everything. So, you know, I could go on my own.

ER: Right.

FR: So I had a job, a sales girl in a gift shop. And I was working over there for probably, oh, three, four months. Then a, one night in a coffeehouse one man told me, "I think you look Jewish." So the next day I didn't come to work in this, I picked another job, in a other...

ER: But it was easier because you had papers.

FR: It was easier. I had papers, and my looks.

ER: Yeah.

FR: So that's it, the looks, that's it.

ER: And you said that this woman Niederman, Mrs. Niederman, Miss Niederman...

FR: Mrs.

ER: Mrs., was helping some other people.

FR: Yes. I didn't know the people but I know she took them to the border, yeah. So, but this was not her goal. Her goal was for me to take me out from Poland. And Poland was dangerous for me. Too many questions.

ER: Yeah.

FR: So...

ER: And where did she want to take you?

FR: She wanted to take me to Germany. But to go to Germany I needed to be German. So, I make application for my German papers. I wanted to become a German. So, must, I must be for a big commission, you know, to be prepared for it. You know, it's like here to become an American citizen.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Questions and questions, questions. So in the meantime she says she is leaving her boyfriend to Italy for a vacation, she says, "If something goes wrong, never,

never say I bought your papers. Never say you worked for me. Never say who you are or who your acquaintances are." Then, you know, when they find out, she can be killed right away the same like me.

ER: Right.

FR: I should only keep my mouth shut what, from where I have it, the, you know.

ER: Did you, when you worked for her, when you lived with her, did you pay her?

FR: No, no, no, no, no.

ER: No.

FR: No, no. So when they were [unclear] it was in '43, the beginning of '43. I was in Radom. I got a card from the commission and they said, "Franciszka Wiarzbecki must come, you know this and this date, this and this time, for German paper to pick up," or you know, to be represented [unclear] all. Oh my goodness. I didn't sleep. I didn't eat.

ER: Yeah.

FR: I didn't, you know, maybe they find out something from me. I didn't know what to do. I ran with my birth certificate to the church and the priest explained to me--it was in Latin--what is the name and what it this. I don't know what's going on. So I went to the chapel to pray, you know. Oh, gosh, I was a fanatic. I went to the chapel to pray where the King prayed. So one night, one day in the morning before this big examination...

ER: Yeah.

FR: I went to the chapel at night, in the day time. It was before Easter. I was crying. I said, "Oh, take my life." You know, when I was very much afraid. And it was, I must be before nine doctors, nine S.S. doctors. They scared me, that's all.

ER: Sure.

FR: They scared me. Only, you know, some girls just left everything, thinking better to the ghettos and that's all, let's finish with them. But I said no. Oh gosh. Nobody touched me. Nobody did to me something. But I was living on my own, and I was a proud of myself. And I make money, and I pay my apartment. But later on I met a other German girl, a young girl. And she was married. Her husband was here in prison here, you know.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Second World War. So, and we took together a room, were roommates.

ER: And she did not know you were Jewish.

FR: No, no, no. She knew I might go to the big commission, too. And that was '43, end of '43, you know, and the Russians coming nearer and nearer. And so you know, everybody was jittery a little. So what should we do? So, it was in, I think it was in July. Because [unclear] was away on vacation. Anyway, nine o'clock in the morning, a day

before I went to the chapel to pray, I came home. I fast all, I didn't eat nothing, just to prepare. So I said, "This is the end of me." I didn't believe that I would...

ER: Mmm hmm, that you could do it.

FR: I can do it. They say they take blood and they, I was thinking they can know what I was. Nine o'clock in the morning I was sitting in the room. Then they call my name. And I came in. I, only in underpants and my brassiere. Oh gosh. They measure me, measure, they measure, they measure me--nine doctors, one doctor, and all sitting around the table. And later they take blood.

ER: From your ear?

FR: Yeah. I was 90% German, and 10% Polish.

ER: Oh!

FR: [both laugh]

ER: Interesting.

FR: Yeah.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And they, around the table they ask me where I were, and where my parents were, and what they did, you know. My, you know, my luck was to, my papers said my mother was born in Hamburg. And before I should go to the commission, they wrote to him how my mother is dead and family, through the bombs and through war circumstances. Nothing they can [unclear]. So, [unclear] lucky I had...

ER: Yeah, and you were lucky, very lucky.

FR: Then it was everything cleared for me. The road was clear. I went to the commission. In the end was sitting a doctor to me. He said, "I'll," I was leaving, oh, about nationality and how I will do for Germany and I am such a good worker and I am such a good orphan. You know I was an orphan.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And so, you know, I had all the papers, all the, you know, all these how I did good there, I did good there. You know, good deeds. So of the nine doctors a short one told me, "Your German acts a little Jewish." Well what? I didn't answer him. "Jewish? Oh never! Never, never, never!" And I left the room. You know, to talk to him...

ER: You had *chutzpah*.

FR: Yeah. And I left the room. I dress up myself. I went home. And the next two, three weeks came a bunch of papers. And I got, was German. And Mrs. Niederman come from Italy with her boyfriend. And I just, you know, we kiss and hug and I said, "Oh my goodness!" She said to me how happy she is. So she was very, very happy. Of course, I was happy. In a month my roommate said, "We'll go to Germany. You'll go with me." "Oh," I said, "Hildegard, where can we go?" She says, "We'll go to Berlin where all the, we'll go, have a good time, and then you will stay with me in

Schwarzwald,” to, in a small town, a villa, to, by her in-laws. And we went to Berlin you know, and on the train they check everybody’s passport.

ER: Let me just interrupt you here. Was that the last that you saw of Mrs. Niederman?

FR: No, I saw her later, in Germany.

ER: Okay. All right, okay, now let’s con-, we can continue.

FR: So, in the train to Berlin they check all the papers. Nobody came to me for the papers, nobody asked me for papers.

ER: Yeah.

FR: It was a sure, and I was assured of myself. Okay, in Berlin, we sleep in Berlin two days. We left from Schwarzwald, you know, Black Forest.

ER: Yeah, right.

FR: It was beautiful. And over there I was staying with them. But, they was politically very much Nazis, you know. That wasn’t Nazi, I don’t know, but they liked so much to hear Hitler’s speech, and they argued and they talked about. I didn’t say nothing. It’s what I can say? I’m in Germany, the main thing, I’m in Germany. I don’t must stay with stupid Poles anymore, don’t be afraid anymore. I was free. So then I was over there two, three months and not working--skiing, having a good life. I said to myself, “Hildegard,” I said, “I must go to the next city. I must go on my own.”

ER: Did you have any contacts with Jews?

FR: Oh gosh...

ER: No.

FR: How can I do it?

ER: No? You couldn’t take the chance?

FR: Never! Oh! What can I say?

ER: Did you see what was going on?

FR: Oh yes, when I was in Poland, [unclear], and I heard about it.

ER: I mean in Germany.

FR: In Germany? No, nothing in Germany. Didn’t do nothing in Germany. Germany was like the, I [unclear] he was already out all the Jews.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Nothing, you know, was left.

ER: Well, in Berlin there were still some Jews.

FR: I wouldn’t dare...

ER: Yeah.

FR: To see somebody. So, when I came to this small town, you know, everybody was happy and everybody, you know, and they had normal lives. And I got on my life. I went skiing. You know, I forgot already my problems. Sometimes, you know. But then the next time after three months sitting in Schwarzwald I said to myself, “Okay,

FANNY ROSS [1-2-20]

Hildegard, it's not for me. No, I'll go to the next city. I will apply for a job. When I came to the next city, they took so many Poles over there!

ER: In this Schwarzwald?

FR: Yes, in the other city. You know why? They took a lot of Poles for work.

ER: Right.

FR: And I was very much afraid of them. I tried [unclear] them. I don't want, you know, where they be with them together.

ER: Were they Polish Jews or just Poles?

FR: No, Polish Christian, not Polish Jews.

ER: Christian.

FR: No, Polish Jews we didn't see anymore. They disappeared. You didn't see. They was in Auschwitz, Treblinka.

ER: Yeah.

FR: So, I was over there by the, in one city and I'm looking for a job. Then I went for six doctors to work, physics. And they asked me, "Do you have some experience?" I says, "Well, I had only one year of college." But I was so, you know, I can do any-, I was thinking I can do any, anything I want.

ER: Yeah.

FR: And I went to work. About six weeks I work over there. After I got a job, I went to look for an apartment. And I was lucky, always lucky with people. And I met a very, very, through the papers too it came in. And she says to me, "No smoking. No dating. No whiskey." "Okay." And she gave me her boy's room, a room like here. And her husband was away all week, she tells me. And I had a beautiful, she was very nice to me. They were very nice people. And I did what I did. They was Catholic. And after six weeks the doctor told me, "You stayed too long by one job. We cannot keep you." I didn't know what, you know, I'm not a researcher or something.

ER: Right, right, right.

FR: I did what the other girl did. Oh gosh, he was a jerk, a mess. He said to me, "How long can you stay by a stone to measure the stone?" You know, I measured what the girl did. I did the same thing. I didn't know nothing from nothing.

ER: Yes.

FR: And after six weeks they let me go. And I got other job. I got a job. I got another job filling watches, you know, in the airplane nights the light?

ER: Yeah.

FR: So I fill in the lighting. I went downstairs for a job and they said they'll keep me downstairs one day [unclear] they sent me to the office. I was in the office working till you know, till the, '45, 1945.

ER: Until when the war was over.

FR: Yes, and I had a beautiful time over there with the people. I went to church. I went everything.

ER: After the war was over, did you identify yourself as a Jew?

FR: Not quickly. Not so quickly. Passed two months. I was sitting on a bench and a lady told me, then the girl is talking, "See this is a Jewish girl." This is a Jewish lady maybe 55. So I didn't want, I was only one Jew. I was afraid, still to identify myself. So when the, when it was night, I saw that lady again. And I went to her. "Yes," she says, "I'm Jewish, too." So we used to go together. Then she says, "I know two other Jewish girls." I met one from Krakow, one from Warsaw. And then, you know, I was staying, still staying in the same, by the same lady. They didn't charge me no rent.

ER: Why not?

FR: I don't know. When her husband came weekends, and I gave him the rent, or on Saturday night, Sunday morning she got my check back.

ER: When you finally identified yourself as Jews, did they know? I mean, you were still in this apartment. What was the...

FR: It's only a room.

ER: What was their...

FR: You see, the lady, I think she know, I think, right away that I am Jewish. You know why? She took me to church. Oh gosh, I went to church. I went to all these places and we were, I did all kinds of things. Maybe all the children see, I couldn't be away, I should do the same thing. And so what's happened, when the priest had a ceremony, honor mother and father. And I cry a little. So it was a small church. And they right away knew what's going on. And later we went to Communion, the fifth time I go to Communion. I didn't know you must [unclear].

ER: And that was it.

FR: And she pushed me I should [unclear]. She's standing near me. She kneel near me. So when we came home, I think she suspected. Then the boy was then eight years old. And he took me to his room and said so. "Listen, Franciszka," he said, "this is the Madonna, okay? This is Christ, okay?"

ER: This was still during the war.

FR: Yeah!

ER: Uh huh.

FR: '45, in May. "This is this and this is..." I said, "Okay, Walter, I know." In German. "This is this..." So, I know.

ER: Yeah.

FR: [unclear]. Then the next day in the office say, "Franciszka, what's happened at church this morning?" I said, "What's happened? Nothing's happened. I got headache and that's all that happened." See, they all, you know.

ER: Yeah.

FR: But I think the lady--this family I'm still in contact with.

ER: Oh yes? And what about Mrs. Niederman?

FR: Mrs. Niederman? Okay, when I was, it was '45, it was April, the 20th of April was the war over over there. So I was sitting in [unclear]. And somebody came out and said, "Girls, did you hear?" We said, "What?" "A Jewish boy from the concentration camp came back, in this and this city." So I said to myself, "I'll go meet the boys." And so I went another city, Konstanz am Bodensee, near the Swei-, near the Switzerland border. And over there was a Jewish community center. It was all over [unclear], lots of Jewish people I see, Jewish girls. And then I met my husband over there.

ER: Was your husband in a camp?

FR: Yeah.

ER: And he was, he's German?

FR: No, no, no, he's Polish.

ER: Polish.

FR: And oh, my paper was hard for me to get too, back to be Jewish. And the rabbi, you know, tell me, "Some German girl, before they was Christian, now they want to be Jewish!" Now, you know, he...

ER: Yeah.

FR: He was very...

ER: He didn't believe you.

FR: No, then they took me to the synagogue, and I read Jewish. Then later on...

ER: Then they, yeah. In your perception, how many Jews received help from non-Jews during the war?

FR: I don't know.

ER: You don't.

FR: I can't tell you. There's in my, you know, in my, you know, when they should help them from our town, at least from 3,000 well, somebody lived, five girls lived, that's all.

ER: Yeah.

FR: Not too much.

ER: What did you learn about yourself, others, or human nature in general as a result of your experience during the Holocaust?

FR: You know, as a result of my experience, that people are good. Then, like the president, when somebody get in, this is more, you know, he can do very much harm, the speeches. You know?

ER: Yeah.

FR: And it seems to me the more intelligent people, they are less vicious. They know what's going on.

ER: Right, right.

FR: And the middle class and the poor, they just danced when the music played. Come Russia, they were Communist. Come Germany they are Nazi.

ER: Yes, right.
FR: They come other, just you know. That's all.
ER: Yeah.
FR: But the people are good.
ER: How much have you told your daughter about your experiences during the war?
FR: Everything.
ER: Everything.
FR: Mmm hmm [affirmative], everything.
ER: Are there any lessons that you think should be conveyed to the young people of today about the Holocaust?
FR: To be what they are born, never change your religion.
ER: Never change their religion?
FR: Never.
ER: And you said that you do keep contact with the family...
FR: One family.
ER: One family.
FR: Yeah. And not the girl, but you know, she was, she had Nazi, you know, maybe she didn't do harm, but she took me to Germany. But, you know, you see others, let me see, they was middle class people. So when they hear the speech from Hitler, they got so enthusiasm about it.
ER: Right.
FR: See, they was not intelligent.
ER: Right.
FR: But the other couple what I lived with them, in Germany, they were intelligent people. They read a lot.
ER: This is in the Schwarzwald, yeah.
FR: Yeah, other family, you know, with the boy who teach me.
ER: Yeah, right.
FR: Now the daughter, she is...
ER: You don't keep in touch with them?
FR: Oh yes! Her husband was just here.
ER: Oh was he?
FR: Yeah. And Walter, what he's teach me, "This is Christ and this is this," he is now in München in a big position in the government. But the thing is to me, the people who were more educated, they didn't went after him so fast, after Hitler. They didn't believe in this. They said it will change. But the people who...
ER: [unclear] change to.
FR: And the people who was stupid, not educated, and these, they hear it, "Go, hate the Jew," then he will go do it. He don't think.

FANNY ROSS [1-2-24]

ER: Yeah.
FR: They do the same thing over here.
ER: Sure. Is there anything else that you'd like to say before we...
FR: Nothing.
ER: No? Okay.
FR: Just that...
ER: Well I want to thank you very...
FR: I'm lucky, that's all.
ER: I want to thank you very much...
FR: Okay, yes.
ER: For this.
FR: Okay. Tell me-

[End of interview]