HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

DEBORAH TEITELBAUM

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Rochelle Chasan
Date: October 15, 1983

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DT - Deborah Teitelbaum[1] [interviewee]
RC - Rochelle Chasan [interviewer]
Date: October 15, 1983

Tape one, side one:

RC: This is tape one, side one, Rochelle Chasan interviewing Mrs. Deborah Teitelbaum, October 13, 1983. Mrs. Teitelbaum, could you please tell me where you were born, when and a little about your family?

DT: I come from a town Vilna, Poland. I was born, actually, the 21 of December, 1922. This is my right birth date because my birth date is not correct on my documents, you know. There's a reason why it was not correct. I come from, a family of--an immediate family of five people, my mother Ella, which survived the Holocaust with me, my father Leib, which was, he was killed in a camp in Estonia, and I had two brothers. My older brother Israel was killed as soon as the Germans entered our city; they systematically killed all the youths which was in the early twenties. My younger brother, Yosik, was 17 and he was presumably killed in Buchenwald. We don't know for sure. The last we heard is that the young people were transported from Buchenwald to a city on the Baltic Sea, Konigsberg, and we have had information that he was two days before the liberation, shipped from Buchenwald and dumped into the Baltic Sea, but we are not sure about it. Either he was killed in Buchenwald or was among the young children that were sent to the Baltic Sea and they were on a ship and they were drowned with a ship in the Baltic Sea. So this is something we don't know for sure because as yet we never heard what was the actually the fate of my younger brother, but we know the fate of my older brother. He was captured from the Lithuanians. They were sent by the Germans to get, so to speak, the young people which were the intelligentsia. My brother was a university student at that time and he was sent to the outskirts of the city with many more and they were shot on the spot there and buried there.

RC: What was your life like before the war or before your life was changed by the Nazi victories in Europe?

DT: I came from a middle-class family. My father was a businessman. He was in the newspaper business and he had, he was an owner of a Jewish theater in our hometown and we were, financially we were very comfortable. I was one of three children and we were, we went to good schools. We were all almost high school graduates, except my younger one, my younger brother, which had two years to go yet in high school. We had a very good life. By European standards we had a very nice, comfortable life, very enjoyable

[1]nee Berger.

for young people. We belonged to Jewish organizations. We were observant Jews and Conservative Jews and it was a very, very nice life.

RC: Did your family experience antisemitism before the Hitler period, if so, could you tell us a little about it?

DT: Yes, we experienced antisemitism in Poland. In my hometown, I remember as far as I was a little girl in 1928, they, they didn't let the Jewish students in the university sit with the Gentiles on the same side. There was, I remember that there was somebody killed and they blamed it on the Jews and I remember seeing a lot of young people march in the streets, Gentiles, against the Jews and telling everybody not to buy from the Jewish storekeepers and the youth was shouting in the streets, "Do away, away with the Jews and Jews belong to Palestine. Let them go to Palestine." In, I remember it was in 1937 or '38, my father came home and he was bleeding from his nose and he was beaten up by a couple of thugs because he-- they waited in front of my father's business and beat him up because he had, you know he was a Jewish businessman and they didn't like to see Jewish businessmen so he was beaten up. I was a young person, I don't recall exactly what happened, but I know that the family was very alarmed and when my father came home he was bleeding, and he told us the story that they beat him up and they shouted at him, "Dirty Jew", and that's as far as I remember. But I know there was always, you know, a division between ourselves as students and the Polish students because we were not liked and we lived like in a separate little world because, we because we knew that it's not we lived there, but maybe we're comfortable in certain ways, but we were not wanted there and there was, there was a lot of antisemitism in the cities.

RC: As a result of the experience that your father had, did he alter his business in any way?

DT: Not as far as I remember. He just went on in the, in the same fashion that he was used to. It was just one isolated incident as far as my father was concerned. I know that my father--it didn't stop anything from what my father wanted to do.

RC: The newspaper that he worked for or owned?

DT: My father had a newspaper agency and all the newspapers from Poland and the world, even the *Jewish Forward*, used to come to my father's newspaper business and then he published a Polish paper in our hometown.

RC: Okay. Did you--you already mentioned that you were active in Jewish organizations, could you explain which organizations and if you did go to synagogue regularly, and did these activities change once the Nazis came into your lives?

DT: Well, I belonged to the Betar, the Revisionists. As a young girl, my parents never told me about you know, affiliations, who I should belong to. They--we had a different situation because the children went to school just with the Jewish children. We were not mixed in schools with the gentile young people and we were very Jewish-minded and we, we always lived with the thought about Israel and we worked for Zionism and we were very Zionistic in those days because we always knew, because we were raised that

way that our homeland may be one day be Palestine and this is one and then. Did you ask me…?

RC: About the synagogue affiliation?

DT: Yes, my father belonged to the citywide synagogue which was a very large synagogue and prominent in the city. He belonged to that synagogue, my two brothers and my father used to go always on the holidays. We were not Orthodox and we were not always in the synagogue. The synagogues in Europe had a different character than here. Here it's not only religiously, but even socially you meet. We didn't have that. We just went to pray and the women and men were not together, so the children, especially the females, used to come just on the holidays. And my father and my brothers used to go on the holidays and special occasions; but they were not overly religious, but we were very Jewish-minded, and at home we were Kosher and observant.

RC: When you spoke about the schools, you said that the Polish children and the Jewish children went to different schools. Is that because the Jewish children were attending Jewish schools, or were there separate public schools?

DT: Now we didn't have Hebrew schools like here, when we went to a school with a Jewish education and Hebrew, so like, we had high schools, private high schools, not subsidized by the state or by the city and they were very expensive, so not everybody could send their children to *gymnasium*, high school. These schools were on a very high level educational-wise, and these were the schools especially for Jewish children of upper-middle class families, which could afford to pay the price, it's like a private school in our country here.

RC: That was at the high school level?

DT: Yes.

RC: What about the elementary level?

DT: Elementary level also was the same. This was subsidized by the city, but the Jewish children were not mixed with the Christian children because we had Jewish education and Hebrew, so we were in a separate, separate schools.

RC: Was that a form then of antisemitism?

DT: This was, I don't think this was antisemitism, I think that this was because of religious upbringing and that was the European way, the educational way, in our city, I don't know about other cities. The children, the Christian children went separate and the Jewish children went separate. I remember my older brother went to a school for a couple of years with, with Christian children, but this was an exception because my father was--had a lot of people in the government that knew him and it was a status symbol, I don't know, he just went for a couple of years, but then my father took him out of school because he didn't like it.

RC: Did any men in your family serve in any national army?

DT: Yes, my father and my brother went to a form of army when he went to high school. It's like boy scouts, but it was on a higher level because, we were-- they were being prepared for army, but my father went, yeah, my father was in Polish army.

RC: Okay. Can you tell a little about your life in Poland in the early part of 1939, just prior to the German invasion?

DT: Well, it was, it was mostly, it revolved mostly around school because we were school children and we had all kinds of activities. We had a very strict educational program. We went to school in the morning and we came home two o'clock and then we started on our lessons. We had a lot of homework, we worked very hard and studied very hard. Our school was on a very high educational level and we had all activities in school, all kinds of activities and then, as I said, we belonged to the Zionist organizations and we had also among our groups, you know, each one of us had their own group of friends. We had social gatherings and dances and a lot of entertainment. We went to a lot of theater and a lot of movies, as a matter of fact, this was a program that was in school even. Our school children used to go to theaters to see plays, you know, by big writers, plays that were suitable for, for high school children and then I took up dancing. My parents wanted me to, to dance, so I went to ballet school since I was 3 years old and then I danced 'till 16 and I was pretty good at it so I participated in the children's plays which were acted out in dancing and that was a part of my life for a long time until I was 16. From 3 to 16, it was 13 years. And, well, then in the summers, we used to go away because my parents could afford a *dacha*. A *dacha* is a summer place, so we used to have a summer place in the summer for a couple months and that's where we went with my mother. We had a maid always, our maid and the children, and we stayed a whole summer in a summer home and we had a carefree summer and it was very nice.

RC: You've already spoken a little bit about your birthplace, I have a few more questions. About how many Jews lived in the city where you were born?

DT: I think it was, as far as I know, between 250,000 and 300,000 and we had among these people 60,000 Jews, except in the war years we had people that came over from Poland, ran away actually, and we had about 80,000 at that time, Jews.

RC: Was it a highly organized Jewish community? Was there a *Kehillah*, a government body, and how did your family view it?

DT: We had a *Kehillah* in our hometown and it was highly organized. We had very prominent citizens, Jewish citizens, which were the leaders of the *Kehillah*. They contributed their time and effort and money and our Jewish community was always very proud of their Jewish *Kehillah*. As a child I remember I had an aunt which could not afford private doctors and I remember that she always went to a *krankenkase* it used to be called and she could get always a doctor there, so as a child, I remember the place where it was located and it was very, very well organized.

RC: That doctor was supplied by the *Kehillah*?

DT: Doctors were supplied for the poor people, the people that could not afford. They always had doctors and they didn't pay for them because the big business people and the richer citizens of the Jewish community contributed in a fashion like here, the Jewish Federation. And I remember that when our city was occupied by the Germans, the first thing that they did is call the people from the *Kehillah* and told them to bring the gold, and all the citizens that have gold and diamonds and very expensive items, to bring and deposit, to give it away to them and they pretended like they said that they will not, these people are going to be untouchable, so to say, but this was another hoax of the Germans and I remember very well the Jewish *Kehillah*, where it was located.

RC: What happened to you and your family during the weeks following the German invasion?

DT: This was a very, very painful period for me to talk about, painful because very shortly after the Germans entered our city my older brother was taken away from us. First of all, it was a gradual process of denying us everything. They started with the yellow star. They started first with the yellow band and then a star on the chest and then you're not allowed to walk on the sidewalks. It was a gradual deterioration for us and then the people started talking about how the Lithuanians did all the dirty work, so to speak, for them. They used to knock at doors and pull the young people out and people never saw them again and in the beginning, we thought that maybe they're taking them just to work some place, but then gradually our hope disappeared, you know, because nobody ever saw them back and I had a very painful experience because my older brother, we already knew that something is not right with what they're doing with the young people. But it was hard to understand it this time because our minds were not geared to all those things they're going to do to us. We knew the Germans are enemies to the Jewish people. We knew that Hitler came to power in 1933. We knew that it's not going to be good for us, but no one ever thought it's going to be a Holocaust and we're all going to be killed. We didn't know that what is going to happen as much as we could think about it, that things are going to be horrible and it's not going to be good for the Jewish people, but no one ever thought what's going to happen. Even in the worst moments, we always hoped that things are not that bad, that there, that these people are going to come back, that the people are working, that the people are just temporary, you know, it's, it's not for, for keeps. It was hard to understand until we all saw what's happening, until we all saw facts. Until the time came when we realized that they have, that they have their minds made up to kill us all and so at that time, coming back, when we knew that they were taking away the young people, we barricaded so to speak ourselves, in our house and we made up our minds we aren't going to let our brother, because he was my older brother, me and my younger brother were, so to speak, children. We were teenagers. My older brother was a few years older and we knew the age they were interested in. They, they were determined to, to do away with people, the educated people, the university people, and somehow they knocked from door to door, you know, they, they somehow they, they checked all the houses. They, they didn't know who

was who and where they are, but at that time, when the Germans came and a day before the Germans we heard that the Germans are coming to our city, my older brother ran away to Russia. He took a train and ran away with a lot of other young people and the bombs were already, were already falling all over and I was running to the train station with him and he was running away because the only thing that was to do is to run away, and maybe escape from them is to run toward Russia. So he came as far as Minsk and it was useless because he could not get transportation to go deep into Russia because the Germans were occupying the cities faster than he, than he could run away, so he turned around and I'm sorry to say, came back and fate was so that he was captured in our house in a very bad fashion because when they came and knocked at our door, we had a back bedroom with a window and he, it was not too high. He wanted to jump through the window and run wherever he could and these people that were capturing these young people were in an apartment under us and they saw him jump through the window and they captured him and took him away on the outskirts of our city and he was shot there with all the others.

RC: During this…

DT: If you are interested I'll tell you the name of the place where a lot of people are shot, Ponary.

RC: Could you spell that?

DT: P-O-N-A-R-Y. If you go to Yad Vashem, the place is inscribed on the floor with the other concentration camps and commemorative places where a lot of Jews were killed.

RC: Were there Jews living in Ponary?

DT: No, that was a park. That was a big, beautiful park with trees and grass. And that's where a lot of people were shot and buried. They have a monument now there.

Tape one, side two:

RC: Did you receive any help of any kind at this time from non-Jews?

DT: That's also a painful question because my father, being in business, he had a Polish friend which was in the same business as my father. He was an orphan and he was raised, actually, with my grandfather in the same, the same place. My grandfather helped him a lot and my father and grandfather were responsible for putting him actually in business. He, Ignatce Pavlovski, was with us, it was very close. We used to visit him on Polish holidays. He had also three children and our two families were very, very close. And as a child I remember a lot of people which were associated with my father, worked for my father, but him, I remember very well. When our children were sick with whooping coughs, we some of us went to stay with them and the same thing, their children came to our house, so you know that we were very close. Christmas, we were always there. And it was a very nice relationship, as for the Polish standard of knowing like between Jews and Christians in Poland. But my father was in the sort of business where he was associated with a lot of non-Jews. When a, when the bad times arrived for us we had no contact with them, but we a, when the ghetto was liquidated and my father was not there anymore already, they took him away to concentration camp some place in Estonia and my mother and my younger brother hid on the rooftops in the ghetto after liquidation for a few days. While they were there and the ghetto was liquidated, I had a chance to escape from the ghetto and run away to my mother's sister family and they were also in a place which was isolated from the ghetto. These people were furriers working for the Germans. They were making furs for the military so I had a chance to escape. I never looked particularly Jewish so I went there and I stayed there for a while and then all kinds of rumors circulated through the place where I stayed with my aunt, that this is going to be liquidated, that in the ghetto nobody existed anymore and everybody was sent. Whoever stayed was destroyed, all kinds of rumors, so I really became frightened and I started to think, maybe I'll have a chance to--I knew where my, my father's friend, this Ignatce Pavlovski, I knew their address and I took off; I put on my coat, I took off my yellow star, without a star, and I left the place unnoticed, because we always had people watching the gates, but I left somehow, and I went there because this was in the vicinity where that place was, where my aunt stayed at that place, so I left and I went to my father's friend, knocked on the door, they let me in, they were very shocked to see me and they asked me, "We know that everybody was destroyed, that a lot of people were sent away to concentration camps, you are still here? We didn't know." I said, I told them what happened, that I left the ghetto, I came to my aunt's, and maybe there's a chance for me to stay with them in a hiding place someplace. Maybe they can hide me. So they told me that there's a German family living next to them and they would not want me there and they can't do it. I said but, "I'm going to be killed, does it matter to you?" They told me they can't help it. "You better go back from where you came." So I looked around and saw this nice and peaceful life, the whole family, a

beautiful home and I said goodbye and actually, no one even worried, no one even said a word, no one even bothered to say go in peace, nothing. I left and that's it. I went back. I was fortunate enough not to be caught on the way because there were people that were caught on the way, people that wanted to escape, and I was fortunate enough at that time to get back to that place and we stayed there and something happened that made me very happy. My mother and my brother escaped the ghetto. They were on a rooftop for days and then found a sort of hiding place. Through what they escaped from the ghetto and also came because they knew that I was there and they came to my aunt's place there. There was a little camp, a few buildings where they housed the furriers that made the coats for the army and we stayed there until they sent all the people which they knew were family, but had nothing to do with making furs for them, and we were sent out to Latvia.

RC: Okay, the next questions will deal with life in the ghetto, starting from the beginning actually. At what point were you ordered to go to a ghetto to work, which ghetto was it, and did most of your community go to the same place?

DT: When the time came and they, and they told all the Jewish citizens to leave their homes, they marched us into two ghettos; they made ghetto number one and ghetto number two. We were in, we lived in a street that led to ghetto number one, and they brought us near the ghetto and there was no room for that many people, so they let us stand for a long while with our belongings and then they marched everyone off to the city jail. My father lost us in all this confusion, thousands of Jews in very narrow streets in the Jewish section, he lost us and he fell into the, into the jail. Me and my mother and my younger brother, we entered at court. Our homes were situated in courts in Europe mostly where it was--you entered--I don't know how to describe it.

RC: An archway?

DT: An archway, and inside were all the homes so in one of those buildings, me, and my mother, and my brother got into a house and we decided to stay there. We knew that nothing good is coming off from what they're doing at the present time. There were too many Jews to put in the ghetto and we already heard; we already knew that a lot of terrible things are happening, so when we saw that they are chasing everyone out of there and marching them some place, that was the city jail. So when they came, the Lithuanians, they worked for the Germans, and told us to leave in a hurry, out, out, out. I put my mother in a bed and I put pillows in a spread and I made the bed, and my younger brother, I put under the bed and I put packages against him and I laid on the bed on top of my mother and when they came and shouted "Out!" I said, "Leave me alone please, I'm sick, I don't feel good. Let me die here." He said, "Who is here in bed?" I said there is no one. "Who is under the bed?" And I was very lucky because they didn't check and they were not too many and they had a lot of work to do chasing everybody out. Somehow in all of this confusion I was very lucky. I was left with my mother and my brother, but my father I didn't find, but next morning when there was quiet, the night was a horror, as a matter of fact in the last minute I saw a neighbor of mine, with a daughter, wanted to march through

the arch. I called their names from the top. It was the top of a balcony and I said, "Halina, Halina," and she said to me, "Yes." I said "Come up here, no one is here," and they came up here and they escaped with me. So I actually gave them life, and next morning we found a little hole and we slid through that hole because this was on the border of the ghetto and we all went through the hole into the ghetto. Next day, my father had a *Besheinegung* [certification], he worked for the Wehrmacht. The few weeks before we went into the ghetto, he was caught for work, you know, they took him to work and they gave him a *Besheinegung*, that he's working for them so with this *Besheinegung* they let him go from the jail and they sent him in to the ghetto and we met there. So we got into the ghetto through this opening in a wall; we escaped and got into the ghetto and we went. My mother's sister's apartment in a Jewish section fell into the ghetto and we went right there. My mother's sister and the children went into the jail. They cleared out the section for the other people and my uncle escaped, my mother's sister's husband, so he was in the apartment and that's where we stayed for a long while in the ghetto.

RC: What exactly is the *Besheinegung*?

DT: The *Besheinegung*, this is a document which they gave the people, any German document that says something that you're entitled to something, that you're working for the government, that you do something for the government or for them, it's like here…

RC: Mrs. Teitelbaum, you referred to the two ghettos as number one and two, were there names for these?

DT: We had our own names. In the beginning it was like ghetto number one and number two or the small ghetto and the big ghetto, but the other ghetto number two was in existence a short time. They systematically, you know, took away the people. They took them to Ponary, as I said, or they sent them away, or they systematically killed them. I don't exactly know because it was in the beginning, but the people disappeared and a lot of them were sent to the first ghetto, to the big ghetto, so to speak, so they liquidated that ghetto, they just made one out of these two.

RC: Okay. Were you able at first to leave the ghetto to work, and at what point was the first ghetto closed, and did you meet refugees from other cities or countries in your ghetto?

DT: The ghetto actually didn't have any other people than our own people from our own hometown, unless they arrived into our city from Poland, refugees that went away from Poland because they're the city like Warsaw and all other cities in Poland were occupied first. Our city, Vilna, belonged to Lithuania years ago and this was the Lithuanian capital, so they left. They actually like cut off our city when they occupied Poland and gave this city, actually they didn't give it to--but we had two more years before the Germans came and occupied our city.

RC: And what year was that?

DT: '41 1941. See, Poland was occupied in 1939, and we had two more years 'till 1941, so we were fortunate in this way that we had a little more time. It was too late to do anything for us already because the war was already in full power. I guess a lot of people escaped through. I heard a lot of people escaped to the Orient, yes, but 'till the last minute, we never thought we were in such danger. We didn't believe. How come? What do you mean they'll come to us and do to us what they did? So we didn't--actually, we were very frightened and worried. We knew already what was happening to the Polish Jews, but we didn't, we didn't think it's going to happen like this. A lot of people thought, "Yes", and they escaped. It wasn't easy, you know, to root yourself out so, but if we were smart we would have done it. I know that a lot of people did. They went to the Orient and then they escaped.

RC: Did the Jews work in the ghetto?

DT: Many Jews worked, yes. We had a *Kehillah* there too. We had a community center and the people, the Jewish people have a terrific, a terrific staying alive power until they're really threatened directly, you know, but this is, this is the wonderful thing about our people, because being in such terrible circumstances, you know. And the city that I come from is a very well-known Jewish city, "Jerusalem of Lithuania", that's what it was called, *Yerushalayim de Lit* [Jerusalem of Lithuania], so our people wrote all the songs and the ghetto songs and even the anthem from the survivors, everything is being written in our ghetto in Vilna, so we had, we even had a theater, we had schools for little children. We had like a separate country and there was even trade. There was, there were people were in business, people were selling and buying. It was like a whole little country. People were going out of ghetto to work and when they were fortunate enough to bring in anything, but still, there were ways to bring things until you were caught. There were times when you were not able to bring in anything because when we had this terrible, terrible Germans that were in charge of the ghetto and they came to the ghetto, what did you say, the arch? This was not an arch actually, it was a ghetto gate. When they came to the ghetto gate and they, they had their times when they searched everybody and they killed people. There was a woman killed only for bringing in a little bag of peas or beans and there were times when you heard people were hiding. We had hiding places under our clothes and this were the people that went out for work. Older people of course stayed in the ghetto, and there were a lot of things that occupied people in the ghetto because life went on. It was very, very tragic, but in a tragic fashion we made the best of it. Well, but every so often we had these actions and there was so much going on just to make the ghetto more--they used to make actions and take people out and killed them. They used to take them to Ponary, you know, to make room for other people when they brought the other ghetto in, when they wanted. First they were killing all the people, they were taking out, chasing them out of the houses. They made again *Besheinegungen* the yellow certificates which whoever had the certificate that you were a worker in certain professions, you went "right". If you didn't have a certificate, you went "left" and they had their way of exterminating, gradual extermination

and all they wanted is to leave as few as possible so most of it used to happen on our holiday, on Jewish holidays. There was the action on Yom Kippur and there was the action on Rosh Hashanah and there was action on all the Jewish holidays.

RC: Was it possible to bribe or purchase a certificate in order to survive, did that go on?

DT: With a certificate I think there was, there was--you had to be at the right time at the right place. I was very fortunate I got a certificate and I didn't even work at that time, but I had met somebody one day, a young boy, which was very well known in the Jewish community. He was nothing in particular. He was just--he liked to--you know, each neighborhood there's somebody that sticks his nose some place everywhere and knows everything. He was, he knew everything, and this boy used to come to my aunt's apartment where we stayed. He knew someone there and he liked me, nothing else, but he liked me. Nobody, nobody particularly cared about him because he was a loner and he was a young guy which came from the wrong side of the tracks, and I had sympathy for him, so I used to sit down and talk to him and he admired me for it because he knows I had much more education and I had a nice background and came from a nice family, so he admired me for it and he appreciated it. He always used to tell me, "I appreciate it because you talk to me, nobody wants to talk to me."

RC: And he was able to…

DT: And he was at the time in the *Judenrat*, you know, in the Jewish community. When they, the first day they talked about the yellow certificates, and he knew that me, and my father, my mother, and my younger brother, we had no particular profession. This was given out to carpenters, to furriers, to tailors; to people that had professions they can use. So he knew somebody, and he got a yellow certificate for me, but I had no right to take my, my mother, and my father or my brother, because I was not the head of the family. So my mother became Deborah-Doba-Berger, that was my maiden name, and she was able to carry through my father, me and my brother, and I became Ella. We changed, and he gave me the certificate and when the time came for that action when they sent a lot of people to their deaths, we went "right". We didn't know the implications of it yet. We didn't, absolutely didn't understand. We only understood that this is something important for us, that this is going to save us for the time being, so I gave the certificate to my mother and she became me.

RC: It was written in the name of…?

DT: They don't know, it was written Doba Berger and they didn't know absolutely because it went fast, right, left, right, left.

RC: Mrs. Teitelbaum, how did your family support yourselves in the ghetto, your own family?

DT: Yes, I can answer this question. The thing is, I want to say, that when we had this action with the yellow certificates, the people were let go for a while out of the ghetto. We stayed there in a line with people, me, my father, my mother, and my brother,

we went again to that place where my family stayed, my mother's sister, we stayed there for a while until they chased us out and told us to go back to the ghetto. How we survived in the ghetto. First of all, everybody used to become get portions, used to get portions you know, some food. When we went out to work, like for instance, my younger brother went out to work and used to smuggle in some bread, some food, when he was able to. My father went out to work and used smuggle something in. I used to go out to work, I used to smuggle something in under the coat. We were not always searched. The Jewish, the Jewish police knew we were bringing in things. Certain days they just tapped us and knew we had things and let us go, when the Germans were not yet there. We had some money, we bought some things, there was not much, but we survived somehow, we survived somehow.

RC: You had mentioned earlier that when you entered into the ghetto all the Jews were with their belongings. Were the Jews permitted to take all of their belongings?

DT: No, not when they chased you out of the house, whatever anyone felt they could take with them, they *shlepped* it with them, ya know. A lot of, a lot you left everything. Some people took a pillow and a blanket, some keepsakes they had all their lives, you know, so everybody took something different that they felt this was the thing he wants to have. A lot of people walked with a lot of suitcases and packages and couldn't carry so left it on the way and actually, whatever we could carry we brought into the ghetto, not much.

Tape two, side one:

RC: Mrs. Teitelbaum, how would you describe the *Judenrat* or Jewish Council in your town or city or if it was active during the ghetto time?

DT: Oh yes, but it was not the same because most of the people which were in *Judenrat* in the ghetto were not the same people which were in the city before they arrived into occupied areas in our hometown, so this were different people. They were also prominent Jews, which, educated Jews, which knew exactly what they were doing, and I believe, in our city there were a lot of Jewish writers which came from our city and there were a lot of big minds in our hometown. Not because I'm partial to my hometown, but this is known all over the world, so we had a pretty strong *Judenrat*, but the *Judenrat* had a very limited capacity there. They couldn't do, of course, what they did before. They didn't have the means, they didn't have the financial means, they didn't have the liberty to do what they wanted to do. They were dictated, the Germans dictated everything what they had to do. They had to obey. They had to do terrible things and a lot of them even decided to get away from it because they couldn't stand it, so it worked, but the German way, and quietly maybe, our way. But they did the best they could with what they had. You know, they were not a free people.

RC: [unclear] before.

DT: We even had a jail in our ghetto, would you believe we had jail? We had a jail for people that stole, that disobeyed, not the Germans, but disobeyed our own people. You know when you have thousands of people, there are liable to be people which are out of order, you know, so we had in peaceful times we had thieves and maybe they got into the ghetto, the same thieves. They couldn't be rehabilitated overnight so they stayed thieves.

RC: And who was it, the *Judenrat*, who acted as, the judge to determine if someone went to jail or not?

DT: We had a court, we had a court, we had a lot of lawyers and at that time, we had everybody, you know, the young people, they started with the old people. Up to a certain time, we still had the younger people which had the minds for all of this. The people, young people that were writers, the young people that wrote the songs, the young people that were the teachers that educated children, that were merchants. Of course, at that time already probably we lost more than half the population.

RC: Did you attend school or classes of any kind, or the synagogue during your years in the ghetto?

DT: Oh no, oh no, people were bitter. The Orthodox, they maybe--I don't even think we had too many Rabbis. They, they were out to get the people with the beards, with the Rabbinical outfits, with the *Kapotas* [plural of *Kepot*]. They didn't want them to begin with. Maybe there were a few, there were people were praying. They were praying mostly at home and they had a lot to pray for. They prayed, but a lot of the more modern people,

you know, we, of course, we had the holidays come and we observed the holidays, we did all these things that we thought we could, but on the other hand, we were all. Why is it happening? Why is it happening? We were good people, observing people. We never did anything, people were questioning themselves. They were questioning why is it happening to us, and then again, we were observing the holidays when they came, but in a very, very poor way, you know, we didn't have anything. And then again, the holidays were always--ended with an action. Whenever a holiday came and if anybody didn't know, the next morning, you know what happened? This and this street, all this street was chased out and they're not here anymore.

RC: Did you have any communication with the outside world or about events through newspapers or the radio?

DT: Well, radio was a forbidden thing. The people that were in the bunkers were hiding, sometimes people were afraid to, they knew that the doom that is coming up, they knew, they heard, there was always rumors, this is coming and that is coming and people were hiding in bunkers and they had a few radios, but mostly we were not free to listen to all these things. And then from the outside world, the Polish people used to inform us about bad things that are coming, because there were maybe Poles which hid Jews. You hear it now after the war, at that time we didn't realize they were a very small percentage because we still had, we even had friends that were hidden in Polish homes, but you had to be very fortunate to have this kind of people to hide you. And, but most of us, you know, the ghetto was full of rumors, and they knew somehow we knew the news. Somehow, we knew what was going on. They knew that the Germans are near Moscow, they knew what was going on in Leningrad, we knew that Europe was under fire, we knew which countries are occupied, what cities are. Somehow the Jews in the ghetto knew the news because mostly and they knew bad news. There were very rarely any good news. There were no good news.

RC: Can you speak a little bit about underground in the ghetto?

DT: Yes. Well, a lot of people belonged to the underground, young people. They had couriers, which went out of the ghetto and acquired guns and they came back and a lot of the young people went to the partisans. I knew that there was underground, but you had to be very brave. You had to be brave and you had to be a pessimist. You know, people that still hoped, were optimists, that still pretty soon something is going to happen, I don't know. Now I can say, after all these years, I wish my brother, my younger brother, were in the partisans, but at that time, not everybody was brave enough to do it. But I know I had a lot of friends that did it, that were in the underground and they were, they were doing a lot of things, but they were very limited in what they did, you know. They went out and they, they tried to destroy and to do things to defy the Germans and a lot of them were killed, a lot of them were punished, but this was. In our hometown, there was a big underground, yes, and most of them left the ghetto and went to partisans.

RC: To what extent did Poles help the Nazis persecute Jews, and were you personally aware of any Poles that helped hide Jews or who smuggled food or goods that helped them survive?

DT: I personally didn't know any, none whatsoever, because when I went out to work, I did have no contacts with them, but I did know of some people that were telling me that they do have. My brother, my younger brother, when he went out to work had, because he used to buy bread from them. He used to buy some, you know, things, food, he used to bring in, he always had. You know, he used to work as a carpenter and he had his tools in a box with a handle and under the--in the box he had a partition and under the partition he was hiding, he hid the bread, grains, and sometimes even meat, horse meat, so that's how he used to bring it in to the ghetto so we had. But I went, I worked for a while for a gardener and I got, and I got a couple times fruit. Would you believe what I used to bring in in the ghetto? I loved flowers and I used to bring flowers in to the ghetto. I would rather bring flowers than bread and when I put flowers on the table, it brought something into our lives. I went to work for a gardener and instead of bringing food I used to bring flowers.

RC: Did you have to hide the flowers?

DT: The flowers, somehow they let me in with the flowers, a couple times they let me in with the flowers. They just looked at me like I'm crazy, but I held the flowers in front of me and I walked in with the flowers. I shocked the people.

RC: To what extent did the Poles help the Nazis persecute Jews?

DT: They helped the Nazis persecute Jews to the extent that they didn't hide enough people, by not helping us, but by looking other way. By having satisfaction that their neighbors left their house and they could take their belongings and you know--we left everything in our homes. They looted our homes. They took away all our belongings. For them it was a plus. They didn't help enough Jews. They helped the Nazis with it. Some of them were good people. Some of them were afraid. Some of them were frightened themselves. I'm not saying all Poles are rotten, but a lot of them could have done much more than they did. I have that fact with my father's friend.

RC: Did you go to a labor camp?

DT: You mean a concentration camp?

RC: A labor unit first.

DT: A labor unit, well, that was a labor unit where I went to see my aunt, where we stayed with my aunt, that was kind of a labor unit because they only let people be housed there because they worked for them. But mostly, you know, yes, when we were in concentration camp they sent us out to work, if that's what you mean. All of them were labor camps, in all concentration camps I'd been they were labor camps. We worked there very hard. We did work which were not suited for women.

RC: Could you talk a little about the liquidation of the ghetto and where you went first after the liquidation?

DT: Yeah, well, that's what I said before, that when first they started taking away the men, and most of the men from our hometown were sent away to Estonia, Cloger, there were a lot of camps there and most of the men from our city were sent in 1943, that's when the ghetto was liquidated, they were sent to those places. Then when they took the men away, you know a lot of people were hiding in the ghetto in the bunkers. We were sitting in the bunker, my father was with us then and how long can you sit in a bunker without food? How long can you sit in a bunker when little children start crying, how long can you sit in a bunker when somebody dies? How long can you sit in a bunker when somebody gets sick? We had no choice. There was a woman with a little child. She put the pillow on top of the child and her own child she strangled, suffocated to death because the child was crying, it was hungry. And my father had no choice but leave the bunker and that's when they caught him and they cleaned the whole ghetto out. They would only let the people after they took the men, they started cleaning every one and there was a week where they, no, three days they took everybody out and sent whether to Ponary. They shot everybody or they were sent to all kinds of places, I don't even know where or what up to this day, and then a lot, not a lot, a few people were hiding on the rooftop. My mother, my brother were hiding for three days on the roof top. I, as I said before, had an opportunity to escape through a wall. You asked me about a contact with Polish people. I forgot about it. I paid money and I don't remember how much money I paid. Somebody told me about a place that people are escaping, through that wall, and I paid. There was a park on the other side and he used to take money and opened the place and we used to escape through it. I escaped that place, went to my aunt's there, to that camp. My mother and my younger brother said to me, "You go! We don't have enough money to pay that man." So they stayed behind. I left them behind and they were on the rooftops for three days until everything quieted down. They were on the roof like cats. My brother told me later when he came to my aunt's that they were jumping from one rooftop on another. My mother was young then, like cats, no food, nothing. They came, I don't know, they were lucky enough at night to escape and to come there to that place where we stayed and in the middle of the night they came. I was so shocked to see them and so happy. I was overwhelmed because I thought I'll never see them again, but they were lucky. Now, we stayed there until 1943. This was in 1943, but the end of 1943. This was a couple months after the liquidation of the ghetto. They divided and sent--they liquidated that place too. They were, first they sent us all out to concentration camp in Latvia, yeah, and the rest that was behind the actual furrier, they sent to the Kovno ghetto, my husband's hometown and then there were two buildings, two parts of the camps which worked for them, made the furs, so some people, they send the ones that were the furriers actually, they sent to the Kovno ghetto and the rest, they shot everyone. And they picked certain people for the concentration camps. I was among them, me, my mother, and my younger brother. This is a different story altogether, different chapter. So we left our hometown in 1943. I'll tell you when, in November, October or November. I think it was October, it was this month.

RC: Which camp did you go to first?

DT: They sent us, first of all, the members--the first camp that we came to was in Latvia, in Riga, Kaiserwald.

RC: Would you spell Kaiserwald?

DT: K-A-I-S-E-R-W-A-L-D. This was the major concentration camp, but before, let me think a minute, yeah, that was the first major concentration camp we got into.

RC: Could you tell me what life was like in the concentration camps?

DT: In 1943, they sent me, my mother, and my younger brother to a camp, Kaiserwald, it was in Latvia, Riga. When we arrived there by train, they led us into a big room. We got showered, regularly showered and then our heads were shaven. We were told to undress, completely naked, we were searched for belongings, whatever, because people, it was rumored, had some very valuable things like gold and diamonds at that time, so they searched everybody because some people that maybe thought this would help them in escaping or something. We didn't know yet the whole picture then, so they had hidden--some people swallowed diamonds. They still had some valuables. And so then our hair was shaven. We were searched internally, I mean we were just like--some people were searched gynecologically, but we didn't hide anything there and we were given different clothes. We were given striped clothes and each one became a number. Each one of us got a number. Fortunately, we were not tattooed on the arm like in other major camps, but we had a number on the clothes. Each one had a number on a white piece of cloth and then we, each one knew his number. We were told what our number is and we didn't have a name anymore, we were just a number. They led us, afterwards they led us into the camp. Men and women were divided with a fence of wires, what do you call the wires?

RC: Electrified?

DT: Yes, and each group got a barrack, you know. We got led into a barrack. I was always fortunate to stay first with my mother, ahead of her or behind of her so, so they didn't know it's a mother and daughter and we kept together mostly, so after a certain time, but for right now we were together, and we were led into a barrack. And each morning we were called to *Appell*. *Appell* was the role call. Each morning we had to get up at a certain time early in the morning, no matter what weather or whatever it was we stood outside for a long time until we were counted, and the *Kapos*, the people in charge, they were called *Kapos*, counted us and told us what we can do and what we can't do. We were given in the morning a piece of bread and a little bit of cooked cereal. It was a pretty good camp compared with the others because we got fed cereal, and we, during the day, we got even a piece of lunchmeat, and this was for the whole day, but the beds were bunk beds made out of wood. Each one had, you know, one on top of the other, we had bunk bed and some people had blankets, some people didn't, I remember that. And the whole life revolved around getting up in the morning, going out to the *Appell* and being counted, and then we were mostly in the barracks, and certain people were sent out to work and certain people

were not. The younger ones, the ones that looked healthier were sent to work, but being there for a short while, we were not long enough there and to begin with, we knew already that some people were taken away and never brought back. I knew a friend of mine which was pregnant. She was married when the war started and she was pregnant, and I never saw her again, but later on I found out that she was taken into the ovens, so, but we were not long enough there to find out the fate of many people. We were all gathered again and led into a march to different little camps in the same city where this camp was located. It was on the outskirts of Riga. They marched us there and there we worked very hard. There were all kinds of little camps. They divided our group into a lot a different places. We came first, we came first into a place first, we were marched by, we already found a lot of people there in a place called Dundagen [Dondangen].

RC: Could you spell that?

DT: D-U-N-D-A-G-E-N.

RC: And this was a camp?

DT: This was a, it was not a concentration camp, but it was a labor camp. It was a camp specifically for younger people where people went to work. They did all types of work. They were digging trenches, they were building, they were cutting down trees, they were putting railroad tracks, it's like lumberjacks in the woods, you know, and whether they were women or men, it made no difference. We were there one day and a lot of them were left there and we were marched, it was in 194-, 1943, yes, and then we were marched in to a different place which was a labor camp also. It was called Kurbe.

RC: K-U-R-B-A. Excuse me, could I ask you at this point, you mentioned earlier that you were fortunate enough to be with your mother…

[Please note: Tape two, side two is blank. Interview continues on Tape three, side one.]

Tape three, side one:

RC: Mrs. Teitelbaum, you were speaking about Kurbe.

DT: There, we had the Wehrmacht, or the SS. We had a lot of them there watching us. When we left for Kurbe it was, there was a lot a lot of woods, trees. It was a very--in certain places it was very nice place, very picturesque. It was a place that looked mostly like somebody would like to go for the summer to relax. In the best places, where the sun was shining and we forgot a little where we were, we felt like we were being led into a beautiful summer camp. But when we came to Kurbe, we were given in groups, each group had different types of work. We lived in the woods and we had no barracks there. We stayed there, a lot of people stayed in tents. And me and my mother were sent every day to put railroad tracks and they were very, very hard, very heavy. It was hard work and we were putting down the railroad tracks one day and another day we were sent to the woods as lumberjacks. We cut down trees and we never knew which way a tree was falling, because I suspect that their aim was for as many people as possible to be killed, so like when you hear sometimes hear when lumberjacks are cutting down trees, you have all kinds of signs and signals. There we never knew where the tree was coming from, so the only thing we were taught from day to day is to look, stop, look, and listen. But when we were stopping and looking and listening they used to come and shout at us that we're wasting time so it was very rough, very tough. They were really treating us like animals and this was, this was actually even work that was hard for men, men that are not qualified and I know there were a lot of casualties. So we were there for quite a while. I don't exactly recall how long we were there.

RC: Are we talking months, several months?

DT: I think so, yes. We were there quite a while, but the food there was better than in concentration camp. We had better food there than in concentration camp and one day somebody came over, I don't, I think it was an SS man, and said, "*Du*" and pulled me out of the line and told me that, "You see there is a house and stairs and you're going to come there twice a week and clean the house there." So me and another girl used to go there and clean the house and I don't know what kind of an official it was, but this official was not a German. He was Latvian and he was very civil to us. He talked to us and explained to us a lot of things and he said that he was an engineer, that he used to work by the railroad tracks and he makes plans for them and everything. So he lived very nice in a nice house and we used to clean the house and sometimes cook for him, and this went on for a month until they one day they marched us in a lot of other places where we stayed a couple days and then we did some work there like cleaning sometimes the woods, taking leaves and branches, packing them and making, I forgot what you call them.

RC: Piles?

DT: Piles and obviously they didn't have much work, but they were determined to work us you know, so we did all kinds of work and we went in a lot of other places.

Where I don't recall the names because the names are very hard to remember. It was a lot of places we went through then and one day they gathered everybody and we were marched in a march to Stutthof. It was a major camp Stutthof.

RC: Could you spell that for me?

DT: S-T-U-T-H-O-F-F.

RC: About 1944?

DT: It was already--by then it was 1944.

RC: Can you tell a little bit about Stutthof?

DT: You know, in 1943 to Stutthof, when we came to Stutthof, we came in we knew that my brother, he was with us at that time, but separated. Men were separated and women were separate, when we came to Stutthof. They separate us and since then we didn't see him, and we heard that the young people were sent out, they were a while in Stutthof, and then they were sent to Buchenwald, we found out, but we don't know for sure, just rumors we heard that he was sent there.

RC: Up to that point, he had been in labor camps?

DT: He's been the same thing in Latvia. He was in Kaiserwald when we were there, he was in the smaller camps there and the whole group, and then when we came to Stutthof then we were separated and we separated at that time too, but we saw him once in a while. In Stutthof we hadn't seen him since then anymore, and this was the last time we saw him. So in Stutthof we also were put into barracks, but in Stutthof we had a very rough time because the *Kapos* used to hit us and we were beaten a lot of the time, you know, for no reason at all. We used to come out to the *Appell* in the morning and being held there for a long time in outside and counted and they shouted at us and pushed us and then we saw a lot of times the older people were pulled out of the lines, we never saw them and people who were maybe in some way they thought was disabled; they used to pick up people all the time since the first minute that we stepped into the camp they were led, and I even saw the people. I even saw the ovens and the smoke coming out of the ovens and the people standing in line being led into their showers and we knew already the fate then because by then the same thing we saw in Kaiserwald and we didn't seem that close, but here we saw it definitely, they were being pulled out, put into line, and led into the ovens.

RC: In plain view of everyone in the camp?

DT: In plain view of everybody else. I've seen it. I've seen the lines, but at that time it was we just didn't want to think that that's what it was, but after a while, being in Stutthof, we knew what was happening because we never saw the people come back. From our group, the older women. We never saw them back. So there we had the *Kapos*, we were roughed up every day by the *Kapos*, you know. I remember laying in the bunk bed one day and they told us to come outside and whoever didn't move right away was beaten and I have a broken nose since then which is now--I was beaten.

RC: You weren't given any type of infirmary treatment as a result of that?

DT: No, there was supposed to be a doctor. I never used any services from a doctor because I don't think they were available. I really don't think so, because before my eyes I saw it myself. There were women that were beaten very badly. I don't think they were ever treated, but then we were not too long there too. We were sent, me and my mother also, my mother was separated from me because there was a whole group of young women that were sent to Mildorf.

RC: Is this another…?

DT: This was, this was, they were sent to Germany. Stutthof was Poland, it was near Danzig. Stutthof was near Danzig. It's not far from the Baltic Sea and there was a woman that we knew from my hometown and she was also pregnant, so I was very fortunate to change with her because I wanted to go back to my mother. I changed with her. She came, walked out to the window and I walked in so she joined the group and I stayed with my mother in Stutthof and she was sent with the group to Mildorf. Anyway, but pretty soon they sent us, they sent us out to work, they sent me, my mother, and a whole group of women to a farm place, and we stayed there for two months and worked there on the fields. We were cutting in German it's called *Rote Riben* [phonetic], it's sugar cane.

RC: Could you spell that for me?

DT: *Rote*, R-, *Rote Riben*[2] they used to call it, you can spell it phonetically, whatever, because I really--, you know, it's in German.

RC: Okay, sugar cane.

DT: Sugar cane, so that's what we were cutting and we lived on a farm and the women were scattered all over the countryside in farms and we worked for farmers. You see, there was this place Stutthof, it was like an open area. It was not even Polish completely. It was more German than Polish, you know, so because it was almost on the border. So Germans had a lot of farms there and we worked for them and we slept with the pigs, slept in the stables, dirty stables with the animals together, with the cows and pigs, but we felt good because when we got up in the morning we were in fresh air. We had potatoes to eat, we had every day a meal, you know, it was bread and potatoes. They didn't treat us bad. They treated us as, of course, as prisoners, war prisoners, but they treated us at least a little bit human, so we worked the whole day very hard on the fields. It was very hard work. Farm work. But we were allowed to go to a bath once a week so when we came to a bath it was like a city bath and we met everybody there, that--our inmates. So we came there and we had time to congregate like for a half hour and tell each other what's happening and we really had a good time. The women got color in their cheeks and they looked very well. This didn't last long. We stayed there the spring and the early summer. It seemed like it's not long because we had it so good there and then we were shipped in 1944, we were shipped by train back to Stutthof.

RC: And what happened at that time?

[2]Possibly *Rote Rübe,* German for beetroot, red beet.

DT: When we came to Stutthof, the situation was very bad. The camp was infested with typhoid fever. There was an epidemic of typhoid fever and we fell right into it. Me and my mother came there and we had smuggled through onions and vegetables in our satchels. We had satchels actually and they let us in with it because they knew we brought something from the farms, but we were lucky to have some a little bit of food as long as we stayed there. And when we came to Stutthof, we found my aunt and my cousin there that came from Kovno. They came, they were sent by train to, from Kovno, Lithuania, and we joined them in a barrack and we stayed there long enough to get typhoid, me and my cousin. So we walked around with a terrible sickness, terrible illness. We walked around, but it was quarantined already and they gathered all the women that could walk and sent us on a march which lasted more than a month. When we left Stutthof, we didn't know what our fate was, where they were leading us, but this was the beginning of the last march that we were sent on. So we spent the whole fall and the winter on that march. We walked hundreds of miles from Stutthof into Poland and our [unclear] were not the SS on the Wehrmacht, it was Ukrainians.

RC: And where did this march end up?

DT: This march led us onto a march to the Baltic Sea. To begin with, we didn't know, but we went through a lot of little camps, villages and towns. We camped out wherever we came they formed a camp. We came to a place which was called Lauenburg. We slept in stables and for 30 days we were not fed. We had no food whatsoever. The winter was coming and we were marching day and night and we were beaten constantly over the heads with big canes. And the women were falling dead. Wherever you looked there were casualties. When we came to Lauenburg on the way, an *Oberscharführer* got drunk and told us to run. And as we ran wherever he hit he took out a gun and shot whoever he could, whoever wasn't running fast enough, he shot. He was counting, "*Eins, zvei, drei*, boom, *eins, zvei, drei*, boom." That's how they got rid of a lot of women. We came to a place, where the--we stayed there for a week, the ground was slimy and we were given picks, you know, to build for the army trenches, and wherever we went in the morning to work, they were hitting us over the heads. We slept in stables. One day they brought us into a stable that was on the second or third floor. There were a lot of pigs and they had for them a platform that they used to bring them down, and we were led there upstairs on a ladder. In the morning when we got up in the morning, they took the ladder away and they told us to jump, so whoever jumped survived. The women jumped and broke legs and arms. Some women died, some didn't. We were fortunate because we were somehow we survived. But one day I was sleeping and somebody stole my shoes, so my mother took off the shirt and wrapped my feet and we were walking like this from stable to stable. One day we came into a place which was called Shirokepas [phonetic] in Polish, and there were tents and we slept in the tents. This was the worst place that I have ever been because we dug trenches and we had to bury our own people and they were not even dead, alive. They pulled out in the morning people and took them away and beat them and told us to dig the

ground, to dig the ground, and bury them. They used to beat them so--shot them and beat them, they were not even dead and we used to had to cover the ground. We used to hear the screams, we used to hear their sighs and they were not even dead yet. And while we did this all we had no food at all. We marched on, we marched on in the dead of the winter and we were infested with lice, everybody was full of lice. When we stood in the snow in the *Appell* and we shook the little bit of clothes we had, the snow became black from the lice. They were eating us up, the lice. So we walked on like this and we came to a place which the name I don't remember, but it was a stable and I and my cousin, we both had typhoid fever. And I knew that I had pneumonia too because my chest and my whole body had big--very high fever, so I said to my mother, "Please let me die here, I don't want to walk anymore," but my mother somehow made me get up and the next stable we came into there was a lot of women that were already dead. Every place we left we left casualties because the people had typhoid fever coming up from Stutthof. They were all sick and on the way with this treatment, with this terrible thing that was happening to them, they died like flies. We walked out, thousands out of Stutthof, and little by little there was less and less and less, until we came to one place and there was a Hungarian doctor, a woman, and she was treating the women, you know, with whatever she could. There was very little to treat with. They gave her something, I don't remember what, but everybody called the doctor, "Nami, Dr. Nami, help me, help me!" The people were crying and laying in the stable and we couldn't walk out to do our business, whatever we had yet, because we ate snow and when we walked by a village we used to steal bread. We used to run if we could, when they weren't looking and steal something and put in our stomachs. Once we ate raw potatoes, once we killed a dead horse on the way and we ate the horse as it is. The dead horse, we ate it, we were fighting among ourselves to get a piece of the horse. So when we had to do our business, you know, we used to--whatever we were--we were traveling with the military, what do you call it, the military, they get the food in and the water, what do you call in the military, you eat from it, the…?

RC: The container…?

DT: The little pot, the container, what do you call it? The military eats from it, so we used to make in it and then when we wanted water we used to throw this out and spilled it and drank from the same thing. And one day, you know, I walked out for some water for my mother and there were mostly everybody dead already in that stable, so I walked out to get some water and they hit me. And they came in, I gave my mother some water, and they were standing, the Ukrainian, and he saw what I did, so he took a big stick and hit my mother over the head and my mother screamed and the head opened and the blood started to flow and I didn't know what to do, you know, so I took off my shirt and that's all I had. I had a little light jacket and the winters there were like Siberia. I took off the shirt and I tore it and covered my mother, but my mother was in terrible pain because all the lice in the head got into the wound, you know. And when I did that to my mother, you know, this was late already in the day and I wanted to sleep and my feet ached. I took

off my shoes and I put the shoes near me and when I came down, my shoes were not there and we knew when you didn't have the shoes, they left everybody that had no shoes, or was weak or was sick, they didn't let them march anymore. So they didn't let me march out anymore and whenever anybody was left in the stable they shot them. So next morning when we got up and you know, my fever, and my mother with the open head, and I was walking with pneumonia and a typhoid fever, so I said to my mother, "I can't keep my head," so she pulled over a dead woman, put under my head, so I could put my head against the dead woman and keep my equilibrium, how do you say it. And then--but then they came in and pretty soon they started chasing everybody out because we were ready to pull out of the place and we didn't know [unclear] but all of sudden this time we heard a lot of bombs falling, you know, and…

Tape three, side two:

DT: So next morning, I didn't have my shoes, and I thought I'll be left in the barn there, stable, and I wouldn't be able to pull out with everybody that was pulling out. So there was a young Ukrainian, his name was Alex, and I'll remember his name as long as I'm going to be alive and still here. He saw me, and he knew my fate that if I'm going to stay behind, so he brought me a pair of shoes, military shoes. I put them on and the group pulled out already. I ran after the group, me and my mother, my mother with the covered head and me without the shirt, with a little men's jacket that I had on, the little thin, the same jacket I had worn and it was in the dead of the winter, we ran after this group and joined them and next day we pulled into a place called Chinow.

RC: Can you spell it?

DT: C-H-I-N-O-W.

RC: A camp?

DT: It was the ninth, it was the ninth--this was not a camp, it was a little village, a little town. It was the 9th of March, 1945 and they led us into a stable and by then everybody was like just like walking skeletons. We were all a group of walking skeletons. We could not lay down, not sit down, because we had no flesh on us. And everybody, the few people that still were alive, and I could count on my fingers because we walked out of Stutthof we were thousands and by then we were only--the count after liberation was 84. And I lay there in the stable and I said this is the last place I'm going to walk into, I said to my mother, I said, "Mom, I said let me die here," and she said, "No, we still have God." And I said, "Look, we walked through the villages, the little towns, did you see there were homes, there were lights in the window, beds, people are sleeping in beds and eating with their families." And I said to my mother, "Please, leave me here," and my mother said, "Look, when we walked here, we walked all together, we held hands. The 10 women were there, we were 10 women as a group, we walked out together from Stutthof and we knew each other from our hometown and we said, look, all of a sudden nobody is watching us, why? Something must be going on. The bombs are falling. The world is all in like an uproar. Something is happening. Look what's going on, the Germans are leaving us. Something is going on. Hold your chin up." Everybody said something. We could not talk because we only had two eyes. Our bodies were all drained of energy, and had no flesh, nothing. So when we laid down in this last stable, and the next morning when I told my mother, "Please leave me here," and she said, "No, if you stay here I'll stay with you." And all of a sudden the bombs start falling and the stable started shaking. The whole stable was shaking and all of a sudden the big doors from the stable flew open and when my mother, I couldn't move, but my mother, mother was then a young woman yet, walked out, and I heard all of sudden, tanks. As much as I couldn't get up and as much as I was ninety percent dead, I crawled on all four and I walked out because I wanted to see what was happening. And I saw my mother kissing the hand of a Russian in the tank, and they were

shouting and they were saying that we were liberated. We can do everything we want to. And all the women were just staring. They didn't have any strength even to react to it. They were just embracing each other and crying and kissing and it was an unbelievable scene which I'll never forget in my life. And some Russians stayed there and some Russians left and all the Germans, the Ukrainians and the Germans and the Wehrmacht that was there that came, or we didn't see the SS, they were all dead on the ground. They took even off their boots and they were all dead, spread out and some of the women were walking by, spitting on them, and some of the women could not even look at them because they felt funny to see. This one minute they were our you know, led us to death and they found a letter in the *Oberscharführer's* pocket that we were supposed to befell, it was like telling him what to do with us. We were being led to the Baltic Sea, where we were supposed to be put on a ship and dumped into the sea. And that's what happened. The next day, you know, we came into the homes of the Germans and they were all, they ran away. We didn't see them, they were empty homes, and they the next day they set up a hospital, temporary, the Russians, and put everybody that was sick in the hospital. I was there, I couldn't even enjoy the liberation because I was two months in the hospital. I had, the diagnose was I had typhoid fever, I had spots, I had all over spot fever. I don't know how it's called in English, and I had pneumonia. That was the end.

RC: During all of your experiences, were you ever aware or in contact with any resistance group, either Jewish or non-Jewish?

DT: Not directly, indirectly. I had friends which left the ghetto. And left the wherever I was with my aunt in Kailis, it was called Kailis, a lot of young people left. They purchased weapons and they left and I knew they were going to the underground or in the partisans, but directly I didn't.

RC: Did you feel strengthened in all of your experiences either by religious faith or by ideology, such as Zionism or Socialism?

DT: Definitely, definitely, this kept us alive. Me and my mother had a lot of faith that God will help us and the thought of the Jewish people, the Jewish nation and that somebody has to pull through to bear witness and my mother, especially, she was a very brave woman. We were a group of about ten women that always kept, whenever we could, together during that march, death march, that is called the death march, the 30 days that we walked up to the Baltic Sea. She kept everybody's morale up and she said whenever she caught anything, a piece of bread, anything, she always gave it to the young girls and she always said, "God will help us. Keep your chin up, don't let them kill you all. Don't let them, stay alive as much as you can. We'll pull through." She always gave us hope. My mother is alive. She's in the [her] eighties.

RC: Mrs. Teitelbaum, did you find any members of your family after liberation, and where did you live before coming to the United States and after the liberation?

DT: Unfortunately, we had a lot of hope to find somebody, but we haven't found anyone, no one.

RC: The aunt that you mentioned…?

DT: My aunt was with her daughter, we met her in Stutthof, and we were liberated together. We went into the death march, we went together and my cousin's alive, my aunt died, but this is the family that we met in the concentration camp. Of my immediate family, my brothers, my father, we didn't find anyone.

RC: After you recuperated from the two months you had spent in the hospital, did you come to the United States immediately?

DT: No. After I recuperated and we stayed there two months, we went to a city. They told us--the Russians told us to go back home, but we didn't want to go back to the Russians. We wanted to go where we can have complete freedom. We deserved some freedom, so we were determined not to go back home. We knew our hometown is occupied by the Russians. We were very grateful to the Russians that they liberated us, but we went to a city in Poland with a coal, what do you call it, a train that carries coal?

RC: Yes, a coal train.

DT: A coal train. At that time, everybody was free to travel wherever he wants. The Russians were telling us to go back home, but people didn't listen to them. And we went into Poland and we were in a town, Bitgosh [phonetic], and we went into a town Lodz, and we lived there for months, six months. And we met a lot of people that were liberated. There was a *Judenrat* too, they formed a federation you know, for Jews.

RC: In Lodz?

DT: In Lodz, yes. And there were books were put out who is alive in Germany, and all over, in the English zone, in the German zone, in all the zones. People found each other. My aunt and my cousin found their husband and son from Dachau they came, but me and my mother didn't find anyone. We lived in Lodz six months and then we traveled to, we traveled to Czechoslovakia, through Czechoslovakia into Germany.

RC: And is that where you met your husband?

DT: I met my husband in a DP camp.

RC: Which camp was that?

DT: Feldafing. My older son Sam was born there. He was the second child to be born to DP inmates.

RC: And how long did you stay in Feldafing before you came…?

DT: Four years until we got the permit to go United States in 1949.

RC: One last question, do you have any message that you would like to leave on this tape for others?

DT: I think that the most important human aspect in the life of any human being is to be free. Freedom is a wonderful thing and I hope that our children and our grandchildren enjoy freedom. Not only our people, the Jewish nation, but everyone in this world has the liberty of freedom and cherishes it because this is the fundamental thing in a human life and the rest is not important. Health, fortune, all other things are important in life, but without freedom we're nothing and the inhumanity from people to people should

never be tolerated by anyone. No one has the right to take somebody's life, no one, and that's what we have to fight for, and that's what the future generation should know, no matter who they are, no matter where they are, they should fight for it. We fought for it, but we were not strong enough. Women and children can't fight somebody with a gun over their heads.

RC: Thank you very, very much. Thank you.

DT: You're welcome.