

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/MIRIAM GERSHWIN page 1
Interviewed (5-6-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

Bob Silverthorne: Go to camera roll number 36, interview with Miriam Gershwin. M--I--R--I--A--M, G--E--R--S--H--W--I--N. Continue on sound roll 17.

(Cut)

SB: Do you want to stay up here or do you--

(Cut)

C: 36, marker 1.

SB: Miriam, tell me your name when you were born and where you were born and when.

MG: My name Miriam Litenstein and I was born the 13th of August in Maimal.

SB: And tell me a little bit about your family background and your early life. MG: We lived in Maimal. My parents came there after the first World War. And to my father was from Latvia and my mother from Lithuania. My--both my parents had eh Rebilincal backgrounds--generations and generations. I also had an older brother, 20 half years older than I. His name was Marcus and we grew up in a very comfortable, nice home. We were on--on the other dock side and we went to school. We uh went to the high art of the gymnasium. Uh for the girls we were separated. The

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girls had one school. The boys had another school and um my school was named Algustvictorialitsaum. And there we lived until March, 1939. The date actually when Hitler came to take our not only the town, it was like a region. It was called Dismaminabeet. And um--and then we fled. We went in the morning. My mother and both kids uh we went to Lithuania and my dad sta--stayed because he was the director of the big textile factory and he had the keys. So he had to go

to open. The owners of the factory had come already before to England. And the had called a British man who was overseeing everything and when my dad came to the factory, an hour or two or three later, Hitler actually marched into Maimal. So the director took my dad, with his car, with uh British flag and he brought him over the border to Lithuania. And then after that, my dad came to the stop that we had made that was in Sholin. We had their electives. (Cough) There we stayed uh few days and then we went to Poladesh because my dad had his sisters there and cousins. And that's where we stayed until uh nov--January, 1940. And then we moved to Kovno. We would have stayed in Poladesh we prob--I wouldn't have probably sit here now because mostly all the Jewish population in whole Lithuania was killed in all the small towns. And huhuh.

SB: And tell me in Kovno, what you remember when the Germans came and also just before the changes that you were made.

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MG: Well for us, actually it was a big change because we did--I mean I'm talking out for me an my brother. We didn't know the Lithuanian language to good. So we couldn't go to school. So I took a course in um typing and bookkeeping and then also in 1940 uh eh 40, the Russians occupied Lithuania. So I got a job and they liqu--not they--they didn't liquidate. They um did all the big factories and all the stores. They um, what do you call that um, they organized it all together. So and my dad was leading expert in textile, so he got me a job in that um office where they work; um liquidating all those books and uh supplies and um. So I worked under a bookkeeper and um until the war broke out. That was the 22nd of June and it didn't take them--it took a day or two and the Germans were there. So we stayed there and uh--you know at that time, still pretty young, and I thought I didn't look too Jewish but uh so I went out a little to see--to get some food or things and but still when I stood in line, the Germans or even the Lithuanian came and they took me out for uh labor too clean uh--uh some um what is it--soldiers lived or uh to do other work to clean the streets or I don't know, they always found me. And

that's where how long and that's how we lived 'till
until we--we there was uh all took out in to the ghet-
to.

SB: Now in that time period where those times when you
got pulled out of line, were they humiliating you?

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MG: Oh, absolutely, that was fault to work, to stay in
the street and to clean the street. And uh to shout uh
dirt at you or uh schwartz at seem very humiliating.
Also, they had to wait if a order
to wear the Jewish star on both uh--on the front and in
the back of your vermin garment and you couldn't walk
on the sidewalk. You had to walk uh in the street--not
close to the dirt. So that was also humiliating. Just
about everybody knew that you were and whoever passed
by uh--'Oh, you dirty Jew!' I also have to tell you
that the Lithuanian population were very mean. Before
the Germans even came, they had people already hundred
and hundred and hundreds of Jews by themselves.

SB: Did you see any of that or?

MG: Uh--sure! Because it was in the center of town or
it was once this one day I went out to look up my
brother's friend and there I saw that uh bodies on the
street. He lived in uh section where there were more
religious people--you know, with beards and those
special clothes what's a religious people wear. Those
were unfortunately the first ones who were very easily
picked out.

SB: And the sound of the war--I mean when the Germans
actually came, where were you and did you hear any-
thing--see anything?

MG: Well we were in our um apartment and we were afraid

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to go out because we had to up already some very bad
stories about the Germans and how they dealt with the
Jews and we were really afraid so we stuck uh more to
the house. So--so if I said that I went check out the
little bit because I felt you know it because my moth-
er. At that time she wasn't very sure of herself to go
and uh. So uh--so I was the one who uh--who went out.
In fact I had an--an ant and a cousin
and the cousin was married and it there was also a
brother from I mean another cousin you know a male
cousin. And both my cousin and the husband from my
other cousin they were taken away. And when they were
taken away, my ant and the uh and duh her daughter and
the two children they came to live with us. And one
day, somebody rang in our bell and there was a Lithua-
nian soldier standing and he asked for my cousin--you
know--for Mrs.--Mrs. Fondbeck and when she came to the
door, he said, 'Come with me and you can see your
husband.' So she was afraid to go, so I went and hold
with her. And he took us to a courtyard and there we
really actually saw him. And he at that time said that
it's very bad and that he is together with our brother
but he doubted that we'll see each other again. And
then we went back and that's was we need two--we didn't
see them anymore. They were killed on the 7th fort.

SB: Okay.

MG: And then when we went into the ghetto, we all went
together. Um but we had separate--you know you could-

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n't choose your apartment or where you wanted to
live--you were assigned. So we were assigned for one
place and my cousin and my uh ant and my cousin's two
little small children they were assigned to another
apartment. But we were always very close and we stuck
together.

SB: Tell me about moving into the ghetto.

MG: Well that was really not a big deal because we came
to Kovno and all of our stuff we had left

in Maimal. So too much we didn't have. So we rented or we uh--uh little wagon and uh we took the other fuel, beds what we had and uh our personal belongings--clothes and--and that's how we went in a few parts and that's how we went into the ghetto. And it was uh site you know--what you--you saw on the wagon--wagon after wagon--the whole street. And the place where we went uh--uh it was called Slabotka and at that time the didn't it wasn't paved. There were cobblestones and that's how we move in to um.

SB: Okay we're just about to run out. We have to put another roll of film.

(Cut)

BS: Go to sound roll 18. Camera roll 37. Miriam Gershwin continued.

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(Cut)

SB: Did you feel a certain safety after the ghetto got formed or did everything turn upside down?

MG: Well, it turned upside down. First of all, I tell you, we were also like strangers in that Jewish community because we didn't know too many people. We came from Maimal. We live only in Kovno like a year and at that time it was also already the Russians were there so nobody felt really very safe and uh not safe but you didn't socialize too much because under the Russians, you were always afraid to uh se--uh talk and can say something so we really felt like strangers. We didn't have too many and there was also no time to socialize in the ghetto. You got up in the morning, you went to work, you came back in the evening and uh the only thing is that and that we realized later that we were all together and we still had our own clothes and if it rained as in next day, you could put on something else. We in the camp you couldn't. So that was uh but otherwise uh we really we didn't uh you know--

SB: And at the beginning, there were Actions. Um did

you know about any before the Great Action?

MG: Oh sure, there was the one when they took out the 500 uh men and uh at that time I had uh I don't know if you call it boyfriend or not but anyhow there was a boy

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uh--you know--who I knew and uh I went out with him a few times. And he was taken away in the 500. But you know, when you live, and you always want to believe the better part and at that time they said that they take them to swap books. They wanted more or less like people who are intelligent; that uh to read books and to make a library and to do this and to do that. And then when I worked--I mean I going to off now--but when I worked at the commander from the ghetto, his father once came over and he said you know, you're working ask it might be he could know where he is or uh it might be he could even bring him back or so I didn't ask him directly but uh--uh the commander, he had like a bal-let--you know he took care of this uh when there were not in one place. Otherwise I mean I polished his shoes and all that--that's while they were sitting. But uh I asked him and then he came back and he says--you know what he said? First of all, he came back he said well what is he to you? So I said well he's my fianc, because I wanted to uh. So then he came back and he said--you know what he said?--that he feels sorry for you. So you knew that they went down already of the 500 men and boys. And um--

SB: Before we go to that job, let's talk about the Great Action. Do you remember that?

MG: Oh sure I do because that is uh actually after my job. Because that is when I saved my ant and my uh--because we got a order that uh November so and

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so--I--I don't the 28th, I think or uh October 28th we should all assemble six o'clock in that one place. So we all went and you know at that time, as I said, we still had our clothes and because my dad was in textile we were quite well dressed and we were--I have to say it myself--we were quite--quite a very handsome family. My dad and my mother and my brother--we were all good looking and uh tall. So we were standing--my father and my brother on the sides and we two, my mother and I, in the middle. And in the back was my ant and my cousin and her two small children. And when we went through and that I really never forget--when we went through, you know, whe we came closer to the German, he was standing like this, you know and he said 'Right, left, right, left' uh so he asked us, is that one family and my dad said yes and he said 'Please, straight ahead.' So we probably made because for a German to say to a Jew, 'Please.' So we probably made the impression on him too. And then--and then we so went to the right, you know, all of a sudden my dad turned around and he said you know this the taunt his eyes and he uh ant Sara. So--and all of a sudden I see and there was a group to the left and they were surrounded by Lithuanian police and they were there, so in a corner, I saw one for whom I had worked after the commander, I worked for somebody else in that same outfit. So I ran over and when he saw me running over, he said, 'Miriam what happened to your family?' I said, 'We are here but my ant is not with us.' He said, 'Come with me.' He went with me in the group and

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we took them out and I, I mean unfortunately, they didn't survive but at that time I saved them.

SB: And um what happen to the people who went to the bad side?

MG: To the bad the side they were overnight--they were taking our uh ghetto was when we started was the ghetto. There was the small ghetto and the big ghetto. So they were all taken. There were about 10,000 people. They were taken to the small ghetto and during the night they were taken to one of the forts and liquidated.

SB: Did you see any? Did you see them going up the road to the fort?

MG: No, those we I--I didn't because mostly when transports came and they brought the Germans quite a lot transport form Germany and from um em Austria but mostly it was done during the night. Only once during the--they brought them and probably they were delayed. So they took them over during the--you know--in the morning and our ghetto was surrounded with uh barbed wire and had our own police. So when the police saw so many people going, so they opened a little--you know--the barbed wire and they said--I mean they could say it to everybody but you know, a few, 'Come here. Come in here. You will be safe.' But you know, the Germans Jews says thought that to them nothing will

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happen. They said oh no, we are going to --they mentioned some kinda of a camp and uh--and they didn't come and they didn't come and they didn't come and unfortunately the boy's killed.

SB: Did you--could you here machine guns from where you were? Did you?

MG: No, but I'll tell you how we knew that they are bringing people or that they have in Action. In the ghetto, they use to come for lime. You know that white stuff what I don't know it doesn't make you smell bodies or uh they say it was uh you know in there ghetto there was probably there was a pit from that. So when we saw those wagons going with the lime, we knew something will happen. All in the ghetto or they bring uh us--uh you know somebody from another country to be killed.

SB: And now tell me how you came to work for that officer?

MG: What--when the ghetto was closed, a couple of days later, they came and they looked for silver and gold. And so they went from house to house. And it so happened that the commander probably must have come, you know, like faith, to our house and when he heard us

talking German between my parents and us children. He called me out and he said, 'Do you want to work for me?' And I said, 'Well, I have to.' So he said, you

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know, he said, 'Don't worry I won't go uh to bed with you because that's forbidden.' And he came with two big dogs. So he so I said to h--'Yeah, okay.' So he said, 'Okay, come along.' So he took me right away with his car and he took me out of the ghetto, into his apartment and he introduced me to his Milay and he said from now on , I mean--he'll be your--you'll be responsible to him, you know and he'll tell you what to do. And he wrote uh note that I can go by myself to the ghetto from his house an in the morning, from the ghetto to his house. So I actually was the first one who had such a uh note that I am allowed to work by myself because mostly when people went to work, they all went in a big group like a brigade, you know, Brigaded--use to call--it was called. And I was only one to uh have that uh and the first one. I mean later, some other people also got uh jobs individually. But I was the first one of the Kovno ghetto, to have that uh piece of paper. In fact, when I came back, you know those things, now you remember when I ca--yeah and then that day we--no I went back by myself, and my parents they probably thought that they would never see me again. So when I walked in to ghetto by myself and as I said people didn't know me because we--we were uh not familiar with uh people. So I heard from time to time, when I was walking uh, people saying, 'Oh you know, a German, he took a young girl. Who knows what will happen to her.' And uh so when but when I came home and my parents, you know, they couldn't get over I'm a kind can uh.

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SB: We have to put another roll of film on here.

BS: Camera roll 38 is up. Slate 3 is up.

C: Mark. 3 marker.

SB: Tell me a little more about that commander. Did he like you?

MG: He probably did because one day, he comes--he's--he came and you know, he went into the ghetto and whatever he liked--whatever he saw, he took. One day, he comes he says, 'You know, the day I brought a present from Maria.' And what did he bring me? A yellow star--what we had to where but it was very--it was done by an artist. It was really beautifully done on the wire uh ring an with yellow--actually with gold and in the middle, this star and it was really very pretty and he brought it to me with a pin to put on. Also the uh his ballet was very good to me. First of all I had to eat myself there and he always sat and ate with me together. And in the evening, he made sure that I always brought something home for the family to eat. And at that time, that was a big--big thing. And I can't tell you--should really have so many good years still. How my mother divided the food among uh some friends or some neighbors and I mean my ant and my cousins were sure they uh but there were a few neighbors and my dad at that time worked at that time worked on the um

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airport and my mother always made sure he had an extra sandwich with if he worked with somebody that he shouldn't see that he is eating well and uh the other one not because, first of all, there was no refrigeration where you can keep it and second we always knew that tomorrow I bring again in something. So that was a big help for us.

SB: And did he one time tell you that he would like to shoot you and what did he mean?

MG: Now that was his ballet. He said to me one day, he said, 'You know, Miriam, I would like to shoot you.' And I said, 'Why? What did I do to you?' And I see that we are quite friendly.

You know, among ourselves. He said, 'Well, I don't want you to suffer--I'd hit you right in the heart.'

SB: Tell me--um, can we cut for just a second? I come back--

(Cut)

C: Marker, 4 marker.

SB: Miriam, can you tell me what the workshops were in the ghetto. I don't know about the ghetto. I don't know about the workshops.

MG: Oh sure, they uh--they took uh and that was a very

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good thing because a big hunk of uh the population were occupied with that. They had all different departments. There was a shoe department what made the boots for the Germans. There was a uh wash--uh laundry where they caught their clothes. There was--they even made toys for what they call to be sent back to Germany or uh and a lot of people were occupied. And you know it was good for the people to work because if you didn't work and they had a selection, the first ones who always were selected were the ones who didn't have a job. And not everybody could out of the ghetto to work places. There were not so many demands. So uh in fact later on, when I got married, and uh the com--uh the commander they all change they didn't stay too long. A different group took over. Uh, I also worked in the Vercstaten. I worked in the toy department. We made toys for wood and uh stuffed uh dolls you know like that uh um rag dolls.

SB: Can you just tell me what day to day life was like in the Ghetto. After--after the great action. After--in that period when the ghetto just sort of operated as ghetto.

MG: What daily life was like I said before, you got up in the morning, you went to work, and you came back and you were glad to have come back to uh and I mean you more or less the Jews were very inventive. They took the fences and they had then wood for you know, for the

winter. And uh we also had our own clothes at that

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time and they took those clothes along to the work
places out of the ghetto and they exchanged it--the
Lithuanian people use to come with butter and uh
margarine and potatoes and sometimes even some meat and
they exchanged it. Flour and then they brought it
back. So we had a little more uh to eat then later on
when we went to the concentration camps. So but other-
wise, there was we even had uh they--the Germans organ-
ized all the um musicians and we had a uh from time to
time a concert. And we Jews alone, we organized a
school for the little children that they were occupied
that they shouldn't run around, until they had the
Children's Action and they took away all the children.
But up to then, they uh--and you know once you are
alive and you always hope that it might be tomorrow or
the next day or the next day it'll be over and as I
said before we were still with our families. I even
got married in the ghetto so there was romance and uh
everything. You know, I mean more or less I wouldn't
say a perfect normal life because you were always that
tomorrow, they have an Action and you'll be the next
one. But uh when the morning started and you were
still alive and this oh another day will come.SB: Um,
tell me again about workshops--I sorry--but there was
big plane when you told me--

MG: Oh, the workshops were uh and they were very good
for the ghetto because if people were occupied and they
had where to go because if you didn't have any jobs if
you not everybody could go out of the ghetto to the

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working places because there wasn't so much demand. So
we made there. There was laundry to wash the soldiers
who ever they brought the laundry. There was also a

repair shop for the human forms to repair it. There was uh a shoemakers were there. They made uh the boots for they uh soldiers. We even made toys. They had different kinds of departments.

SB: But basically to serve the Germans?

MG: Oh ya. Sure we could not bring our laundry there or our shoes or uh no. It was only because it was supervised. And they came uh we rarely even knew when an inspection would come.

SB: Tell me about the Jewish Police--the ghetto police.

MG: The ghetto police they had it very tough because on one side they--I mean they were commanded to work with the Germans. On the other side, they wanted to help the Jews. So in general, they were all very nice. There were a few you know, what you'd find all over who wanted to be holier than the Pope but in general they were nice and they warned the people and uh it was I mean we all really say looked out for each other because we were all in the same boat. And we knew that if we'll be destroyed--we'll be destroyed every--all of us; if you were a policeman or if you were not a policeman you would have the faith. And it so happens that sometimes the policemen went first.

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SB: Why?

MG: Well it because they might be they knew a little bit more or uh they were involved in something. So they were shot uh before the others.

SB: And uh spiritual life, religion?

MG: Uh, religion was you know, if you were religious--you were religious. For instance my mother, after her last day, she didn't touch any meat. For us she cooked because she felt that we need the strength. But she didn't and I mean our meat consisted of dead horse meat and sometimes if you were lucky, when you brought from eh out of the ghetto, you brought uh lard or some um ham, you know. But you know, the Jewish

religion does not allow. So she didn't touch not even a morsel of that. But for us children and my father she felt that we go to because she did not go to work, she stayed home. So she felt that we needed it more and she cooked for us and we ate it. (SB says something but is barely picked up by microphone) And later my mother in law was the same thing.

SB: We have to put another roll on.

(Cut)

BS: Wentworth Films. Kovno Ghetto Project. Continua-

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tion of interview with Miriam Gerchwin. Sound roll 19.
Camera roll 39 at the head.

(Cut)

C: 39 marker 5. Mark.

SB: Um, tell me a little bit about--a bit about the ghetto council.

MG: The ghetto council were consisted of six I think or seven men. They were all lawyers or doctors. In fact, the Dr. Elkis; he was from the same town as my mother. And whenever there was some problems or my mother had something that was think was Dr. Elkis. And they were also un--you know they were under big pressure but they still were helping us and they looked out more for the Jews than and a few times they had only I think big arguments with the Germans. But uh they did not, you know, comply to the other orders of the other because uh nobody as I said we were all under the same rule and they didn't look out like to save themselves and to uh give the other people, you know, not a chance. So in general it was okay. It was hard you know like for to send to work because not all the work places were good ones. So how do you, if somebody go the better what he could exchange the things for better things and some were note the Lithuanian were none of the Lithuanian people came to exchange uh but uh in general, it worked out very well. And I think there was not too many what

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were against Udenhat.

SB: Did they have terribly difficult choices--did they have to prepare lists for the order?

MG: They had to prepare lists and that was part--they also didn't always and In fact in 1943, they were suppose to give a certain amount I don't--I forgot, you know, how many; were supposed to be delivered and they didn't give out so many, so at the end, the Germans went and whoever they grabbed the grabbed, so they In fact that's when my mother went away and my husband's whole family--his mother, his two married sisters with their children.

SB: So they had to choose people for selections and they didn't necessarily know what was going to happen or did they?

MG: No they didn't because they were always told that they are going to work. So, you know, so it was up to more or less sometimes they probably (Coughs) choose single people. Sometimes they choose people young and people but in general mostly also they ask also for volunteers and a lot even volunteered because they thought that it might be there it'd be better. Because you really didn't know. And a lot of times it really worked out that you were sent to labor camps. There was Felianchance. There was a big uh group and there was another big group and they worked uh like uh

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from the ghetto. And later they were also brought to Studto for, you know, to the concentration camps. So you were never sure it that is a selection for death an for work.

SB: Tell me about the Kinder Action.

MG: The Kinder Action--that was when the people had gone to work in the morning, all of a sudden came into the ghetto a lot of buses with there windows painted black and the Germans went--with the Lithuanian helpers--because they didn't go any place with out them because they did the dirty work. And a lot of times the German did the Jew but, you know, they always had the helpers. And they went from house to house and when they found children, they took them. There was one man--he didn't want to give his daughter, so they took him too. And there was another lady. She was even a gentile and she married a Jew and she opted to into the ghetto with her husband and their two children. And when they came and at that time she even said she said, 'You know, my brothers are on the front fighting for you and you want to take me and my children?' But that didn't mean anything. She was unfortunately taken away with the with the children.

SB: What did you see of that? You--you were at work right?

MG: No, I was at that time, in the ghetto. And I was

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there and we saw that the people were running on the street and In fact my cousin who had two children, we hid them. And luck had it they didn't find them and they were saved. The little girl was about 8 or 9 and the little boy was might be 5.SB: Tell me about the grief, the sadness.

MG: Well, uh when the people came back from uh work and they didn't find their children, I mean, I don't have to tell you what that means. Um, I mean it's bad enough you know sometimes if you lose a child but to work so hard and come back and then don't find them so you could only hear crying and crying and not even crying, you know, shouting eh from grief and uh hitting their heads on walls and uh that was uh and that went on for quite a few days.

SB: Tell me about how your niece and nephew were--where they were hiding.

MG: We had built a little--not with the whole house where we lived--had built in the yard to go down stairs and then uh in the ground there and that was supposed to be like for the whole house. So we took them down there and it so happens they didn't find them, you know. I mean few children were uh some were and in attics. Some were in double wall. So a few children were saved but uh it was like uh not even a fraction of the people what's of the children that they took. But uh at that time we were lucky. We had the children.

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SB: And um tell me about other hiding places besides that one--sort of in general.

MG: Well, if people dug out from underneath their uh--uh houses you know. So uh some dug under the fence to go to the gentile side. You know whoever uh had the means. Also we really didn't know because those things were not publicized. SB: And was the ghetto very different at the end than it had been earlier.

MG: Absolutely, because once the children were away, first of all, you didn't have the school anymore. You didn't also hear some children I mean, you know, children are children when it was calm. They run around, they talk, they sing, and the mood from all the people were very--very low. We also knew the little bit what was going on with the war. And we also always felt that we won't see it. That before the war will finished we'll be...so the mood after each selection and after each eh months and after each thing that was probably when we heard that the Germans were defeated there in Russia. For us it was not like a joy. For us it was always well soon our time will come to be destroyed and killed.

SB: Um, was the ghetto getting smaller?

MG: Yeah, because some people went into hiding, some people went to the Partisans, and with the selections,

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it was always getting smaller and smaller.

SB: So by the end, about how many people were there, do you know?

MG: I really don't know.

SB: Um, I think we're about to run out and I don't have a short question. Oh, tell me about the trading for butter. MG: Well, that was, you know, you when you went and you got and you were so happy, you got piece of butter and what will that mean when you come back to the ghetto and present it to your family. And then when you opened it, there was mashed the potatoes in and it was a coating of butter or margarine uh so that was a big disappointment because you gave away a lot of things and a lot of good things because when the Russians came, people who had money bought a lot of things because we knew that the Russians that means the money they only nationalize. So they uh--to even though they had good clothes and good sheets and good baby clothes and if you gave away to us, it didn't mean anything because we didn't use those baby clothes and we didn't use those sheets and uh so we uh came home and found there are mashed potatoes in and it was like in a pound to uh you know you were so happy that you would give your children and your family a big treat with the butter but it wasn't meant to be.

SB: We have to put another roll on.

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(Cut)

BS: Camera roll 40 is up. Slate 6 is up.

SB: Another question about the Kinder Action: did some parents choose to go with there children?

MG: Oh sure. I mean not too many parent were around because mostly they were working. But for instance there was one man uh and he was a policeman in the ghetto and he did get his child and he went alone. It was uh Mr. Bohk. And a few others who were there for sure they quite a few were taken, you know, all their uh parents.

SB: Do you know what happened to the children?

MG: I mean eh whatever was said that they were taken and gassed uh I mean I really don't know, you know, no witnesses are there to report. But uh nobody came back and that's what it's why so uh the imagination is there.

SB: The hiding place--did you spend some time in the hiding place?

MG: Yes we did. When the ghetto was liquidated, we all went into that same hiding place--the whole house, you know where we lived. And it was terrible. And the

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children--the few children who were like my cousin's children at the time we lived already at the same house. Um because when as soon as the ghetto got a way smaller and smaller, they closed off parts. So when my mother was taken away and my husband's family, we all went together with my dad and my brother and my cousin and my ant and the children--we all lived together. So and the children were really good because they were told that they shouldn't--that they should hardly breath you know, not a sound out of them. But the air was so stuffy and I really--I could breath. So I said you know, whatever will happen to me, I going out. So my husband and my dad came along and I was pleading with my brother to come also. And he said no he said, 'Whatever will happen, I'm staying here and don't I'm not moving.' And unfortunately I'm he got because when we taken away from the ghetto, the ghetto was already burning and they all perished. So and I'm sure that if he would have come with us, he probably would have been alive.

SB: Describe--

MG: Because my dad survived and my husband survived and he would have probably survived too.

SB: Tell me what that hiding place was like inside.

MG: Well--eh--uh we didn't even see. It was dark and we had there provided uh a few pails of water to drink

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Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
and uh I don't know if we had bread or water--I really don't remember. I only remember the water and from time to time, you know, uh it was a pass a few drops for each one. And we stayed there like--I think I stayed there like about maybe two days and I couldn't take it anymore. And uh I said at that time, I asked my ant and my cousin also to come. And my cousin said, 'Look, where will I go with my old mother and my two small children. I don't have a chance! Where will I go?' So she stayed and my brother didn't go. He also opted to stay.

SB: Was it hot in there?

MG: Terrible hot. We were uh practically naked you know because it was a small whole and it wasn't no walls and uh nothing--you know a hole in ground. But is was a under--I mean there was a shed on top--so under the floor they had dug out the men. I don't know how many were there 30--40--50 people. 30 for sure. I mean because you know when we when you started to run, and somebody else from the other neighborhood came, you couldn't tell him he can't come in. You had to let him in too. So I'm sure there were a few still who didn't belong to our house.

SB: And so when you came out, describe what you saw and how long it took before you were deported.

MG: What when we came out we opted to go to the little

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Verchstaten--you know where they uh--and there we even
met up with a few of our friends. And there we stayed
until the Germans came and they said and they said that
they have uh the trucks ready and we should move. And
they put us on trucks and they took us to the railroad
station.

SB: And when did you see the ghetto burning?

MG: Well when we were on the docks. They went already
to each house and they started to shoot and they start-
ed to burn because they knew that people were hiding
and some even came out running. You know also be very
poorly dressed because I'm sure in each hiding place it
was the same situation like in ours so people started
to undress their clothes and some were caught and some
probably were shot. Because we heard--we heard shots
too. So some were killed on the spot and uh.SB: Um,
es--but you made your way from the hiding place to the
Verchstaten--

MG: Ya.

SB: Safely--

MG: Ya.

SB: You sort of sneaked there or?

MG: Well we did probably at night, you know, in the,

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when it was dark and uh the ghetto was not uh miles and
miles. It probably was a couple of blocks. So we went
one after the other and we were three people; my fa-
ther, my husband and I. So slowly slows down till we
made it.

SB: And um you were married in the ghetto and did you
get pregnant in the ghetto?

MG: Yes I was--I was pregnant twice and I had to have an abortions because that was the law.

SB: And how did you arrange that? Was it?--

MG: Oh there were doctors at the was the Germans In fact one of the doctors he was in prison and they released him because he was an--an Obnistritian and they needed him and uh that was you know, that was his job.

SB: And um can you tell me how different it was in a concentration camp from the move the ghetto?

MG: Uh huh. First of all, we didn't have any clean--our clothes. We also didn't have our families. For instance I was, as I said before, I didn't know too many people ya? So I was really alone like skunk. Some had a mother, a brother, eh a sister, a sister in law--eh I was all alone and uh you know and so you shared to her with a friend--with a--uh it was uh and

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there I mean--there you didn't have anything. You had you dress and you coat. You also didn't have, you know what not a piece of soap--not a comb--not a piece of toilet paper even. I mean nothing. I didn't even have any shoes until the end of November; until they brought um--um the wooden shoes. And they were very bad because you know and up in the north when you have snow, you have snow. So it was very and the snow use to uh be on the wood and it was very hard to walk. You walked like this, you know, and sometimes. And if you didn't walk with your 4 in a row or 3 in a row you got hurt. You got hit by the German. We also lived in little scout tents where you couldn't walk in like you walk through a door. You had to crawl like uh a dog. There were ten people; ten women to uh tent. And the tents were already from the rain and from the snow and there were not even water proof. So in the mornings, our heads were frozen to the tent--you know to the material. You also didn't have any clothing. If it rained and you came back, there was no way of taking off you clothes and drying it. So you went to sleep with the wet clothes and in the morning you went back to work with the same wet clothes until it finally

dried on you.SB: Okay, I think we've got everything. I think we're all most out--

(Cut)

MG: --by myself--

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SB: Are you rolling? Bob?

MG: While I was walking by myself, from the ghe--from the my job to the ghetto one day, I saw that a woman was walking next to me on the street because I was walking in the gutter. And she motioned to me and then she came close by and she said that she had some letters for people in the ghetto from the ghetto from Vena and if I would take them. And I took them and I brought them to the ghetto and there were a few for instance what for instance that's how I met again my husband because I had known him from before. And one of the letters was addressed to his sister but I didn't admit that I know that that was his sister but we had friends by that same name. So I thought that that was for our friends. So my mother took the letters to the Dr. Elkis because he was a friend and you know and I had the letters. But I said you know for a few, what I know, I would like to deliver them myself. And that woman had said that if I come, I don't remember in a day or two, she'd be there and if people want to send letters back, she would take them back. So I went, thinking that that we are friends, the Bloombergs and my husband answered and I said I have a uh letter for Dr. Bloomberg. And he said, 'Yeah, come in that's my brother in law.' It was uh somebody else you know and that's how I we met him and we started to home and in two weeks we were married.

SB: In two weeks?

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MG: Well, what you know, my husband died a year and a half ago and the Rabbi came, you know, to ask some questions and there were a lot of people in the house. And he asked me how I met my husband so when I told him this story and I said two weeks. All the people said, 'Two weeks and you got married?' I said, 'You know what and it worked for 53 years. You got married here and in a year, you are getting divorce. And you know each other you know for so long--you are engaged for a few years and uh so we were married like 53 years.

Man: Did--did you have to get married in secret?

MG: Oh yeah, sure. But you see in the ghetto, once you were in the ghetto and when you're armed, you did what you wanted to do. We held for the holidays we had services--In fact my husband, he was lawyer but was a tori and there when the lawyers went to court, the had uh robes and the first year for the high holidays, my husband gave the robe to a theater and he was singing, you know. It was a robe, like uh in Roman times.

SB: Okay, we can get room tone.

(Cut)BS: Go to sound roll 20. Camera roll 41.

C: Mark, 7 mark.

SB: Okay.

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MG: You want to ask me the question or?

SB: Which one do you want to start with?

MG: Well, let's start with the festivities, ya?

SB: Okay, so tell me what the festivities were?

MG: Well when we got married, cause of my husband he had a lot of friends and he knew a lot of people and

also because I had saved my uncle--my ant and cousin-- they at that time said, 'Listen, when you get married,' but not thinking that I'd get married in the ghetto, 'we'll really go to town.' So when we decided to get married in the ghetto and I mean you wanted to have a little something so first of all I had still my dresses what were made to order before the war. And uh my sister in law had uh like probably a little veil or what. So anyhow I was a nice bride. And the food consisted of--they took potatoes and they took out the inside and they made it like the feltta fish with the spices and then they cooked it back with onions and somebody had gone and I think my husband even went to uh brigade because he was, you know, like a bridegroom. They let him do more exchanging than the others. So he brought back some flour and uh so my ant she made even uh cream puffs. I don't know if there were filling but there were like a cream puffs. You cooked and uh. And then from the peels of the potatoes, we made pancakes.

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They were washed and--and that was done, not only for festi--for festivities--that was really our ma--some-times our main dish. You wash them and then you chop them up and you put them in little flour and you baked them or you, if had a little oil, you fried them and that was the pancakes. And um I don't know if he even had I think a chicken or something but anyhow it was a very nice uh, you know, celebration and that was our wedding.

SB: Who were some of the guests and how many people came?

MG: The guest were, as I said, we didn't have family. It was only my ant and my uh cousin and the two children. My husband had two married sisters and his mother. And the rest were his friends. His uh um because he was very outgoing person and he liked to have people around himself and eh to be uh, you know uh, like the Santa and to talk to everybody and uh so uh all his fraternity brothers came and all uh the people he knew. And uh we had a Rabbi and uh it was you know, like according to the uh--to the Jewish law. In fact, after the war, my grandfather, who was a Rabbi, and who had come to Palestine, at that time when

we started to correspond when he that we are alive and uh. So the first question in his letter was who was the Rabbi who married us because for him that was the most important thing as uh religious man. So we wrote to him, at that time, who it was and it was by Muasis a

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Pole that it was legit.SB: And now we have to backtrack a bit and tell me about the woman who approached you in the streets, so we can learn how you me your husband.

MG: Oh, okay, so she approached me in the street with the letters.

SB: Just uh you have to back up a little.

MG: Oh because you don't have that?

SB: Don't have it.

MG: Oh okay. One day while I was walking from work to the ghetto, I was walking in the gutters and a wom--and I saw that a woman is going and she is looking at me and she is like keeping up steps--you know with me the same uh eh so and so I looked at her and then she motioned me I should come closer and she came closer to the curb and she said that she has some letters from Jewish people from the ghetto in Vena; if I would take it to the ghetto and she said that uh she would bring--she would be there in 2 or 3 days and if there are replies, she would bring them back. So I took the letters and I went back and I gave it to my mother and we looked at them and uh my mother is um the biggest bulk she took to the Dr. Elkis, who was our uh eldest uh man--you know, our elder, from the Udenrout because, as I said before, she was connected with them. And a few I kept because a few I thought I knew them because

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it was addressed to a Dr. Bloomberg and we had friends--Dr. Bloomberg who came not from Maimal but from the region of Maimal and we knew them very well. So I said you know, the few what I know, I would like to deliver myself. So I took that letter and I ask where the Dr. Bloomberg lives and they told me and the white uh what was it called? I forgot what it was called. And this and the white blocks, so I went there and I knocked at the door and my husband opened--my husband-to-be opened the door and I had known him from before from Pointavesh where we came out of Maimal when we went to Pointavesh. So I said I have a letter for Dr. Bloomberg. He said, 'Yes, come in that's my brother in law.' So I right away knew that it was not that same Dr. Bloomberg what I thought he was but anyhow I delivered that letter and that's how--first a friendship and then later (laughing) the courtship started and we got married in 2 weeks. But after the war, when we were liberated by the Russians in January of '45 and the war was still going on, so we figured that we--so then we were from the whole camp, when were about 700 women. About 20 were sent to a hospital and I was among the 20. So after that when we stayed there and I mean the Russians themselves--they didn't have any food and they didn't have any food for us. So we were lingering around and then they said that they sent us back to Lithuania. So and we ourselves wanted to go because that's where we came from and we wanted to go back there. We didn't know who--that was already some after the war--you know, who survived and who will come

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back and uh and we started going back to Lithuania and we we through Poland and at that time, you couldn't go with uh terrain like you go in now, you buy a ticket and you go. You went to the railroad station and whenever you saw a train, and you felt that it's going north, you jumped on it and you uh went to anther town or another town; always closer, closer. So on one--in one town we stayed on the railroad and a few people in Polish uniforms came by and they were talking and at that time, uh Poland was still very antisemitic and they were talking a little Polish and they asked us, 'Are you from Metchstek Aumha?' And Metchsteka in Poland means a town and Aumha is the Hebrew

word for the Jewish people. So we knew they were Jews so we knodded our heads so they said we should come down and then when we came down, the started to talk to us in Jewish and they said, 'What are you doing,' 'Who are you?' and uh. So we said we are uh refugees, we survived the camps and now we want to go back to Lithuania. So the guys said, 'Do you know if somebody is alive from your family. And we said, 'No.' He said, 'Please don't go back. It's a very large door in but a very small one out. Stay in Poland and if you hear that somebody of the family is there, they always let you in, the Russians.' So we took their advice and we went to a bigger town to Lebline and stayed there and at that time also, we didn't have anything to eat and still wore our clothes from the camps because we didn't have anything. So we went to the market and we sold--somebody gave us uh some uh yarn to sell so we

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had a few pennies there to buy uh a small piece of bread. And if we didn't have it, we didn't have it. So we were 3 women and one woman had a daughter. And we were all from the same camp. So we were 4. So one day some men came--they went to Lithuania, who had given away their children to gentile people and they wanted to collect them. And when they heard that you know my name they said, 'Oh, you know, your husband and your father, they are both alive and they are in the American zone.' Because they were all in Dakaw and they were liberated by the Americans. So what--can imagine that we were very happy. And for the other women, they also said that her husband is alive and for the next one, they said her husband was killed but eh the brother in law was alive. So we decided we go to Germany already and that is a story by itself. So also at that time, you couldn't go uh so we use to live in the train station and whenever we saw a um--a train, we went on it and one town we met up with 2 German men. I mean they were Jewish. So we use to sit and talk and we use to converse in German. So all of a sudden we were arrested as spies so but the soldiers were drunk and in the morning a different group parent came and we explained we are Jews, so they let us go. So finally we came, we treaded and treaded and that was, as I said, I was liberated in January, and that was July, we came finally to Berlin. And in Berlin, that was divid-

ed into 4 zones: British, the Russian, the French and the American. And by that time people traveled already back and forth to look for relatives and for uh. So

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Interviewed (5-6-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
one day, I'm standing there and a man sees me and he says, 'You are alive. You are supposed to be dead.' And he tells me this story that my husband got a letter from some officer friends who he was with them. And their children were in Palestine and they belonged to the British brigade and they found him and they came for him, to take him back to Palestine. And they brought a let--a letter from his wife and she wrote there that she has investigated from people what she knew their faith and everything is more or less hundred percent because whatever she felt it was not really true, she didn't put in the list and she writes to my husband--they both wrote--the man and his wife--that we are sorry to tell you that your wife Miriam died and we don't have any words for you and her father but on the other hand, you know how we were close to death and you have to see to pull yourself together and then she wrote in that same letter: but I also have good news for you that your bo--your sisters both survived and I'm sure you'll hear from them. So that was Friday night that my husband got that letter. So they decided they'll make a service and you know we had a prayer what we said after the dead like we say it for 11 months. So in between m--some of my husband's friends had gone to also to Germany to look for people and going going going they ended up to France and there they found a friend of mine who knew with who I was together who knew that I was alive. They also found--my husband had a sister in France who before the war.

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/MIRIAM GERSHWIN page 40
Interviewed (5-6-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

They also found that the sister is alive. Her husband and both the children were alive. My husband's cousin were alive there. So they came home that same time when my husband and my father got up and they wanted to say the prayer. So all of a sudden that they opened the door, and they say, 'What are you doing? Don't say it because your wife is alive.' So then my husband had 2 informations. One, I was dead and she wrote with such authority that she--like she didn't make a mistake. So he didn't know what to expect. So finally he thought that he would go eh to Germany, to look for me. Some was on Poland, I mean, because that girl uh in France, who had given the information, she had said that she had left me in Poland. So my husband thought that he would go and look for me. Well I came, and I as I said, I heard that on the rode so finally we made our uh trip and, you know, we went from town to town and from uh finally we came to Munich and it was curfew at that time still for the personnel--the Americans they could walk to 9 and uh we, you know, the plain people only to 8. We were more or less one of the first women. We came in August. So when we came to the ya and those people who I met, they told me exactly where my husband was and they also said when you come to Munich, you go to that and that place. There is--it was a Duochy museum. There is a Jewish community and they take you because my husband was not directly in Munich. He was in a hospital--he was uh--uh managing a hospital from the peace. So we came there and the last

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/MIRIAM GERSHWIN page 41
Interviewed (5-6-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:
trip we rode on a coal truck in Sevain. So we
looked--can you imagine how we looked? So anyhow when
we came to that, you know, where the Jewish community
was, there were people around us everybody--all mostly
the Lithuanian Jews. Did you see my mother? Did you
see my papa? Did you see my wife? Did you see my
child? Did you--you know, everybody wanted to know.
But so whoever we knew we told them and uh. So
then--so then one guy came and he said, 'Look, it's
now--I can not take you where you husband lives because
it's curfew, so he gave us a room in there--in that
Duochy Museum where the community was and he said,
'Tomorrow morning, I'm coming and I'm taking you to--to
your husband. So we were sitting in the room and
somebody knocked at the door and an American soldier

walked in and he said, 'You know, I saw you women and I saw the commotion, could I come in, could I get some information from you. So he came in and you know, I new a little English and he knew a little Jewish so between we could converse. And then he said to me he said also to the other woman. He said, 'Do you have anybody? Can I do something for you? Do you have anybody in the states? And uh.' And I said, 'Yes, I have a cousin.' He said, 'You know, write a few words.' And I sent it. I didn't know the address. I only knew the town and the name. So I wrote up Rabbi Bezique, Baltimore. And I wrote that I'm alive and my dad is alive and I got married in between and my husband is alive. And you know, she got that card, my cousin in Baltimore. And then in the morning the other

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/MIRIAM GERSHWIN page 42
Interviewed (5-6-97) by Sandra W. Bradley
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guy came and he took me out and when we came to that little town and he knew exactly, you know, where my husband lived and uh, he said you know, you stay in the car; it was early in the morning, I'll go up. So he went up and he knocked at the door and my husband came out. And he said, 'What are you doing here so early?' He said, 'Oh we at the meeting. And uh we figured we'd come by and see you. Come down.' I see my husband said, 'I'm in my pajamas, how can I come down?' 'Come down he said.' Oh but, you know, I was sitting in the car and I couldn't sit in the car, so I went slowly out of the car and I went up the steps and where my husband opened the door I so happy. And as I said I was liberated by the Russians in January. And I came to my Husband the 13th of August and that was actually the first time when I really act well.

SB: Thank you.

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