Interview with Roza Kent
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: September 21, 1989 Place: San Francisco
Interviewer: Sandra Bendayan
Transcriber: Melanie A. Johnsen

A My maiden name was Rose Kent. It wasn't Rosaria Kensla, so Kent was my name; so ... and I was born in Poland in a little town near (Lenberg) in (Volf.) I had three brothers, two sisters, and was born 1921.

Q And was (Volf) a big town?

A (Volf) was a very big town, the biggest town in (Valetzia). This is where I went to school.

Q Is it a town with a large Jewish community?

A It was a very large Jewish community. My town where I lived was three-and-a-half thousand Jews, that was the population - and this was almost 30% of the town.

Q Um-hum. What business was your family in?

A My family -- in Poland there was no land owners Jews, so my father leased from the Count, from the Polish Count, estate. He managed it, took care of it and just paid to the Count who lived in Poland in (Lenberg).

Q So he paid rent to the Count?

A Yes.

Q But got a salary for taking care of it?

A No, he didn't get a salary. That was his business, he leased the whole thing.

Q Oh.

A Yes, we were unaccountable before the war because everything belonged to my father - all the cattle, all the horses, whatever went with it. He used to pay per acre whatever at that time was --

Q So a kind of a farming cattle type of business.

A Yes. I want to tell you they run the mill, everything was in that, and all our children went to school in (Lenberg) because the town, the village actually, where that land was Ukraine and the schools weren't as good as in other places.

Q Did you have other relatives living around you, like grandparents?

A Well, in small and different places. My mother had six sisters and they were all married and other cousins. My father had a brother and sister and they had children, and sure we had a like a family. From my mother's side of the family, most of the people were intellectuals, doctors, professors, lawyers and an uncle; and from my father's side, they were more scholars in Jewish, and Rabbis and such.

Q So, um, it sounds like there was a large Ukrainian population.

A Yes.

Q And one element already existing was that you couldn't own land.

A No. Not in Poland.

Q Okay. Did you have any other symptoms of anti-Semitism in those earlier days?

A No, no, because we went to school, had a lot of friends. I must say we were rather popular and we mixed -- it wasn't -- and that part of Poland as a matter of fact, I survived things to my Gentile friends and saw that my sister and my brother. And my older brothers were more skilled out of the ghetto, so we had a lot of friends who took care of us.

Q Um-hum. So you mixed freely with the Christian population.

A Yes, we did, we did. We were Jewish, we were cautious. We had our place and they had their place.

Q So were you an observant family - Orthodox?

A Not Orthodox, but rather observant, yes.

Q And, um, so it sounds like you had a relatively peaceful childhood.

A Very peaceful, uh-huh. Except for a certain amount of time because my mother died of cancer when she was only 43 and I was 14 years old.

Q Yes, that must have been difficult.

A Well, I will tell you something very interesting. When I was about maybe 12 years old, I had a very strange dream. I was home far from that city in ghetto and in other place far from that place, and it was Yom Kippur and there was a voice that came out that something terrible was going to happen.

Q And this is when you were 12.

A 12 or 13 years old, and I was so scared. And I screamed and I cried and my parents woke up and I told them exactly. I remembered so

vividly that dream. And my mother tried to comfort me, and she told other people and they said, "That's such an unusual dream for a child, could anything like this happen?" And my mother said, "Well, it's unusual, usually things happen to children". With Catholics, they would make her another Holy One, and it was be another case of another Bernadette. Jews don't believe in these things; I always read a lot, who knows what she read, how she would think about those things.

Well, shortly after that, my mother got very ill and another year later she died. So everybody took the dream as a prediction as something horrible to happen and happen to our family. And people want Jews -- even today, who expect a 43-year-old woman, a mother of five, to die.

Q Um-hum.

A But this was it. But strangely enough, when the war broke out, we were put in that town in Poland, and Yom Kippur there was a killing - the biggest one. And because of that, my uncle, my relatives and even my father went to a Rabbi to ask for an explanation. So when this happened, that story was very much repeated. And after the war my uncle, Dr. Philip Friedman, wanted that dream to be related.

Q How do you think the dream relates to --

A I don't know because I go sometimes to (Brendice), and we talk sometimes about mystics, about dreams. And I had in my life a lot of, a lot of dreams that came true. It's like -- I don't talk to my friends about it because they would think it was something spooky, you know? But I still have a sister. She's the only one from that area

still remembers that thing.

Q So it sounds like something you trust in yourself when you have a dream like that.

A Yes. I have very strong feelings about some of those things -- and that some of mine that lives in L.A., one night we woke up at 1:00 in the morning and that I was so tired, and all I could think about was him, and I called him up and he say it was only 10:00 in California when it was 1:00 in New York. And I say "Martin, what are you doing?", and he say, "Mom, what are you doing, it must be 1:00 in New York". And I say I just think about you, I just want to know how you are doing, and he say, "You don't have to think about me I have a little cold, so you don't have to worry about me". It just happened that night he was just coming home and slipped in the garage and broke his arm.

Q Oh my goodness!

A And so I believe there must be something with some people; so anyhow I'll go back to, and I'll try not to stretch these stories. The war broke out in 1939, the Russians came to out part of Poland --

Q Did you have any growing sense of anything going wrong from the earlier thirties?

A What do you mean?

Q I mean did you feel any more anti-Semitism in the sense of what Germany was doing?

A No, no. As a matter of fact, I wish we would have because

my brother was about to leave for Isreal to an agricultural school, and he was stretching, stretching until the last minute and then he was about to leave in 1939, there was already a war 1939.

Q He wasn't emigrating, he was going to study?

A He was going to study, to go to college and he was killed, too. But we experienced a lot of bad things from the Ukranians. Because you see that was a very big conflict between the Ukranians and Poles there so we were like in between, but they were the ones. Actually, my two brothers that were killed were killed by Ukranians.

Q At that time, before the war?

A No, no, during. Then the Russians came. The Russians came because my father employed a lot of people, so he really got the paragraph and he was branded as a outlaw and he had to hide. When the Russians came in, they were Communists, and they seeked out people who employed other people and they told those people that they use those people, took advantage of those people. I was in high school, in Russian high school, so right away I had to study Russian and everything, study Communist. It was in 1934 was when the Germans came and there was a terrible fight between the Germans and the Russians and we thought we had it bad with the Russians, but at least they didn't kill people. And then they throw us right away in the ghetto in a town called (Rohatin), and Rohatin was three and one-half million Jews. They told us that since it's a rather nice town, most of the Jews were educated. This was already another era

the business and young people had a certain education, so they said they would try to shelter us. And we said to ourselves "we'll work hard enough, we'll survive the war. But by doing so, they'll create jobs and they'll start building factories". And everybody who could had to go out every morning with a shovel out of town and dig. They said they want to put cement and build factories. This was going on, let's see from the Summer until Spring 'till March - it was Purim, that's why I remember it was March - and those holes were already big holes and everybody was wondering why they weren't pouring cement. It was already big enough for a factory. One day, it was the 21st of March, it was Purim, and we were still at home, it was a Friday morning, we shooting, so much shooting. So people thought coming the Russians and they wanted really to run out. We had one of our neighbors, we were already in ghetto and in one family house was already four families living. And Poland, this goes back fifty years, there was no refrigeration; so under the kitchen was under like a basement, a flap door, so somebody said, "Hey, let's run down to that basement". So we stayed in that basement, and we started looking and there were German soldiers all over and just shooting Jews. And those factories supposedly they were building, these were graves - mass graves - so all the people that went to work in the morning were shot, killed and buried in these graves.

Q You saw this massacre yourself?

A I didn't see because I was sitting in the basement. What

I saw in these graves were all old people, they would shoot old people on the street. I saw my grandmother was 82 years old was killed. My aunt with two little kids, my uncle. Whoever they could find. They came to our apartment, they were sitting around; but we were sitting in the little basement so they didn't know, so this is how we survived that first killing. My whole family who survived was my father, my three brothers and my other sister. After that killing, there was over 3,000 people killed that one day. There was only 500 left, just the ones who were - just like ourselves, lucky enough to be hiding. Then after that, there was more killing.

Then they brought people from other small towns and they kept doing that.

Q Was it a locked ghetto, a wired ghetto?

A No, but you weren't allowed to go out. We were wearing bands, white bands with blue stars. And those people, they were taking us to work. Every day they would come, and the women had to go and clean offices and clean apartments and had to go different labor. So every day everybody had to go out from the ghetto, but with the stars, and at night we would come back.

Q Had you been involved in digging that big trench?

A I was not there, mostly men, because the women were mostly working out at different jobs and this was going on for a while, and then my brother saw what was going on and then -- meanwhile, I looked so blond and everybody told me that I must get out of that ghetto, I

shouldn't die and everybody saw that everybody being killed. So that a couple girls should get out of the ghetto. We had Polish papers through Polish friends supplied us with and we should go to different towns in different towns in Poland. So it was maybe at that time five girls that left, and I was among them. Shortly after that, my father died. Then my brother place with a Polish family with my sister and my brother, who died in Israel, my sister still in Israel. They brought everything that we had to that family, whatever was in jewelry and uh --

Q Had you been hiding jewelry and other --

A Yes, but it's still there because nobody went back, because even after the war if a Jew showed his face they would kill him.

As a matter of fact, now I'll jump to a time now in Israel to a family I met, also a Polish family, who saved a friend. I haven't seen him for 50 years. So he survived the war and left right away. The German people found that man and they killed him. They brought all of his limbs, his hand and his feet to punish him and then they killed him, just because.

Q How did your father die?

A Typhoid.

Q Typhoid. So this was a big problem.

A Typhoid. But the young people always survived because they were younger and he was older, so he didn't survive.

Q How was the food situation at that time.

A Very bad, it was rationed little pieces at a time, a little

bit of this and that -- but so, that's another reason people had typhoid and all different sicknesses, people were dying. So then after my brother and sister were out of the ghetto, my father died. My two brothers started to organize parties on something. At least we didn't want to go like sheep. So my brother was connected with some Gentile people so they started getting guns and ammunition, and somebody at that point told on them. And that night - they were just out with a couple of their girlfriends that night - and they were told to go with the other young people to the woods and they'll start, even if to die, but to fight, to kill a German. Because it was hard for young people to see how hard or how helpless-- Somebody must have spilled the beans because our house was surrounded, circled around with soldiers and they were killed right there. We were told by one Ukranian man after the war that my brothers grabbed their weapon and were killed right there. And at that point, the whole ghetto was liquidated.

Q Liquidated?

A Liquidated. Everyone was killed and everything was burned down to the ground. You see, from our place they weren't taken to concentration camps, they were just killed on the spot.

Q Do you know why they weren't taken to the concentration camps?

A I really don't know. I really don't know, maybe because they had the Ukranians to do their job. Again, the Ukranians killed the Jews more than the Germans. The Germans were there, but -- I know for a fact that both my brothers were killed by Ukranians.

Q Did you know what the Ukranians feelings were at the time? You described that there were a lot of Ukranians in the town.

A Yes, they were very bad. They were bad to Jews, but they were also bad to Poles.

Q What kinds of things did they do?

A They burned. We had that big farm, everything was burned down to the ground. Even before, like in 1939, a lot of burning and whoever they could kill, they would kill. They were savages. They were really savages. So I was out of the ghetto.

Q How did you find the people with whom you lived, do you know?

A It was very strange. A Polish girl, a classmate, took me on a train and she promised my brothers, like, we're in New York, she had some relatives in the South, say, some relatives, right?

Q Was it difficult to leave the ghetto at night?

A At night, at night we took all of the things and we went to her, and she took me on the train and we went to that town. Her cousins were supposed to prepare a job for me and I was supposed to be with them. But what she did when we got on the train station, she took away everything from me and just left and left me stranded on that station, even my luggage.

Q She took it away from you?

A Yes.

Q No struggle?

A What struggle, there was nothing --

Q So there you were.

A There I was. So I came up with a story, this was already a different of Poland where Polish people lived where she took me. And everybody knew that in (Galitzia) where I lived in (Lenberg), the Poles they were killing a lot of people. So I just told them a story near the train station that I'm Polish, that the Ukranians killed my whole family, and I ran away and changed my name. I had some Polish papers, they were false, of course, and that was it. They found for me a job, they were sympathic.

Q What was your Polish name?

A (Kentarska, Heuta Kentarska). I just told them the whole story, that I'm willing to work, but I cannot go back there. And a very, very poor woman let me in, and her neighbor, a poor girl, took me in -- took me to a restaurant and she worked there as a waitress and it then went on and on.

Q Well, what was your living situation?

A Not bad, at least I had food to eat and --

Q And so you lived with this woman?

A No, when I had a job, well that is a story besides! Where I worked, there was a maid and we had one room on top of that restaurant like an attic room, a small room, but at least we could wash our clothes, whatever we had. It turned out later that that girl was Polish and Jewish too, and she was hiding because she was Jewish, too. And every night when we talked about it after the war, and every night I would go on my knees and pray and pray aloud. We all knew

how to pray in Poland because every day before classes a prayer was said in the classroom. Jewish children didn't have to say that prayer, didn't have to cross themselves; but when stand in a classroom for 12 years and you hear, you know how to pray. She was praying there and I was praying here. I didn't at first know she was Jewish, she didn't know --

Q How lucky you were to call upon those prayers, though.

A Yes, yes, but I'll skip something because then I met somebody and then I got married and a Polish man married us. It was a civil marriage.

Q All this while you were in hiding?

A I was in hiding, there wasn't much going on. I was working and I serve somebody - and this is another part of Poland - and he calls me by my Jewish name Rosa Kensla. I look at him, and he's from my home town. I had to run, I had to run so many times.

Q So you left the restaurant.

A Left the restaurant, went to a different town. Life was very hard.

Q Where did you go when you left the restaurant?

A Then we went to the forest with some partisans, and in different parts.

Q How was life with the partisans?

A Scary, scary.

Q Were you accepted by the partisans easily?

A Yes, yes. Because there were a lot of people hiding. And then it was very bad again because there was no food again and then I met that man with the partisans and I got married.

Q Avel was a Catholic man?

A Yes, yes. But when we got married, I didn't have any documents and he suspected that I was Jewish, but he didn't know. And there were a lot of other people that he gave them papers and he married them. And then when he was pointed out, he was killed. There were a lot of people, a lot of very bad people, a lot of very bad Polish people, but there were some that would have liked to help.

Q But there was a terrible risk to help?

A Terrible risk, because the people, the population, they pointed the finger, that was --

Q What was the name of the man you married?

A Well, I don't want to go into that. But I will tell you now the incident that my son writes about. My son moved here about 16 years ago, the one who is an architect, and he brings me to the airport, in San Francisco, you know, and there's that beautiful building that he designed, those big towers; and the whole building is standing there but the landscaping is not done and there are wild flowers, all around there are wild flowers. And somehow I remember the beautiful day, another place, and I say to him - that's the incident that's very painful - I say to him -- I started to cry. And he said, "Mom, I came a long way. Look at my building, look at my accomplishment". I say, "You don't even know what a long way you came

because when I was seven pregnant with him, and because I was the one that looked so Catholic, so I would be the one to go out to buy some food for some people". Because I had something to trade, a ring, some jewelry, or something. So one time, they caught me and they insisted that I must be Jewish; I insisted that I am not. And then so I was arrested. I was arrested by the Polish police and then sent to the Gëstapo. I stayed at the Gëstapo, they interrogated me, no food, they had big dogs going, and I did not admit that I am Jewish. When somebody does not admit that they are Jewish, they would guess they are Polish people so they were afraid. They had a trick. They would take these people out into the forest and shoot them in the back and say that the prisoner tried to escape. And I was so resigned, I just wanted to die so badly. Because what kind of way did I have that I would survive. I mean it was impossible. And how am I going to have a baby? And how am I going to give birth to a baby or something? And when he brings me out to that forest, and it was in August and it was so beautiful because I was in a cell that had no windows and so sunny, and all of these wild flowers, all these wild flowers - I was a nature lover - and I started to think, "My God, in me is a baby that never saw flowers, never saw beauty". I felt life in me. The baby never saw sun, never saw flowers, and I started to think how could God allow that? How could my God allow that? And I just turned to that Gëstapo man, a young blond man, such a handsome man, and I say, "Look at me, take a good look.

Maybe you have in Germany, to; many children. I'm pregnant. I have a child in me". Maybe you want to go home to your wife and your children. Maybe you shouldn't kill me - I'm not even Jewish. And now you want to kill this child not Jewish." And he start to say, "Turn around,walk, walk, walk". So I walk, walk, walk, and I turn around and he is gone.

Q Oh, a miracle!

A He's gone!

Q You'd convinced him.

A And I found my way to a woman who used to be a maid to a Jewish family and she took me in. And from there, there was still a lot of terrible, terrible things, but we'll leave it at that.

Q I'm a little confused. Was this man that you married, was he killed?

A No, no. We were later got together. He's the father of my two sons.

Q You were married, but you must have been separated then?

A Off and on.

Q Was this because you had to go for your lives in different directions?

A No! His whole family was destroyed. He lost everything after they found out.

Q After they found out what, that you were Jewish?

A Yes. After they suspected, they never really found out. With women, they never really found out, but they suspected, but they suspected.

Q How did they react to him?

A Very badly, much worse than to me. I was never beaten the way he was.

Q By whom?

A By the Germans. Oh, he was beaten! Then there was hunger, then there was running. Having a child -- when I had my child, I was in a little room when I came out from the forest because I was going to have a child.

Q When you were in the forest, did you have any shelter, any kind of a hut, or --

A We had off and on, off and on. It was terrible rain, it was springtime and I was so sick and I saw a little house and there was a man living there, a Polish man.

Q What were you sick of?

A From the cold, from being pregnant, from hunger, from swollen. You know, it says our body can withstand an awful lot. At home I was such a fragile child, and then I endured so much. I endured an awful lot. So then the time came and I knew I would have the baby soon, and through some Polish people, they went into a nearby town and my husband brought me there, like Saturday or Sunday. And he had to go get some supplies, and that night I had my baby with no help.

Q All by yourself.

A All by myself on a bed with all straw, no sheets, no nothing.

If they think that Jesus was born poor, I was more poor. Because I had to hide; I was afraid that I would start talking Yiddish or something. I was among Polish people, they didn't even know me. I was one day in that house, but I crawled out because I thought I'll die. I was a girl not brought in America that knows everything. I was 20 years old and didn't know much. There was a widower living there. He had two young daughters, and one daughter says, "There's a woman very sick". There was one lady, it was like midwife. And I never knew, I never knew if she suspected me of being Jewish or not.

Q Did you have to deal with the umbilical cord yourself?

A She did, she did. Then that woman, she washed me up. It was horrible, it was horrible.

Q Was your husband with you?

A No, nobody was with me. I was just alone. And the other son was born in New York in one of the best hospitals, and I had a very, very bad delivery. And there were other women screaming, crying. And the nurses say, "Rose, aren't you hurting?" They didn't know whether to do a Caesarean or what. I was in horrible pain. I was so happy to see a nurse and a doctor. What your mind can do to you; what your mind can do to you -- I was so relaxed, secure.

Q But it seems like in the case of your first child, you were afraid to scream out.

A I was afraid to do anything; I was so filthy. And I was shaved. They gave me an enema. I was was laying in my "you know what".

I was laying in everything.

Q Sure.

A And here, I was clean, I was clean. They even held my hand and so when I came here and when my son asked me, "Mom, I came a long way", I said, "You'll never know what a long way you came". I somehow related these flowers, and at that point, I told my sons; and at that point, the younger one wrote a book.

Q I see. So this birth is obviously the older one, the architect.

A Yes, yes.

Q And so what did you do then? You had your baby that you didn't feel comfortable.

A Well, that moment, that woman that she came from that church. She organized that whole block, everybody brought me every day a cup of milk or a little bit something. Then my husband came, and we were very, very poor, scraping by. And then he went to this place where he started bringing things, and this was going just a few months. And then the war was ended.

Q Had you heard anything of your own relatives by then?

A Nothing. A half a year later, I found my sister and my brother. That is a very interesting story because my uncle, as I mentioned before, most of my relatives were in Poland, and they were well-to-do people, intellectuals. And so after the war was over my grandfather's cousin was being made Minister of Defense, anyhow, so I quickly went to him and I told him who I am, and he said, "Listen,

the times are still very bad, you stay with your husband". So then I went with my husband to his place, and we took over what we could, and we started to exist. And then a Jewish woman would come by all the time, she would buy something from us or we would buy from her. And she maybe suspected that I was Jewish because my uncle said to stay incognito, so a lot of Jews were still being killed after the war. Whenever they found out that somebody was Jewish. And that Freida, that was her name, you know she said, "I'm going to be busy these days, I'm Jewish and Jewish people are now going to have a holiday called Passover and we are baking Matzos". And so I say, "What Matzos",which disturbed me incredibly. And she said they were crackers and they eat them for seven days. And I say, "Freida, that sounds like such a good thing. Here is money, how much do you want?" "Bring for me a bag of Matzos, I feel I would like to eat that too". She brings me a whole bag of Matzos.

The next day somebody knocks at my door, to hook or to crook, my brother and my sister found out that I survived and they came to my house the day before Passover.

Q Oh, gosh.

A And they didn't know it was Passover because we were like animals running around loose, nobody knew anything.

Q How did your brother and sister find out that you survived?

A How?

Q Um-hum.

A They were in (Lenberg) still, where I come from, and they were

on the market selling something and they see another girl. That girl turns out to be the one that works with me together. And when you -- the Jewish one -- and when my sister mentioned that I left with the Irish papers -- with the Gentile papers -- this is one in a million!

Q It is!

A One in a million! I'm talking this is in California, this is in New York, this is here, and she said, "That was your sister?", and she said "Yes, but they probably killed her". She said I'm selling everything because I'm going to go home, and I will go there and if I'll find her, I'll give the address where she saw me last.

And they came here, it was the day before Passover, every year my children they have friends over and they read the Hăggădah, you know, I always tell them I even have a better story. How I met my sister and my brother after the war, and I had Matzos with them.

Q That is amazing!

A Very amazing! In between, there was a lot of horror which I don't scratch.

Q Were you a religious person, say up to your twenties?

A Yes.

Q And did you remain a religious person?

A No, for a long time, I was very angry. I didn't even want my sons to be Jewish. No, I was very angry with my God. I thought I would never be Jewish again. But then there were such miracles happen, I say, maybe that's why.

Q What was your thinking around that time when you were marrying

a Polish man, I presume a Catholic?

A Well, he had his stories. He had his stories. He had his stories about his people, and he is a very righteous person, a very righteous person. And his mother, she was a Polish Countess. She comes from very high Polish nobility. Her husband was killed during the first war, and then she married another man who was his father, very nice, a very educated man; but he was not a Count, he was not a Polish nobility. Now his mother, who is from that line of Polish nobility, ignored those kids, ignored the younger kids that was born of the other husband, who was not a nobleman. They would come to the house and shake with the older kids, but wouldn't shake hands with him because his father was not -- and you know, he grew up so bitter and so against --

Q The class differences.

A The class differences. Polish people were slaves long after the slaves were freed in America, the colored people, do you know that?

Q Like a serfdom.

A Yes, yes. Even though they were Polish, they were still slaves. So then he helped me, he was very liberal, and he very wanted to save somebody's life. And, of course, we were very young, he fell in love with me.

Q So then it wasn't too long after that your liberation came.

A No, that was another story, a very bitter story. I mentioned to you that when the Russians came out to the school, and I knew the Russian language very well. At the last point it was very bad because

there was a place where two big rivers come together, the (Visla and Saun), and on a hill. So the Germans have a struggle there and the Russians were all around, so there was a lot of bloodshed there and there was a lot of hiding going on. So they didn't even look at the Jewish people - well, there were hardly any Jewish people - but nobody looked in your face, we were Polish people. And when the Russians were coming in, everybody was afraid to come out. They didn't know what to expect. And those people in this part of Poland, they didn't speak the language, so right away I volunteered that I speak the language. Now I was now very anxious to go because my baby was maybe nine or ten months old and very, very sick, terrible sick, barely dying. So I went out, for better or for worse, for a drop of water, people were just dying for lack of water. And I started to talk Russian, and it went through my mind that I'm going to tell them that I'm Jewish. But somehow, when I saw first these soldiers, I got scared. I just froze. I just started to tell them that I have a very sick child, is there a doctor. They said, "Yes, there is a doctor, but -- ", and I said, "My baby is dying, I need a doctor!"

Q Were you starving, or what?

A We were starving, and we had colitis. We were hiding, I was nursing, I had no milk, I had no food. And at that time, my husband, we were already all together, he found a goat to get some milk. He got terribly sick. I didn't know if my child would survive a couple more hours, so a soldier said, "Hey, you look pretty sick, you want a piece of bread?" I say, "Yes", so he say "Give me a knife, I'll give you

a piece of bread", those first soldiers that come in. And I I go back and he gets a knife, I have a knife, and he says, "Oh, you, you have such a bad knife, with such a knife I could only cut up juice". That was my first experience.

Q With liberation?

A This was my liberation. And so then I already pulled back, I just say, "Show me a doctor"; and then the way they behave -- the doctor say give the baby injections, glucose injections, and from then on they gave him injections, my baby was tough but he survived. He was sick for years.

Q From those same experiences?

A Yes. And then I would speak Russians and look for Jewish and I would always look for Jewish, how do you call it over there? KGE? KG? The Russian military police.

Q The KGB.

A The KGB. And so they had already some Jewish people, and then there was just very few people that I would confess that I was Jewish.

Q So there you were with your husband and trying to resume some little business there.

A Yes.

Q So you, your husband and your son, and uh--

A Yes, but the Russians took my son. The Russians took all the men away to the army.

Q Your husband was taken at the time of liberation?

A Immediately! Immediately at the time they separated

and he was taken away to the army, so I was alone with the baby again.

Q And then what did you do?

A And then what I did. I would go to the bakery and get a few breads and go the factory where they had sausages, and then as the Russian soldiers would come by, I would sell it to them.

I had an apartment, but I was afraid to live alone there. But I guess -- there was a Square there -- I guess I must have been smart because all over there were these Russian soldiers, so right away I went to the military police and I told them that I had that apartment. And that spot where we were, there was police girls, they directed traffic. So I told them I have an apartment, so should they go somewhere, why not come they live with me? So I had these soldiers, four Russian soldiers living with me.

Q Why were you afraid to live there by yourself?

A Because there was soldiers all over! I was a young woman, it was scary. What are you talking about? A Jewish man installed a bell for me so that it would ring if somebody would start knocking on the window too hard, I would ring the bell. And the soldier - well, you never saw a Russian girl soldier - she would come out with a gun like you never saw. It was so scary. Scary, scary, scary.

Q So was it common that the Russian soldiers were commonly raping the women in the town?

A Yes! It was scary, I was alone. It was not like that because other people had families, those Polish people, I didn't have nobody.

I was alone there with my son.

Q How did you manage to sell food there on the Square?

A Everything with a baby carriage. I wouldn't let this kid out of my sight for a second. I had a big baby carriage and I was selling food and --

Q How did you get the baby carriage in?

A We found someplace a baby carriage. This we found before. It wasn's fancy, but a carriage. We went through hell. And I always thought how would it be if my father and my mother would -- I was always overly protective of the child and I couldn't do much. I was a sickly child.

Q How did you understand what was going on yourself, the changes that were going on?

A I couldn't. I speak German, too. And in German there is a phrase means that if you have to do something, it could break iron.

Q When the need arises.

A When the need arises. When the need is great, you could break iron.

Q So you found out that you're a survivor.

A Yes, a survivor. One time we had absolutely nothing. My husband took the train someplace where he had cousins. Meanwhile, don't forget it's during the war, people don't have much. So he went some place with the hopes that he would get some money, some food. There was a train accident and he was hurt and he was just stuck in some hospital.

I was left alone again.

Q And this was during the war?

A Yes, during the war when I had already that baby. Everything blew up in our face.

Q What happened when he was inducted into the army?

A That was another miracle. You see, in Russia we were already liberated, but in Germany the war was still going on.

Q When was this?

A 1944.

Q Was it like in January or February?

A No, no. It was like August, August. And so then they took all the men - Jewish, Polish, they didn't care - and they would send them like a wall. Like they would put up a wall. These people weren't trained, they didn't know anything about fighting or anything. They just gave them outfits and guns and they put their people behind and pushed these people against the Germans. And like 95% of these people were killed. How did my husband survive? I save him. I heard about these young people, how they're not trained, so I went there again with my baby, and I went to a Polish. I didn't tell him I was Jewish. I told him just that I went through hell, that my whole family was wiped out, I have this kid. And now if my husband dies there - he knew that all of these people were dying - he was in the army, a Polish doctor, but he was getting all this from the Russians, the Russian doctors. He said, "My dear friend, my dear sister, I cannot do anything for you". I say, "I don't have money, I don't have anything. How could

we save his life?" He said, "Let him come to me, let him see me, maybe we'll come up with something". It's really an unheard of story. This is what happened. He examined him, and he had an indentation from a rock when a child. He examined him, and he say, "We'll play an epileptic". When the German -- when the Russian doctors came, you just throw yourself on the floor. And he told him how to kick and how to do, and he was doing -- it was pouring -- and this Polish doctor comes by and he say, "Oh, this is that poor epileptic, I have him every day, let the poor dog go". So they say he's unfit.

Q Oh, that's amazing.

A You know, I told you this is why I'm a fatalist. I told you I was in jail once; I was in jail three, four times because I because I have go out to go get food. I was arrested by that Polish police, the officer - not the officer, the -- what the rank, what's the highest one -- said to me when he brought me in, I told him the whole story that I was Polish, that my family was killed that --

Q Why were you arrested?

A Because they are suspecting that I am Jewish.

Q Was that why you were arrested every single time?

A Every single time, if they suspected. No matter how well I spoke, no matter how well I blunt. They smell out a Jew. And then again, you don't have any family, you don't have anything. So he told me "Look I'll send a telegram to your home town and find out if that true". So there's another door in the back, and I ran out the back.

Q And they didn't go looking for you?

A If he wanted to catch up, he wouldn't have left me.

Q Do you think that he wanted to let you go out the back door?

A Yes, yes.

Q So that some people were humane and some were not.

A Yes, some people. And another time when my husband had a job and he had a friend there, he was a Polish guy, and he had compassion for everybody. He was such a liberal guy. He always liked us very much, his name was Peter; and so I asked my husband, "Why don't you ask Peter, maybe he'll find a doctor for me, or someplace where I could have my baby". He liked us so much, he's our best friend. And my husband said, "No, no. I don't trust nobody".

And then we are sitting and talking, and we were saying that it was horrible to have the Germans, it was horrible to have that war, but at least they cleaned up Poland from that Jewish gangrene.

Q So your husband's instinct was right.

A The instinct was not to tell nobody.

Q When did you finally tell your husband you were Jewish?

A When he wanted to marry me.

Q Way back then you told him?

A Yes, I wouldn't marry somebody -- he says he loves me so much. I say, "You're crazy, you don't even know what will happen to you".

Q Well, he was very courageous.

A Yes, only young people would be so foolish.

Q And how did you escape your other arrests?

A Always something, I don't remember now. This is

why I'm telling you today is in spurts. What this story is already 35 years ago.

Q Um-hum. Well, your memory is still pretty good for details.

A Well, pretty good. But when you are asking 30 years ago, that's a big difference in every possible.

Q During the war when you were having such a horrible time, did you know already about the final solution and about the death camps in Poland?

A No, not to that extent. We knew they were taking people somewhere. The biggest horror that I saw was in my home town that they killed everybody. They killed everybody! They buried everybody. Some people were half alive when then buried them. I never went back to my home town because as you know, I was in a different part of Poland. I had just come back from Israel and my sister was telling me things that of what the Gentile people were telling her that at night those graves were moving. Those graves were moving! And there was so much steam coming up that people thought that it was raining or something. This is unbelievable! All the people from our areas were killed. We knew that they were taking them to work, to work. But nobody knew what was happening in these camps.

Q But in your home town, they wanted to destroy the entire Jewish population.

A Yes. Well, this is why my father -- when I don't want to talk about it or I don't want to do something, I remind myself that my father feels -- some people don't really know what happens. I feel that it's my obligation, you know. Most of the people thought that

nobody would survive. When you think that I wanted to leave my family and get out of the ghetto. I mean here was my whole family - my father, my brothers, my sister - and where was I going? I was among strangers, I just wanted to die. But they said, "Who knows, they may kill us all and then nobody will know what happened".

Q So you had to take that responsibility then.

A Yes, and somehow -- I don't know how it is, so many people in that ghetto thought that I would survive. There was -- I'm still looking for one man, I'm here in the States here already 40 years. Her son was here in the United States, which we used to refer as America, and she would say, "You'll survive. You will get to America and you will find my son (Smeilcha)". But since I been in New York, I look. I ask the organization, but he really must be in Canada. I really didn't get the opportunity to resume it there. But very often I think about it, I feel guilty. She always had such a feeling that I would survive, and she wanted me to look up her son. She wanted him to know how she died.

Q Now you describe yourself as a very frail, sickly child.

A Very sickly. When I was nine years old, I had kidney failure and there wasn't a doctor who thought I would survive.

Q They must have seen energy, strong.

A Yes, strong. This is what you say I'm strong, but I survived.

Q Apparently you did.

A I did. We came to New York, and around Jewish -- this is why now I work for a lot of different organizations because we didn't

have any relatives. My relatives were fairly well-to-do in Poland. And people who had means in Poland, they didn't go to other countries to work because from what I hear now, Jews in New York the conditions were pretty poor and if somebody had to exist there, why go.

So we came here and for the first three years, we lived in a basement apartment, a cold flat in New York, but we worked --

Q And so your husband by some mixed miracle got out of the Russian army and reunited with you.

A Yes, just shortly before my sister and my brother came. Here I was alone with the baby and here I had my husband and brother just before Passover.

Q Two extemes. And so then what did you do? You had your husband and your brother and --

A And so then we went to already a Jewish community, and my uncle, Dr. Philip Friedman, was there and he prepared for us an apartment and we were living there. And still war was going on.

And then, I think it was 1944 or 1945 when the Germans left Poland because they had to move further, it was backsliding. So we went to a big town and we opened up a store, a big store, and we got an apartment because the Germans got out so they gave these apartments to Jewish families.

Q The Polish authorities?

A It was Russian-Polish, Polish-Russian. Why did we leave there. We already had a nice apartment, and we had a nice store, a grocery store and this and that. And then the Russians started sticking

in their fingers in what we are doing and they confiscated everything. So we left with everything, with the baby and we crossed to Germany. We went to Czechoslovakia and then to Germany on these trains and we stayed in these camps for three years.

Q In Germany?

A In Germany.

Q By the way, how were the local Ukranian people after the war?

A Well, some of my friends when my sister and brother came, because they were hiding in the area where we lived, Polish friends came. We took them in washed and scrubbed them and gave them clothes and gave them food and they stayed with them until they left.

So you asked me if we had money and jewelry and that town where we had that farm , we had everything buried in the stable underground and nobody would dare to go there because some Jews went, and they were killed by the Ukrains. Do you understand?

So, some people were your friends, very decent people, and some people were just anti-Semitic. And then again, they were greedy and selfish because they took all the Jewish money, and Jewish places, and Jewish clothes and Jewish furniture, and they didn't allow them to come back.

Q Um-hum.

A You understand? So we had experience with a lot of good people, this is why we are here. This is why my sister is here and my brother, so just -- and then there was a Catholic Polish priest that invivted us to some celebration.

Q And what were the conditions in the camp?

A Terrible, terrible. It was just as bad as the ghetto, or worse.

It was that nobody was killing you, but the conditions were just terrible. Four families in one room, because they gave us where the military used to lived. So there were these big rooms, so they would put two, three people in this corner, two or three people in that corner, four families in one room. For three years we struggled like that.

Q What was the food like?

A Whatever America sent. Milk powder, egg powder, a little tomatoe juice and tomatoe sauce and sardines, whatever.

Q Administered by the Americans?

A By the (Hyette), all these Jewish organizations.

Q Did you have any meetings with the local German people? I mean, did you run into them very much?

A No. We would go into town and pray that we could get a little American cigarette, a little piece of fresh bread, some butter occasionally. We would get some cheese, which we weren't used to, that yellow blocks of cheese. So they would give you a little fresh flour - this was the extent of the association.

Q Did you have any type of feelings towards the Germans?

A Hostility. What kinds of feelings could you have? I still can't look at them.

I was almost beaten up once because I was sitting in the park with my little baby, and some neighbors were saying, "Don't worry so much about him, don't be so over-protective. One day he'll bring a colored girl home, and he'll have her". And I think what's wrong with a colored girl as long as she's not German. Now, these people -- I say, "What's

wrong with a colored girl?" They've had enough problems. You see some of us could hide because we had white skin, and they could not hide because they had colored skin, and this is my feeling and this is what I told my children.

Q You still have strong negative feelings towards the Germans?

A Of course.

Q I mean even the current generation.

A The current generation, I don't know. But you know, the first time I came in touch with them was in Israel and so many of them, they were swarming around in these hotels.

Q Do you feel ready to finish then now?

A Yes, because more or less I give you a lot of jumping around.

Q Well, life isn't organized, either.

A And especially in the prospective of such a long time.

Q Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to add before you finish?

A I feel that I am very privileged. I think, "Why me?" There were so many people deserving, maybe more deserving, and why me? It's really so much by fate again. I fly so much by planes and I do so much, and I believe that I have no fear in me because I believe that what I survived --

Q So you feel that you faced death so many times?

A So many times! So many times! My oldest brother was never in a ghetto, he was never sent to labor because he was in this part of Poland where we had a lot of property, where people knew us. They

say we were friendly with Gentile people, a lot of girls were in love with him. And he was just sitting there, and that day when he was going to the ghetto to bring his girlfriend out and he was killed. One day in the ghetto.

Q Well, again, fate.

A Do you understand?

Q So do you think that a lot of people feel guilty because they survived.

A No, I don't feel guilty because in some ways I feel that I contributed a lot. And there were some incidences after the war when we could perk up and we could help a lot of people, a lot of helpless people. Unfortunately, some people are very helpless.

Q Yes, that's true.

A Some people are so helpless. I remember after the war I had two slips, and I would wear one and the other one I would give the other girl who didn't have anything. And she wasn't clean and I gave it to her, and then I washed it for her. And with the last bite of food, we managed. I don't know. Somehow, it was unbelievable stories. Even in the United States, we came quite penniless, and we are quite comfortable now.

Q What did you do?

A What kind of work -- in the beginning, my husband washed dishes and I worked in a restaurant. But then we started to learn the language and then he started to work in a very fine hotel, the Sheritan, and he occupied the management position, and I worked in the restaurant.

Then I had my own restaurant, and then I got into real estate. So, somehow, I was capable and so was my husband. Our two boys went through college and everything. We did it all ourselves. And in a way I say we give contributions. We do a lot of charity work. My husband worked with underprivileged children as a volunteer.

Q So you feel that you've made a lot of social contributions in life.

A Yes, social contributions, material too. Material, too.

Q Did you keep up your Jewish culture when you came here?

A After a while, after a while. And now my sons are keeping up more than, yes, they have a very strong --

Q And I guess your husband was always okay with that.

A Yes, because it's not so much in the religion, it's more in the culture. He could do what he wants, and I could do what I want.

When you are fair and honest with yourself and other people, I guess everything could be done because we are all people. And all the other things are just what people create.

Q This is true. Do you feel that you have a belief in any kind of God. You said that you had felt bitter and angry after a while.

A Yes. There was so many times when I say, "My God has failed me". When I got so sick with the trip to New York, to Israel, and the plane was delayed - I have angina pectora - what happened was my plane was delayed and I was put up in the Plaza, the Airport Plaza in New York and I came in the morning, and I say, "My God, this is such a terrific thing that happened". A lot of nice things, and the bad ones

we have to endure because -- having two healthy children is a big blessing.

Q Yes, especially with the difficult time with your older child.

A Yes, having two healthy children is a big blessing. And living the way we lived, we had a beautiful standard of life.

Q You made reference to the fact that 35 years ago, you told your story. Was it the first few years after the war was over that you could talk very easily about your experiences?

A No, I was almost forced to do it by Mr. (Schmuran) - he's such a wonderful guy - so I said I'll talk about it. But I didn't want it to be published at that time. I'd have that story translated and I'll give it to my son.

Q You said also that you had to hide from your children, that you didn't want to talk to them about your experiences. Were they ever curious, I'm sure they were, about your history and the war.

A Yes, the war. But somehow, we didn't talk about it. Now I have regrets, but then they would have someone to blame.

Q That's true, that's true. Did you ever talk to other friends and relatives.

A Oh sure. When I was in Israel, all we talk about -- like I mentioned to you about that girl that I met after 50 years.

Q And what about all the other relatives. Your mother had so many sisters.

A Everybody was killed. Everybody!

Q Only your brother and sister survived.

A No, there's one cousin in New York. Polish people rescued her, also a Polish family.

Q Was it difficult for your children in the position they were in that they had no grandparents, and no --

A Oh, that was painful. When my younger son was in school, and when he was already in school, in first grade, he said, "What's a Grandma?" He didn't even know the meaning. It was painful. And my husband and I were very overly protective. And now they are blaming us because we were over protective, we didn't teach them, we didn't tell them. But when you have only those two children, you always have to call out and make sure they come home on time.

Q And so you were feeling like something might happen to them?

A Yes, this -- if in five minutes I didn't hear from somebody or the plane didn't land, or -- yes. The paranoia is there, it's still very much there.

Q But you had plenty of experience to go by.

A Yes, well I think during the day it's okay, but at night I would wake up and get palpitations, and who knows what happens.

Q Does he have any relatives left at all?

A He went last year to Poland for the first time. His parents are dead. As I mentioned, he has from that first marriage, one sister. So he doesn't keep up too much.

Q Have you been back?

A No. It's like opening a closet with ghosts. Maybe eventually. So thank you very much. So I'm glad that you have these books here.

Q Well, you survived everything else.

A I suggest that you read them.

Q I am going to.