Interview with MIRIAM SAMUEL
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: December 10, 1991
Interviewers: Barbara Barer
Susie Kisber
Transcriber: Lisa Polonsky-Britt

MS. BARER: Today's Tuesday, December 10, 1991, and we're in San Francisco. And I'm Barbara Barer interviewing Miriam Samuel, and Susie Kisber is the second interviewer and Lorie Sosna is the camera person.

And Miriam's done an interview before, so I'm just going to do a little bit of background and then talk about more of the things that you want to talk about.

Q: LET ME JUST START BY ASKING: HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?

A: I'm sixty-seven.

Q: AND WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

A: I was born in Czechoslovakia.

Q: IN WHICH CITY?

A: In a small town. It was called Dolvo.

Q: AND HOW DO YOU SPELL IT?

A D-O-L-V-O, Dolvo.

Q: DOLVO. AND HOW MANY CHILDREN WERE IN YOUR FAMILY?

A: There were eight children. I had seven brothers. One was older than me, and the rest were all younger.

Q: YOU ARE THE SECOND OF EIGHT CHILDREN?

A: -- Of eight children. And my parents, when they took us away, were very young. My father was forty-one; my mother was forty.

Q: WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOUR FATHER DO?

A: We had businesses, like tobacco and alcohol licenses; the only ones in town because my father was a war veteran. And my father also had other kinds of business, because for a large family like that, it was hard to just have -- from -- make a living out of that. We also owned land.

He -- my father was a little bit of everything. He was an engineer. He designed bridges for the town. They weren't like the San Francisco bridge or anything, but they were the smaller bridges over rivers and stuff.

He also was exporting fruit to France. And he worked with other kinds of wood materials for ties for railroads. He was selling them. He did all kinds of things.

And the time when I was growing up there was a depression, and business just couldn't make it. The taxes were very high at the time, so he had to do other things to make a good living for the family -- to make a living for the family, I should say.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR FAMILY NAME?

A: Farach, my father's name was Martin Farach.

Q: SPELL FARACH.

A: F-a-r-a-c-h, Farach. And it was spelled differently at different times, because when the Russians were there it was with an "o". When the Hungarians came in it was with an "a". So it was --

But it's Farach.

Q: THAT WAS ALWAYS SPELLED ONE WAY WHEN YOU WERE GROWING

UP, OR --

A No, there were changes, too, because our country had Czech offices, Russian people working in it, and it was really kind of a -- Czechoslovakia was just about for twenty years, so things changed a little bit.

Q: NOW, YOU TALKED ABOUT YOUR PARENTS BEING TAKEN AWAY WHEN THEY WERE VERY YOUNG.

A: Yes.

Q: DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT THAT, OR DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT --

A: Yes, I would like to talk about that, too, because I don't think that any people from that -- from those people survived except, as far as I know, myself. I'm the only one who survived.

First of all, I did lose all my seven brothers there in Poland where they took us to, and my father. And my mother survived with me and she came back, and I'll come to that later.

But I will start, where we lived the Jews were separate. We didn't live in a ghetto, but we kept together, the Jewish people. And we lived pretty close to one another, also.

When Hungary and Germany divided Czechoslovakia we were -- the Hungarians took us. We were in the Carpethian part where it was before Austria Hungary. And it's just the Hungarians were for about -- I think they

occupied us late in '39, and in '41 -- and I don't -- don't keep me to the dates, because I don't remember dates -- but in '41, in the middle of the summer -- it was late June or early July -- I know it was before my seventeenth birthday, came to the door one Saturday morning, knocked on the door, and told us to be ready in two hours.

Q: WHO KNOCKED ON THE DOOR?

A: Jhondars and the town police, whoever was volunteering to be police in town.

I -- by that time they already have taken away from the Jewish people all the rights. We couldn't go to school. Our house was taken over in part by Hungarian Army for -- because we had a bigger house than most people because of the businesses -- they take over for a field hospital for -- two doctors living in our house, and we just got the kitchen and two rooms.

Q: DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT WHAT YOUR LIFE WAS LIKE BEFORE THAT TIME, OR DO YOU WANT TO GO AHEAD --

A: Well --

Q: I MEAN, LIKE ABOUT WHAT YOUR CHILDHOOD WAS LIKE, WHAT YOUR NORMAL LIFE WAS LIKE BEFORE THESE THINGS HAPPENED.

A: Well, I would say that my childhood was quite happy. I was an only girl with seven brothers, so I was -- and my father didn't have a sister, just one brother, and --

I don't know, I was cherished, like I don't know what. I also was my mother's helper, because boys usually

have to study in Europe, they were thinking boys have to make a living, so they had to study more than the girls. And I was my mother's helper, and with so many children you can imagine that she needed all the help.

I also used to help for my father in the business. When he wasn't there I made decisions for him, and most of the time they worked out. So he took me to all kinds of business meetings and -- his little girl -- I was his -- Whenever he made some deal, he always brought me along. He called me his fishkal, which means his lawyer.

So life was, for me, was happy. I mean, I had a happy childhood.

Q: HOW FAR DID YOU GO IN SCHOOL?

A: Eighth grade. And then after that there was no school; the schools were closed.

Q: BECAUSE --

A: Because the war started. You see, the Czechs mobilized, and in our towns we just had school to the eighth grade, and if you wanted to go to middle school you had to go to another town.

And my brother went to the gymnasium, which was at Huszt. He was going to be a doctor, but then, as time went on, he couldn't go to school because he was Jewish. And our businesses were also taken away because we were Jewish.

Q: WHEN DID YOU FIRST START NOTICING THINGS CHANGING

BECAUSE YOU WERE JEWISH?

A: As soon as -- as soon as we were taken over by the Hungarian; as soon as Hitler started mobilizing --

You know, when the war started they took a part of Shlasia, you know, from England; gave away part of Czechoslovakia to Germany, and there was among the people a certain unrest, and right away they picked on the Jews.

Q: HOW OLD WERE YOU AT THAT TIME?

A: When the whole thing started I was fourteen years old, a little bit over fourteen. And then, as I say, because of the school -- there were no school at all. And then when there was, Jewish children weren't allowed to go to middle school or to gymnasium. It's also private and very expensive.

Q: WERE ALL YOUR FRIENDS JEWISH?

A: No, I had friends that weren't Jewish. I used to study with non-Jewish friends, and they used to stay overnight and we used to have breakfast -- they used to have breakfast at our house because, of course, I wouldn't eat at their house.

We also used to have a shabbes goy; that's what we called them. We used to hire somebody who carried on our business on Shabbat.

Life for me, you know, for where I was at that time, I thought it was pretty good. I didn't know any better, either.

My father also wanted to send me away to England, and from there he thought I might find my way to the United States.

Q: WHY DID HE WANT TO SEND YOU AWAY?

A: Because when things started, he saw the writing on the wall that things are happening that aren't very good for the Jewish people, and he wanted to save some of his children and I guess I was the one who he was going to save. I had a passport ready and everything, but I couldn't travel because Germany already had closed borders and we had to go through Germany to go anyplace. And I was too young to travel by myself; I wasn't allowed to travel. We had to be over a certain age, so I didn't go anyplace.

As I say, things were very difficult. I did talk quite a lot about that in the other tape, how hard it was to make the living. And I would like to get more into some of the other things what happened.

Q: GOOD.

A: When, as I said, when they knocked on the door one Saturday morning, and in 1941 the Hungarian, they -- there was going around a story that a lot of Jews are on the black list, the Jews they don't want to have around, and I think my father was one of them. The reason is because my father was a veteran. He was a little bit more educated than most, and could make some trouble, maybe.

Q: WHICH WAR WAS HE A VETERAN OF?

A: World War I. He was seventeen years old, and he lost a hand in the war when he was seventeen. And they could have took out the bullet and he would have been all right, but the nurse thought because he is such a milk-faced kid -- my father was a redhead, looked very young -- that she didn't want him to go to war, so she didn't take out the bullet, and let him get infected. And they had to cut off his hand. So he was a very young war veteran, but he was a war veteran.

So when -- and then the war ended, the First World War --

Well, I'm jumping here from place to place.

Q: HE WAS ON THE BLACK LIST, THEN?

A: He was on the black listing because he usually used to fight about taxes because he was more versed; he could write letters and go to talk to the head of the government and stuff like that. So he was considered a threat, and some other Jews, too; whoever had something against certain Jew, they were on the black list.

Well, when they came in they got us that Saturday morning. They told us we have two hours: Take three day's of food, bring all of your valuables with you, and whatever you can carry. Well, everybody --

They didn't give us the two hours they told us. But neighbors came to the house, and they were right away dividing our fortune: "I'm going to take this," and, "I'm

going to take that." The anti-semitism was so great that it was unbelievable.

These were people that we were next door neighbors with, and were the best of friends. And they even asked my mother: "Wouldn't you, Helen, like me to have your kitchen set?" or, "Wouldn't you like me to have your bedroom set?" or, "I would like to take your linen," that type of stuff. So it was very heartbreaking to hear that.

And it was very sudden. They took us illegally. They did not have permission from any government or from any upper office to take us. They just took us because they wanted to take us at this time, illegally, just like kidnapping.

Q: WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THOSE WHO WERE TAKEN ILLEGALLY AND --

A: That was -- it was later. You see, they didn't take all the Jews then, in '41 from where we lived. They took a group, and by the time it got to the higher offices, a lot of people were on the other side of the border.

So we were illegally taken. They claimed that all the Jews came from Poland, and they wanted to send us to Poland.

Anyway, my father took all of his papers; his release papers from the Army, that he was honorably discharged, and all of his citizenship papers, all of that thing. They told us to take those things. They took us to a railroad

station.

From the railroad station they brought together all the people from other towns taken the same way as us, and it was on Shabbat and we were very observant, so that was another shock.

By that time Jews had already suffered the type of anti-semitism, like cutting off their beards, beating them; they did that before, too, but at this time they did it more.

So when -- they took us on a train to the Polish border. We rode all day Saturday, and then during the night and the next morning, like Sunday morning we got to the border. And on the border were Hungarian and Polish military groups. They told us to get off the train.

Q: YOU WERE ON THE BORDER OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND --

A: And Poland.

Q: -- AND POLAND.

A: They brought us there --

Q: RIGHT.

A: -- by train. They told us to get off. And my father took his papers and he went to the -- some general who was in charge there, and he said, "Sir, I am from such and such regiment, and my father and my grandfather and my great grandfather and my wife's parents were all born here in the town where we were taken from. And I was a loyal soldier," and all of that. And he said to my father, "Are you a

Jew?" and my father said, "Yes," and he says, "There is no Jewish citizens in this country."

And I remember my father coming back. He aged at that time, like he came back and he was bent over. We saw that something's wrong. And then came the Polish, or the Ukrainian Black Shirts. They wore black uniforms. They were like military police or from their country, I don't know, they were the same as SS, except they were the Ukrainian and the Poles.

And they took us and started -- told us to line up with our kids and our packages and just told us to march. And they herded us from place to place for three weeks.

Now, they weren't very kind. I think what happened is they were -- in each town they changed groups, you know, from each town there was a different group of people taking us over, and they had night sticks and switches like you do for cattle. And they were beating us, and if you --

Some of the older people who couldn't keep up, or children who were left behind, they were beaten to death, clubbed to death by them.

Q: SO AT THIS POINT WERE YOU ALL TOGETHER WITH YOUR FAMILY?

A: At this point, yeah, we were all together.

Q: WHERE DID YOU EAT? WHERE DID YOU SLEEP?

A: Well, we slept wherever they would let us sleep, on the side of the road; we slept by creeks, wherever they

brought us and told us, "This is where you are staying tonight," that's where we stayed.

We did not sleep -- was lucky it was summer. We did not sleep indoor at any time.

Q: WHAT DID YOU EAT?

A: Not very much. They did not, in the whole three weeks, they -- I'll tell as time goes on what we got once -- just what we took along. And the bread and dried fruit or whatever we had with us by then, you know, started -- we ate it all up and there wasn't much left. So people ate -- they had some raw beans or whatever. There wasn't very much food left, and we didn't even think about eating; they were beating us. We were hungry. They were beating us, and when families saw that some of their family was left behind and killed, people were running more everybody frontwards, and this was going on, as I say, for three weeks.

Then at some point they brought us to where farmers were working in the fields, and they told us to sit down on the side of the road where the farmers were working, and we thought they were going to give us a rest. But instead of that, the people from the fields came with their shovels and implements and were beating us over our heads. I'm talking about all kinds of people, young and old. Nobody said, "Don't do it."

They -- if they saw somebody had on shoes that they

wanted, they took it off. They tore out my earrings. For many years I couldn't wear pierced earrings because of it.

Q: WHAT ELSE HAPPENED TO YOU?

A: Well, on this trip I was just beaten with a switch that went around my legs, and I had welts all over, and my mother told me not to let my father see it because she was afraid he'll commit suicide if he sees that I was, you know, that --

I was in the back, carrying my -- I had a little brother who was three years old, and I carried him, a tablecloth tied around my back, carried him in the back, carried him in the front, because my mother had other small children, you know -- she didn't carry them, but she had to take care of them, and I always felt like I was stronger than her.

So I carried my little brother this whole time, my three-year-old brother. When we -- and then they -- that was one occasion. There were a lot of things. Then at each stop when they let us stop for a while, usually it was at -- somewhere there was water, a creek or a river or something, so we would -- we drank the water, washed our feet. Most of us didn't have shoes anymore because they were taken away from us. So many people changed; in each town everybody wanted something.

They also took out the young girls and raped them along the way. Some came back, some never did. In some of

these places when they stopped they took out -- they said, "We need ten or twenty strong men who are willing to work." Of course, everybody wanted to work. Nobody wanted to be hungry and just be herded like animals. So people came and they were picked out. These people were taken and shot for sport, and we never saw them again. And I'll tell you how I know about it after.

Then we came to a place where it was -- a farm with -- had a big barn just with a roof on it, and they told us to get in there and rest. And then town people brought us boiled potatoes. Everybody got one boiled potato. And we thought: What a wonderful community that they finally recognized that we are human beings and are giving us something to eat. Then we finished the potato; they told us to lie down, and they walked on us with their boots, not one or two, but a group of people -- on the heads, on our heads and on our feet. We were just kind of lying down like sardines.

They also picked out twenty men there, and they picked out a lot of girls and they raped them, and you heard them scream. But they picked out twenty men and they took them to a field and they were making sport out of them. They were shooting them. And it was late in the day and it started getting dark, and one of those people jumped -- there was a creek close by with bushes around it. He jumped in and hid there. He wasn't shot. That's how we

found out, because he, somehow he got back and I got back, then he told me. But he isn't alive anymore, either, because he went to Auschwitz just like -- later.

This was all still in the first few weeks, in the first three weeks. Then they took us all the way to where the fighting was going on between the Germans and the Russians.

Q: WHERE WAS THAT; DO YOU KNOW?

A: I don't remember the town. I remember the scene -- and we didn't know what town we were in because they didn't tell us, and they were herding us like animals; we couldn't look. I mean, they took us whichever way they want to.

We walked between 35 and 40 kilometer a day. Now, that's with bundles and with children and without shoes -- and hungry. So we came to this place where the war was -- they were fighting the day before, and by a church. They brought us by a church, for some reason. They told us to sit there.

It was still bloody and fresh from the fighting the day before. I think they had a fight there. And we could smell the blood. And they told us that it's all of our fault because we are communists and that the Jews are at fault for this war.

So every time that things -- we were beaten more and punished more, and they turned us around from there and brought us to Stanislauvo, which was a very large Jewish

city in the Ukraine. It's Poland, but it's the Ukrainian part. There they took us to the Gestapo.

They took us in a courtyard which went around a circle like a maze. They took us in there. Now, we are still -- this is still people who are local citizens dressed in these black shirts, and acting as police, as some type of authority there.

They brought us in there, and -- between two buildings. One building had the back and one the front, two 2-story buildings. They told us to stand in four against the wall.

While we were there, this is the first time I saw a German. Germans came, German officers with their dogs and their tall, shiny boots, and we all had to stand like at attention. All the men had to take off their hats.

There was one old man who didn't take off his hat. I think he was beaten so much he didn't know where he was. He was just shaking forth and back. He was completely out of it. Then this German officer went and sent his dog to kill him -- to -- in front of us the dog tore him apart to pieces. This was our first reception with the Germans.

Now, this was a German Gestapo. It was a -- that's a German prison where we were in now. But we were on outside. We were facing the prison. We stayed there for ten days. They told us to sit against -- the way we were standing -- to sit down, and we weren't supposed to move

any other place, just sit there.

We were facing the prison, to the prison. During the day they used to bring in some people. They would come, like business people with their satchel or attache case; mostly men, fairly young, well dressed. They brought them in. During the night we heard them scream. In the morning we saw them being brought out, dead. So I think they felt like these are people who are against them or ar not with them, I don't know.

Q: WERE THEY JEWISH?

A: I don't know. I have no idea. But this is where we were.

Q: WAS ALL YOUR FAMILY TOGETHER STILL?

A: Well, we are still not with our family. We were there about at -- we started out like two thousand people. Here we were maybe eight hundred or something.

Q: BUT ARE YOU STILL THE TEN OF YOU?

A: Yeah, we were still together. We were still sitting there. Now, because we didn't have food or water a lot of the younger children and some old people died right there. Some of them were killed on the way because they couldn't make it, you know, walk so fast. But some of them died there, sitting there because they, you know, it's a long time for -- to be there for that long.

It was actually the first few days that they died. And we asked the people who were standing there watching

over us, would they please take away the dead. It was summer, I mind you. And they said, "No. You'll be so hungry you'll eat them."

There were rain barrels of water on the side of the building, and we would go in at night and steal a handful of water. That was our most -- that was about all we got the whole time.

Then the ninth day, a lot of German trucks came, and German officers, and then they said, "We want to get all of the healthy people to stand up and come with us. We need people to go to work."

Everybody was running to go to work. I went with my father and with my three older brothers -- well, one older and two younger. But the rest of them were real little still. And they were supposed to go up in the next --

As I say, it was like a maze back in the other courtyard -- and I went with them. And they didn't watch so much anymore the women and the old people who were left behind.

My mother came running and she said, "I want you to come back." and she again told me to put on the scarf and she told me to hold my little brother and say, if they asked me, that he is my child. And I listened to my mother. I came back and I left my father and my three brothers there.

There were trucks there, you know, parked, and they

were loading, and in a way we were kind of excited and happy that they are going to take them to work, because if they take people to work they are going to give them water and food. Well, I guess it didn't happen. These are the people who were the very first ones to be executed over those graves that they had to -- you probably saw in the films -- that they had to get undressed and be shot.

My mother, as I say, saved me then because she brought me back and told me to hold my brother. Then the following day they let us out of there, but before they did they went on the -- from the second story windows and they threw some food at us, what I think those prisoners brought days before. There were all kinds of sandwiches, hard boiled eggs, I don't know, just food. And they threw it from the second story window to see how we were going to kill each other to try to catch food. See, they didn't give it to us; they threw it, and the thing just fell apart all over the place.

But then that same day they took us out through the gate and they handed us over to the Jewish agency in Stanislavo. Stanislavo had a ghetto. Inside the ghetto they had a place that was called Rudolf's milla, and they surround this with barbed wire and made it into a camp for us. By then I think there were left 250 or so people.

Q: OF THE ORIGINAL TWO THOUSAND?

A: Yeah, of the original two thousand.

Now, these were mostly women and children and very old people, you know, who weren't capable of working, or that's what we thought. Then they brought us -- I still remember we were so hungry -- and they gave us cooked arbuss, you know. I don't think they had, you know -- you don't know what that means. Those are the big horse beans, like kava beans, I think, cooked. We got -- everybody got about a ladle full in the hand. And this is the first food that we had in who knows how long.

Then they took us to this Rudolf's Milla, and there was established already a kitchen with some people who are cooking there, and they fed us very thin soup and some bread. And we were surrounded with barbed wire, like in a camp, and Jewish police were at the gates watching. So we were inside of a ghetto, and inside of the ghetto it was a camp, and we were in that camp. So we weren't equal with the other Jews who lived in the ghetto.

Q: WHAT WERE THE JEWISH POLICEMEN WATCHING FOR?

A: Well, you see, in the ghettos, when the Germans were occupying that area, they had Jewish police. They had the Jewish -- complete Jewish community that had to take care of themselves. In other words, there were the English -- the Yiddisha Gamaynda they called it. The Jewish agency had their own directors, and they had to have police and they had to have order and they had to have people who divided the food and the housing and what have you. So

they had to have their own government, in other words.

So we weren't supposed to leave that place. They wouldn't let us out. We were locked up. In the kitchen worked a German woman -- well, she called herself a German -- woman who was sent back from Germany because they said that she is from Polish ancestors. She worked in that kitchen, too.

When we came there, by that time I had an infected foot from, I think a stone, or a little stone got in or whatever. It was infected to the point that some young medics or people who studied to be doctors came to see us to see, you know, what's wrong with us, if they can help some. And when they came to me and they saw my foot, they said that they had to take me to the hospital because my leg has to be amputated. It was swollen all the way up, red, infected, and -- and it was very painful. And it was hard as a rock.

So, of course -- first of all, they didn't take me right away, and secondary, I wouldn't have gone anyway. And there was nothing in this Rudolf's milla. All we had where we stayed is the sawhorses with boards on it. That's where we slept on, little beds like that. It was one next to the other. It was a four-story building, and we were pretty close together.

Q: WHAT DO THEY CALL IT AT, LIKE THE ENCAMPMENT, INSIDE THE GHETTO; WHAT DO THEY CALL IT?

A: They call it a lager, Rudolf's Milla Lager they called this place where we stayed. I think it used to be a mill, and it was Rudolf's milla so they called it Rudolf's Milla Lager.

Q: WHAT DOES "LAGER" MEAN?

A: "Lager" means a camp, like a concentration camp.

But, you see, they brought us from someplace else, so we weren't allowed into the ghetto.

Q: WHY?

A: We were separate. You don't ask questions, you know.

Q: THAT'S HOW IT WAS.

A: That's how it was.

So we were getting very little food, and --

Q: I INTERRUPTED YOU ABOUT THE LEG.

A: With the leg --

So they were going to amputate. They said they are going to bring a doctor with more experience and they are going to take me to the hospital.

Well, in the meantime there -- we didn't have any water and we didn't have anything to soak my foot in or anything to help me, so my mother -- I don't know where she heard it or what, but she asked a policeman by the gate could she go out in the street and bring in cow or horse manure, and she packed my foot in that because it had moisture in it. And -- what people can do in need.

And she wrapped it around in that, and it started

feeling better because it took some of the heat out, you see. And by morning the thing turned white, I mean the -- my bottom of my foot turned completely white like, you know, soaked out from this stuff. And I wiped it off.

My mother sharpened a knife and we got a big needle from somebody, and I myself cut -- everybody left the place -- and I myself started the needle and saw with that knife that my mother sharpened on a stone until I cut the thing -- it was very thick -- until I cut the thing through where the infection was.

And the thing started coming out, and my foot got better. So when I did this, then when these doctors came again to look and my foot looked better --

And I cleaned it out and, you know, I did -- it helped me because the thing -- it was a lot of pus that came out. I remember squeezing and screaming so -- nobody was around there -- until blood came, you know, after the pus.

Anyway that started healing, and they thought I'm something and they wanted to help me, you know, these doctors. They set up a little office and they took me in there to wash bottles and stuff like that. There was nothing to do.

Then this German woman decided that I could help her in the kitchen, so they took me. I was lucky. They took me into the kitchen, and I would help with some of the

work, wash the kettles. I would get in the kettles, they were so big, wash and lick out the food, whatever was left over. Every little bit helps when you are really hungry and you need the calories.

So we were there from -- well, I don't know, from about August in '41 until Passover.

Q: WERE YOU TOGETHER WITH YOUR MOTHER AND BROTHERS?

A: Except for the brothers that were taken away.

Q: I MEAN THE YOUNGER BROTHERS.

A: And then my youngest brother died there from hunger. I remember when I went in the morning in the kitchen I saw him. He was very quiet. He had this big belly like you see in the pictures, with the thin little legs. He didn't cry. He didn't -- he was just lying there, listless, and we had nothing to give him. I mean, you know, it just --

Children need nourishment. And then I came out, came up at night and my mother told me, "He's dead."

Q: AND YOU'D CARRIED HIM ON YOUR BACK FOR THREE WEEKS.

A: Yeah. So -- I don't think I even cried [voice breaking] because I -- somehow it seemed like maybe he is better off. And I said, "Well, where is he?" and she said, "Well, they took him away," you know, "He died; they took him away."

And then the hunger was so great there. When the Germans -- during the winter the Germans didn't -- wanted the food for themselves. They didn't give enough food for

us. They took everything away anyway, what was in the country there. So they didn't give too much food for the ghetto, and especially for us. We were even lower than that because they brought us from someplace else.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH THE JEWS IN THE GHETTO?

A: No, no. Nobody came. I think everybody had their problem, except for these few people who came in to work there, like the police and, I think a couple of times they brought me a half a sandwich; they shared their food with me. They didn't have much.

So then -- and my other three little brothers, they were quite talented and they got -- two of them got themselves into the children's home -- it was called Orphan's home -- right there in the same lager. You know, some of the parents died and there was nobody.

They got themselves in as entertainers. One of my brothers played the violin, and there was singing -- as I told you, that --

We had a very happy home with a lot of singing. My father was a singer, and all of that, so they -- two of them -- because they got a little bit more food, so -- took up in there, and the older one stayed with us, with me and my mother. And the baby died -- I mean the three-year-old died.

When I went to Israel to Yad Vashem I saw these pictures, and it almost looked like it's my brother, you

know, the big belly and the thin little feet; couldn't stand it. I just -- you know.

Then a few days later my mother started swelling up like she is going to be dying, you know, from hunger. For about three or four weeks we didn't get any food at all.

Q: HOW DID YOU LIVE?

A: You live. I mean, you survive. Some did, some didn't, as I say, you know.

My mother started swelling up. They gave us warm water, you know; the people came in in the kitchen and they heated some water, which helps, and it was winter and the people had already, you know, you already suffered through so many months.

My mother started -- because my brother was swelling up, too, before he died, and it really scared me, my mother is getting swollen. And this German woman knew that, you know, she brought me a cube of sugar for me; she wanted me to survive. So she brought me a cube of sugar, and her name was Wasserman, and I remember putting it in my bosom and running upstairs, the fourth -- we were on the fourth floor -- to give it to my mother because I thought that might save her. And it probably did, believe it or not, a cube of sugar, because the -- it's somehow unbelievable. It stops hurting, hunger. It just makes a person weak and don't -- not caring.

So after that, a few days after that food came to the

camp, a full truckload of food. Before they even unloaded it everybody went and got in line, and the food wasn't even cooked, I mean -- so they are going to cook it. And they waited in line to get the food.

The same time the German trucks came with their machine guns and soldiers and surrounded the whole [Rudolf's miller]. They got -- came in. We couldn't escape anyway, you know. There was no way to go, no way out. They surrounded it while we were standing to get our first meal in a long time. And people took their food and went straight on the trucks. They knew where they were going, just like, "I don't care" type of thing. They just went on the trucks.

And my mother came down and she -- we spoke standing in line to get the food. And I said to my mother, "How can we take our food when we are going to be killed?" You know, by this time we knew we were going to be killed. And my mother said, "At least I'll die with a full stomach."

And we stood there and we got our food. It was just, I think, some type of grits cooked, you know, wheat ground up and just in water, nothing else. We got our watery soup and we're going -- can't climb up. It's so hard when you are so weak, to go up four flights of stairs.

We go up the stairs, and my mother says to me, "I'm not going on that truck, and you are not going on that truck. And I talked to your brothers. We have to escape."

I said, you know,

"How do you escape?" She says,

"Well --" and she was thinking about this kind of thing constantly -- she says,

"If they take me on the truck, I'll jump off. If they take you or if they took us both, don't think that if I'm there that you have to go. Jump off, and I'll jump. And I'll tell your brothers to do the same.

"They cannot kill us twice, and it's better to be a live rabbit than a dead lion. Don't be proud. And if you break a leg, you'll break a leg or an arm, but at least they are not going to -- you are not going to be going willingly to the slaughter."

So I guess I listened to my mother very closely, what she was telling me. In the meantime, when everybody willingly went on the trucks, the trucks were driving away and coming back and loading, you know. Then finally they started, the Germans with their dogs started going from floor to floor to see that nobody is hiding. There was no place to hide except, as I say, they just had these boards on top of the sawhorses, you know, so there was no place to hide. There were no closets.

Q: SO WHERE WERE YOU?

A: We were waiting for them to come up to the fourth floor. When they came up there, we hid under two of those things together, and my mother on purpose was sticking out;

she was on top of me, I was against the wall, she is sticking out. The Germans came in and they said, "He nause, he nause," and my mother said, "Ja wohl" and she moved the sawhorse from underneath the board so the board fell on top of me, you know, one side did, and I stayed there and they took her.

And by then it was already night. It was dark.

Q: WERE YOU ALONE?

A; Alone, completely alone. There was nobody left in the whole camp. I was all by myself. I remember my heart beating -- I wanted to get up and go, too, you know. After all, my mother is going. I have nobody. But she told me that I stay, so I did.

And I knew that, you know, she did this to protect me. And she told me so that I better not move.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER THE LAST THING SHE SAID TO YOU?

A: At that time she told me, "Don't move." She says, "If they take you, jump." It doesn't -- she says, "They can't kill you twice."

And all along she was telling me that somebody needs to tell the story to her brothers. She had three brothers in Oakland.

"Somebody has to tell my brother what's happened to us." So when -- so I stayed there. I remember my heart beating so hard that I thought it was going to make hole in the floor. And I don't know, I stayed there until morning.

I think I partially probably slept, I don't remember, but then in the morning when I got up, you know, I came out from underneath. I was still under those boards. I got out from underneath the boards and I came downstairs.

The camp was open. The gate was open. There were no police. There was not a soul. The thing was -- the camp was empty. Everybody was taken away. So I walked out into the ghetto, and as I walked this woman who was working in the kitchen, this Mrs. Wasserman saw me and she dragged me into her apartment. And so she said, "You'll stay with me --" well, until whatever.

So she dragged me in, and I stayed with her for about two days, and then my mother showed up on the street. She was limping, but she jumped off the truck. And we found each other. So this is miracle one; we found each other.

Then we heard that two or maybe all three of my brothers are alive, the little ones, that they jumped off the trucks, too. See, my mother was coaching us how to --

But you know what they did?

They didn't look Jewish, so they walked underneath the bridge from Stanislavo to a small town and escaped. And they found some Jewish people. Those people thought that if they knew a way how to escape, maybe they can get from the ghetto out their relatives.

So they send them back. They gave them some food and they gave them some money so they could survive and said,

"Why don't you go and bring my family back?"

And that's when they caught them.

Q: HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED?

A: Because we came to the same town after, me and my mother. Okay. Let me explain now, when we were in Stanislavo from ghetto. They got rid, first of the camp of us. We were first. Then they gathered up the people from the ghetto, but they did it gradually.

They told the police, or the Jewish gemeinde to gather up -- today they need two thousand people -- and they would get these people. They knew where they were going -- and they took them to the cemetery to this -- they dug a big hole and they shot them, and they would just fall in there and then they would bury them with a little bit of dirt, and the grave would move for days because the bodies -- as the bodies sank.

So it was a known fact in Stanislavo they were doing that, like, you know: Today we need two thousand, tomorrow we need five thousand, then we need two hundred.

It depends what mood they were in, the Germans. They had the German police gather these people, you know, you gather your neighbor. And they said they can't do it. They said, "If you don't do it then we'll take your wife and you," so to survive, one Jew gathered up the other one and gave them to the Germans. They would have taken them anyway.

But they also went to dig the graves, the Jews from the ghetto went to dig the graves for bread, for a loaf of bread. So you can imagine how great the hunger.

Q: AND THEY WERE SHOOTING PEOPLE?

A: They -- at that time the didn't have crematoriums there. They just took the people; they dug a large hole, and they just told them to get undressed, I mind you, stand over the grave, and they just shot them, dead.

The hunger was also great and people were dying anyway on the streets. This was around Passover. And, anyway, it was really a horror how, you know, we suffered through so much, and we felt like we had lost everybody. We couldn't understand how one Jew can go and take -- give the other Jew to the Germans to kill. They gathered them up, you know, and they just send them. But that's what happened. Finally Stanis --

Then they gathered up the people from the surrounding towns, too.

Q: DID YOU KNOW AT THE TIME THAT THAT'S WHAT THEY WERE DOING?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: HOW DID YOU KNOW?

A: When I was in the ghetto they were talking about it. I mean, they just went and they gathered up the people and you saw them taking them. I mean, it was no secret. This was pretty open, what they did.

They also gathered up the people from surrounding towns, were taking them across a bridge, and then they lined them up and shot them all, and they all fall in the water so that the river couldn't pass. No, we heard all of this.

Q: WAS THIS ONLY JEWS?

A: Only Jews. Now, this was in the Ukraine, in Poland. You see, this cannot happen in a country where the hatred isn't that big. See, they didn't do that in Germany, either because they have more intelligent people, maybe, I don't know. Maybe there would have been some type of an outcry. Here there wasn't.

By the way, while we were there on the march, a neighbor of ours jumped off the bridge. He gave his little girl's hand to his [sic] mother -- they had two little girls -- and he went on the bridge and jumped, and his whole family watched. And then they were shooting him, just in case he survived. So there was a lot of horrors. People were going completely mad. You know, they just went mad. They couldn't take it.

You had to be very strong and a very strong will to survive, to make it. Anyway --

Q: WHAT GAVE YOU THAT, DO YOU THINK?

A: I think my parents. I think my parents. Anyway, when --

Q: WERE YOU EVER RAPED IN THAT TOWN?

A: No.

Q: YOU WERE A YOUNG AND PRETTY GIRL.

A: Well, my mother told me how, you know --

I always kind of covered my face and wore dark clothes and carried my little brother, you know. I -- there were much more -- there were a lot of beautiful girls and -- very striking, you know, and maybe they didn't succumb to what --

I -- I was more like a little mother there, and I was always, I tried always to be in the middle so I wouldn't be easily seen, because they walked alongside of us.

Anyway, when -- while we were there for a week, or maybe two weeks we got some potato peels and cooked in that woman's house, you know, and had that. Or, once in a while she shared something with us. And then we saw that they are taking them, too, you know, everybody. There is no people left. There was very few people left except the Jewish gemeinde was still a fact. They still were there. Their families were still alive, but the rest of the town is gone, so they would be next, you see, because they closed -- they --

So one day the wagon was going by the house with dead bodies all the time, with people who just -- or they killed themselves, or they were found, or somebody else killed them, you know. They gathered up the people from the streets and just took them to the Jewish cemetery.

The Jewish cemetery was out of the ghetto. You had to go through a gate. So one day my mother said to me, "We are leaving here." and I said, "How?" She said, "Let's get -- just come with me." And as the wagon was going we held onto the wagon, one side, as it was going through the gate, and went to the Jewish cemetery with the dead, with the dead people. There we jumped off before they took them to the graves. If they see us, they will shoot us.

It was, as I said, early spring, and they already had pretty tall grasses, you know, and we laid down in the grass and we pulled ourselves on our stomachs into a field and stayed there all day.

Q: THEY DIDN'T SEE YOU ON THE WAGON?

A: No. You see, the -- they were going by on this side, and we were on the other side, legs up, holding on to the things, and went through. It was lucky. It wasn't, you know --

But it was my mother's thing of making me survive. And she was telling me all the time that I have to survive to: "You have to survive. You are meant to survive," you know, and, "I want you to survive so you can tell my brothers." That's what she was telling me all the time. And she reminded me where her brothers lived, too, all the time.

So when we were in the fields all day, then we

walked at night. And when we came to a small town, we went from house to house where we thought Jewish people might live, and felt the door post if there was a mezuzah. It was -- when we came to someplace, the first thing we looked: Is there a place to hide?

Q: WHAT WOULD BE A PLACE TO HIDE? LIKE WHERE?

A: Well, even on top of the roof, if it's -- or, is there someplace, a nook or a, you know, where you can hide, because we were hunted.

So one morning, one night before dawn we found a house with a mezuzah on it. Now, we are not going to knock because they would be afraid it was Germans, anyway, so we didn't. But we stayed by that house until morning.

In the morning a woman came out with mush and milk to feed her cat, and we tell her that -- where we are coming from and that we are Jewish. And I remember I wanted so much to get down with that cat and eat that mush and milk.

But, anyway, she let us in the house and she made us some tea and gave us some bread. And we stayed there in that town for about a week.

Q: HIDING AT HER HOUSE?

A: Not at her house, at somebody else's. My mother stayed in one place and an old lady had me stay with her, that I would help her out with her housework and with whatever she needed help with.

She took me in and she shared with me whatever food

she had.

Q: WAS IT DANGEROUS FOR THEM?

A: I suppose. I mean then who is going to know. There was -- it was an elderly -- also another German woman who came from Germany before the war. When Hitler came to power they sent all the Jews away, the Jews that they felt are from Poland. She had a boarder, this woman. A young man lived with her, too. And I remember I went with her someplace and I carried a bundle for her -- I don't remember what it was -- and as we came to her house --

They used to have shades on windows with strings that you pull up and down, and she had this tall window with those type of shades. And as we were coming in we saw her boarder hanging on the things. He hung himself on the things from the window, and I had to cut him down; a young man. He was in his mid-twenties. And then --

Q: WHAT DID YOU DO WITH HIM AFTER YOU CUT HIM DOWN?

A: I don't remember because I think right after, we left. But I had to cut him down because she was an older lady, and she told me, I guess, you know. So I cut him down, and I remember, you know, he was kind of like trembling after I did cut him down, you know, his stretched out body. And -- well, anyway, it's not the most pleasant thing to talk about. But all these years I try to forget these things.

Q: IS THAT HARD TO DO?

A: Very. Very. I mean, for some people it might not be, but to see somebody commit suicide and -- I mean, I didn't see him commit suicide, but it was -- maybe he was dead for a -- minutes or whatever, you know. Not for long.

Q: IS IT LIKE IT COMES BACK TO HAUNT YOU?

A: No.

Q: NO?

A: No, not that. I think I had other experiences that are, you know --

There is so many things. I had other experiences that are -- you know, there is so many things that, you know, you can't have everything.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE WORST THING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

A: I don't know. I think when they took away my father and my brothers, that was the worst thing.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER THE LAST THINGS THEY SAID, OR YOUR FATHER SAID TO YOU?

A: No, I don't know. He just told me, "If your mother wants you to go with her, go," you know.

It's -- it was kind of a feeling that I shouldn't go with them because I was a girl, I don't know. It's -- it's very hard to say: "This is the most," you know.

Anyway, there was a lot of incidents like this. The point here is that when we wandered from town to town we knew, we had -- we heard that my cousin's husband is in a

work camp on the border from Poland and Hungary of Czechoslovakia by Ungvar.

Q: SPELL THAT.

A: Ungvar. It's very hard to spell it. It's Ungvar. There is Munkacs and Ungvar, but the biggest cities in our area --

That he is on the Polish side, and he is -- one of those work camps where the Jewish soldiers had to dig dugouts for the Germans and bury them and pick up the live munitions and stuff like that.

So we heard he was there and that he knew we were alive and that then if we could get to him he might be able to help us to come home.

Q: THIS IS YOUR MOTHER'S COUSIN, YOU SAID?

A: No, this is -- this was my cousin's husband, my mother's niece's husband.

So we tried to get there, but we didn't have a map and we couldn't ask anybody which way to go. We just went; we just walked. Now, we walked from -- from about Pesach, from about April, I would think, until September. It took us that long.

Q: HIDING EVERY NIGHT?

A: Hiding during the day. We could never go to sleep in hay or straw because we were afraid they will find us. So it was mostly in the wet grasses and --

Q: YOU WERE WEARING THE SAME --

A: Well, we didn't have very much clothes, and barefoot -- barefoot, yeah. We both looked a little bit vile, I'll tell you that much.

So we were going from town to town, and then we came to one more town. We found a Jewish family, and they gave us some grits, raw grits to cook, and I remember me and my mother stood by the stove and put it in hot water, and we ate it up before it came to a boil.

Q: YOU COULDN'T WAIT.

A: And then we continued. And we finally came where this relative was stationed. Now, mind you, he was also in a dangerous situation because he was a Jew being watched over by the Hungarian and the semites, who would rather kill you than help you.

But somehow we did let him know that we are there in the woods, and he then shared his food with us.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN THE WOODS, DID YOU SEE OTHER PEOPLE WHO WERE HIDING?

A: No, you never wanted anybody to see you, because you didn't know who they were.

Q: THIS IS JUST YOU AND YOUR MOTHER?

A: Just me and my mother. And what we were doing is -- when we were there in the woods, this is more dangerous because it's already on the border, you see, between the Hungarians and the Poles. So it's more dangerous because there is all kinds of situations there that they could

catch us. It's war time.

Q: DID YOU EVER GET CLOSE TO BEING CAUGHT?

A: We were caught there.

Q: YOU WERE?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED?

A: So me and my mother, we would never lie down. There it was woods -- it was a lot of woods. It would be here like the Sierras almost, but, you know, it was in the summer or in the late summer, so it wasn't freezing, and there were no berries or anything to eat. We ate grass mostly.

So we would sleep back to back, her back to my back so we could see in every direction.

Q: SITTING UP?

A: Sitting up. But they did catch us anyway because, as I say, there were a lot of Hungarian and Germans and Poles and just everybody. So the caught us.

Q: TELL US THE DETAILS.

A: Okay. Now, these details I want you to really listen close, because this is another miracle that did happen. and I do think it's a miracle.

They caught us and they put us in a cellar. The cellar was dirt.

Q: WHO CAUGHT YOU?

A: The Hungarian with the Germans. They were together.

They were allies. So --

Q: IN THE NIGHT OR IN THE DAYTIME, OR --

A: In the daytime. They just came up on us as we were sitting there and, "Halt, or I'll shoot!"

That's it. So what are you going to do? We were caught. They brought us to close to where these people were -- had their barracks or whatever, and they put us in a cellar. The cellar was a dugout, just dirt. It didn't have cement, just black dirt. But it was kind of deep.

It had air holes and it was about -- it was much higher than here. It was real deep, and it had the air holes on top.

When they brought us there, me and my mother, they already had there ten, twelve people, I don't know; they had there people. You don't get yourself introducing in a place like that. I mean, you -- and it's dark. And -- but we -- my mother was -- she wanted to know what's going on; how long were they there and all of that.

They were Polish Jews and some of them said that they took these people to be killed, to one of those graves, and some of them escaped, so some of them were from that group. And they said that the -- that they are glad they escape -- they know they are going to be killed -- because they didn't want to be beneath so many other bodies that are settling, or something like that. They said the grave was moving ten days later.

So when we were in that thing, I think we were there maybe for two days. The Hungarian -- we speak, me and my mother spoke Hungarian, so we could understand -- they couldn't -- what they were talking. And they were talking, when they were changing guards to watch this place, this little building, they walked all around it, you know. After awhile you figure out exactly when they are going to be there. They said that: "We won't have to stand here much longer. Tonight is going to be dark, a moonless night, and they're going to be kapoot," I mean they are going to kill us that night.

So my mother said,

"I'm not going to wait here to be killed." But they say to my mother,

"You stupid woman; what are you going to do?" you know, "You are going to turn into a butterfly and disappear?" And she said,

"You see these air holes? We can get out through there, and if they catch us, maybe they can catch some of us, but they won't catch us all." And they said,

"Don't be stupid. How can you get up there, it's so high?" And so my mother said,

"If you let my daughter get -- go first, then I'll be last," you know, and then we went one on top of the other to get out. And when it started to be real darkened outside, when we saw that hole is black, you can't see

through it anymore, that's what we did. My mother was on the bottom, and then somebody else, and I on top of that person, and I crawled out.

My mother also told me that -- to run as far as I can and not to wait for her: Just run as fast and as far as you can from here.

So I did. I got out, I crawled out from the hole. The watch people were on the ends and it was dark. This is in the woods, I mind you -- and I started running with my arms going like that (gesturing, arms outstretched, moving from left to right and back again) because it is woods and bushes and tall grasses. And I go like that (gesturing), and then I came to a big area -- place. It's very dark and I don't know anymore which way I should go. I didn't want to get confused and go back, so I stayed there and I go like that (arms outstretched) and I feel another body.

It's my mother.

THE INTERVIEWER: Oh, My gosh.

A: That's why I say it's a miracle.

Q: HOW DID SHE GET OUT OF THERE? SHE WAS THE LAST ONE.

A: Well, I think that maybe somebody pulled her out, or maybe somebody let her go out that they saw that she was so interested in life. I don't know what happened. I never asked her.

But we never, ever seen any of the other people.

Q: AND YOU FOUND EACH OTHER --

A: And we found each other.

Q: -- IN THE DARK.

A: In the dark, just by -- like that.

THE INTERVIEWER: AMAZING.

A: So that's why I say this was a real miracle.

Then we went back to the woods and we were still hiding. Now, this cousin would bring us every second day his portion of food, because he had to eat, too.

Q: WAIT. HOW DID YOU FIND THE COUSIN?

A: As I said, this was in the place where my cousin was, my mother's nephew.

Q: SO HOW DID HE KNOW YOU GOT OUT?

A: Well, somehow he found out that we are in there and, you know, we --

I don't know how we communicated to him, but he brought us, every second day, his ration; dry coffee, and his food, and so we shared it, so we had a little bit of food.

Q: SO ONE DAY HE HAD IT AND ONE DAY YOU HAD IT?

A We had it, yeah.

Actually he lived in New York. He just died last year.

So when we couldn't --

He found somebody that might take us across the border. Once we are across the border then we can go home to our town, because they didn't take us legally to begin

with. We can go back. Some of the other Jews still lived there. We could go back.

So we tried -- he tried to find for us somebody to take us across. And they came and they took us for a mile or two, and then he says,

"No, I'm not going. I don't want to be shot," and gave up and disappeared, you l know, even after you pay him. And here we are, still stuck in these woods.

Then one night, sitting back to back with my mother, I had a dream. And I dreamt that I'm climbing up a ladder that is going nowhere, you know, just up into heaven, like, and I'm -- and the dream starts when I'm kind of in the middle and I'm walking up, and I find myself being scared of going any further.

And an old man with a white beard is holding the ladder and -- and he told me,

"Go ahead, go ahead," and I didn't, you know. I just kind of stand there and look at him. I don't know this person.

And far, far away I saw my father, very, very small, and he said,

"That's my father." See, I didn't know my grandfather. He said,

"That's my father and he's going to guide you, just go ahead, go ahead."

And I woke up in the morning and my mother -- I don't

know if my mother had a dream or what -- and I said, "Mom, why don't we go?" and she said, "Yes, let's go." We both picked up and we walked across the border. I mean, you know, with some problems; hiding and going on our stomachs and all of that, but we walked across the border, came to Ungvar, went to the Jewish agency, found my mother's sister, send them money to buy us a railroad ticket to come to her house.

And we are kind of barefoot, scratched, half naked. I haven't combed my hair in I don't know how many months, you know, or washed it, for that matter. I had curly, long hair. It's all tangled. I really looked like a vile person.

And we got the railroad tickets, got on the train, and everybody is dressed beautifully, you know, like nothing has touched them. And we are like a couple of vile people out of the woods. And I remember that I sat on the edge of the thing, sticking my feet under the thing so nobody would see my scratched and bare feet. And I tried to get my hair to, you know, to look human.

Came to my aunt's house --

Q: WAS THIS BACK IN YOUR HOME TOWN?

A No, my aunt lived in the same town as my husband is from, Chernow. We came to my aunt's house first.

Q AND THEY WEREN'T TOUCHED, OR WHAT HAPPENED?

A They weren't touched. They just took certain people

in '41 from our place, and in Poland, of course, the Polish people already. So when we came to our Aunt, she saw how skinny we are and, you know, bathe us and gave us some clothes and fed us.

And she made a big meal and we ate and we ate and we ate, and they looked at us like we are crazy: How can we eat so much?

And this was already September. It was just before the High Holidays, and they have a plum tree outside full of plums, those big President plums, the late ones. And me and my mother went outside and we started to shake the tree, and we ate about a bucketful of plums.

Now, my husband's father was my aunt's brother-in-law -- see, I married kind of within the machatunim, within the family. And he said, you know, "Those two women are crazy," and he was a relative. He said he never saw anything like it.

"Do you know they ate a bucketful of plums after dinner!"

You know, we just couldn't get full enough.

Q: YOU DIDN'T GET SICK?

A: No. No, we just ate and we ate and we ate, we were so -- I mean --

Q: STARVED.

A: We were so starved, and we didn't see any fruit in who knows how long. Anyway, I'll tell you something --

So, if you think this is the end of the whole thing, it's not.

Here -- so from my aunt we have to go to our own home town, and because we were in Poland, because we came back, the Jhondars, which are like the Police department here, we had to go to them once a week to report to them.

Q: BECAUSE YOU WERE JEWISH?

A: Like prisoners, because like we are prisoners, you know. So we won't escape or something.

They also decided that because me and my mother, both women, came back and my father and all of the seven brothers didn't, that we might have been prostitutes for the German soldiers, and that's why they let us live. So here I'm in trouble again. They want some of the same thing.

I have to escape. So each time we were supposed to go, I hid out or whatever, and my mother was punished for it. Then finally --

Q: HOW WAS SHE PUNISHED?

A: Well, I heard that she was beaten.

But in the beginning I was just home for two weeks, because when I saw what was happening, my mother sent me away to Hungary, which was the occupying country. You see, the occupied country was treated differently than the occupiers. Like the people in Hungary, the Jews haven't suffered anything yet. I mean, there was anti-semitism,

but they didn't suffer anything. They still had businesses, you know, they still lived a normal life.

She -- I don't know, somebody told her that there is a family who is looking for somebody to come to babysit, and for that the person, for a half-day babysitting after school, a half-day, I could have for myself to learn a profession or something. Here I knew I already don't have anybody to depend on.

So my mother somehow scratched together from her sister money -- everybody was short at the time. As I say, it was a time of war -- to go to Hungary. And I went to Kisvarda.

Q: WHAT LANGUAGE DID YOU SPEAK?

A: Well, I didn't speak Hungarian, but I learned. You know, you learn everything. I already spoke Polish, Czech, Russian, and I spoke a little bit Hungarian and German. So I spoke Yiddish.

Q: WHERE DID YOU LEARN THOSE FROM?

A: Well, because of the -- well, not in school. No, I didn't learn them in school.

So I finally came to Hungary, come to this -- I mind you -- I come to this family where I'm supposed to go, but because there was no such communications here like telephones or telegrams or what have you, I just picked up and I went there because I had no other place to go, and I had no money except one-way ticket.

I met a girl who was a servant, a maid to somebody, and I befriended her on the train. And she took me home to sleep with her for the first night. And then in the morning I went to see these people, and they -- these people left for vacation; they weren't home.

So here I am, stuck. I don't have money to go home or anything. But the woman where I spent the night, the people go there every morning in the market to by foods, fruit, vegetables and, I don't know -- they go -- all kinds of stuff.

So I think the women talk between them and they say, you know, "I have a girl here who came to see such and such, and she isn't home. And she has no money to go home," say, "What is her name?"

By then I adopted my mother's name. I knew my father wasn't alive, so I took my mother's name, which is Auch.

Q: SPELL THAT.

A: A-u-c-h. So I took my mother's name when I came there. And all at once there were two families who wanted me to come and live with them. One woman came and she says, "You are an Auch? Oh, that's --" you know, was very cultured family, my mother's family came from.

"I want you to live with us. My daughter is getting married in a few weeks, and you are going to be -- take her place in my house." And she took me in. She told me she is a relative, so that I wouldn't feel that, you know --

I'm sure she wasn't, but, anyway, I shared one couch with her daughter sleeping together, so she didn't have that much room. And while I was there I got malaria, whooping cough, all kinds of throat infections. Doctor said I wouldn't be able to survive there; I have to go someplace else.

Now, people usually don't have those type of diseases, you know. It doesn't come --

I was eighteen years old at the time. I came up with all of this. I thought I have a lung disease when I was having whooping cough, you know, TB or something. I was coughing like crazy.

And then right after that I got malaria. Now, people in those countries never heard of malaria, but I had malaria. So the doctor said he couldn't figure out why I have malaria. I did -- I mean, I had it a few times, and you know, they gave me quinine and all of that stuff.

And he told me that I better go to another -- to another climate.

Q: IT WAS AN ALLERGY OR SOMETHING?

A: No, I think it was all because I was living like an animal for a long time, and who knows what bit me or, you know --

Q: RIGHT.

A: But he didn't know that. No, he just says,

"There is no malaria in Kisvarda; how could you

get malaria? Maybe whooping cough, but no malaria."

So -- but at the same time what I did is, I felt like I should do something, so I would -- I still didn't want to believe that my whole family is gone, so -- except for my mother -- so I decided I'm going to fast. So I fasted, I mind you, after all of this, when I was in Kisvarda, I fasted twice a week --

Q: WHY?

A: -- Tuesday and Thursday.

Well, I did it because I felt that if I fast maybe I can see what's happened to them. Maybe --

I wanted to do something, okay. I also came from very religious background, so it was easy to understand why I would do something like that.

But I still didn't have the energy to do it, so I got all of these diseases. And so those people found for me somebody else who also said they are relatives in another city, which was Debrecen, so I went there.

Q: TO WHERE?

A: Debrecen. It was another Hungarian -- big city. I went to Debrecen and I stayed there with a young woman and two children. Her husband was in a -- some hospital to hide out so he wouldn't have to go to the military.

Anyway, so I stayed with her. Now, the meantime I was telling everybody what's happened to me and what's happened to my family and what's -- you know, and nobody,

nobody wanted to believe me. Everybody thought I'm a dreamer, I am making it up. So it came to the point where I didn't see any reason of talking about it anymore.

Anyway, and while I was with this other young woman in Debrecen she -- they were very well off, and we were like two sisters; she loved me and I loved her, and she said she's a relative, it was okay with me, you know, because I -- you know, I was like at home with her. She treated me very well. She even gave me a fur coat.

Q: AND YOU HELPED HER WITH THE CHILDREN?

A: I helped her with the children. I was more like a companion to her.

So while I was there, again, before Passover, the -- things were getting worse for the Jews. The Germans came in and request all of the Jews to go to ghettos when they came in. But -- and I said to her, "No way, after what I lived through, am I going to go into a ghetto."

So she said her parents in another city in [Yirahaus] have a winery and vineyards, and I can go and live there with the people who work in the vineyards and they'll never find me that I'm Jewish.

So it was Passover. What Jewish kid is going to go between goyim to the vineyard? So I stayed with her parents for Pesach, and on Pesach they took us. So they took us then. They took us to --

Q: SHE WAS WITH YOU?

A: No, she went back. She was in Debrecen with her family. She lived in where her husband came from. But her parents lived in Kirahaus. They were old people, like over seventy.

Q: AND YOU --

A: And I --

So here they took me with them. We went to a ghetto. And in the ghetto I found out -- I got from my mother a letter that -- or something, some type of a correspondence, that they caught her.

Q: HOW DID SHE KNOW WHERE YOU WERE?

A: Well, I mean, we corresponded. She came to see me also there.

So she -- they caught her. And then I fainted or something, and they revived me and I decided I'm not running; everybody is going, I'm going, too. There is no way to escape, you know.

So from there they took me to Auschwitz. I was in with these -- with all strange people whom I didn't know. The language was so-so. I mean, I spoke Hungarian, but I wasn't that good at it. Between all these people I didn't have a friend. I didn't have people I knew.

And because my name was Auch, I was the first one on the truck.

Q: AND WHERE WAS YOUR MOTHER?

A: My mother was back in her own home and taken with the

same people as Eli's parents and all of those guys because they come from pretty much the same area. They usually brought all of the Jews to a central place.

But I was in Hungary, so they take me to -- to this ghetto. And the Germans already are putting on their things. They have us work, like digging holes, carrying in big bowls like in salad bowls except bigger, bigger bowls, dirt down the hill and up the hill. You know, just to make us work.

Q: "JUST DO IT," IT WASN'T --

A: "Just do it." It wasn't -- there was just one German in this specific ghetto. But then they loaded us on trucks, took us to Auschwitz.

And maybe we should rest a little bit.

(Begin Tape 2)

A: Okay. Then from this ghetto in Kirahaus they took us to Auschwitz. I didn't know a soul between any of these people, except these two old people that I knew for about a week.

And, well, I guess you probably heard many times of how the trip to Auschwitz was in cattle cars, very tightly packed. And for -- for elimination they put up two pails or something there, and everybody wanted to be close to it; if not, they couldn't get to it.

Things were happening on that train that also is very interesting, I think. A young couple got married because

they thought if they will get married they won't separate them. The parents were there and they got married right by the pail of elimination.

Q: HOW LONG WERE YOU ON THE TRAIN? HOW LONG A RIDE IS IT?

A: It's very hard to guess. I think it was about four days, approximately four days and nights, maybe longer.

Q: SO THEY GOT MARRIED NEXT TO THE BUCKET?

A: Yeah, they got married. And I remember when they were saying "Mazel tov" we all felt like crying: Why are they getting married?

And then there was a young couple who was just married for a very short time, and things like that, and they felt like maybe they won't separate them.

There also -- they didn't give us enough water. Just once in a great while they gave us some water, and people would fight over it.

Then we got to Auschwitz after all of this. And people were bewildered. They didn't exactly know what was happening. This was pretty much in the beginning that they were taking the real Hungarian Jews, the very first ones. They took us to --

I kept a journal. When I came back from -- when I came back from Poland I decided I will, you know, write everything down what I remember. So I kept a journal, and I was so loyal to it that I would never miss writing my --

what was going on with me, my feelings and all of that.

It was pretty difficult to be in a strange -- between strange people anyway, after I lost my own family, and even -- it doesn't matter how nice they were to me; still it was difficult.

Q: LIKE STRANGERS.

A: Yeah. Especially when I was sick. And I was worried about my mother, also. So when we came to -- I was holding on to my journal. I didn't care about anything else but that. I wanted, you know -- it was very important to me to have it.

We got off the trains, and as you all probably heard it many, many times before, the Germans were standing there with the dogs and with their night sticks and:

"You go here," and, "You go here; right, left, right, left, right, left." Anyway they -- and they followed this person, then we followed somebody and they took us to a bath house. The other ones they took to a crematorium, straight.

They took us to a bath house, and it said on the top of it, "Arbeit Macht Frei," which means, "Work makes you free," was written in big letters; arbeit macht frei.

And it was like a big, big stall with double doors. We went in the back and they told us to take off all our clothes and:

"Shoes go here, dresses go here and whatever, your

bundles go here."

We had -- and we weren't supposed to have any -- anything in our hands -- completely naked. We got completely undressed, completely naked, nothing in our hands, not a pin, nothing. And I think the whole time I was thinking about my journal. I wanted my journal, you know, that's --

If I could have found a place to hide it or something, you know. It was so important to me because I kept it for all of the other stuff I lived through.

So we went into the shower room and they shaved -- from the ceiling were hanging clippers, hair clippers. They cut our hair off completely, shaven completely, the hair off. Then they cut every other place also. We had to bend down. Then they pumped on us gasoline or something, some disinfectant, I guess. I don't know, but it was stinging like crazy.

Then we went under the shower and -- for a few minutes. They didn't give us towels to wipe or anything. And the showers also were coming down from the ceilings. And then they made us go frontward, and frontward there were like two desks and they were giving us a piece of clothing.

Some people got shoes and a dress, one of their uniform type of prison clothes; some didn't.

Q: YOU MEAN LIKE PAJAMA TYPE THINGS?

A: Well, we had dresses or pajama, at different times, yeah, the pajama, the striped ones. But when we first came they gave us dresses, but no underwear, just that.

And: Go, go. Some --

And here our heads were completely white. It was dark haired people or light; everybody looked the same with a naked head.

And then they took us to -- they counted up a certain amount and took us to -- they called them blocks. Into one block there was supposed to be one thousand people, but they put in thirteen hundred because they brought in so many people they didn't have place where to put them.

For the first night they took us first to -- it's cigeuner lager, which is the gypsy camp. Then the next morning they took us to lager C. Lager C was destruction camp. They didn't give us any numbers because they were going to kill us as soon as they have enough crematoriums.

So they piled us up in three layers. They had three-layered bunks. The heavier people were down on the bottom, and then the next group, and on the top were the lightest weight. And we were supposed to be ten in one of those bunks, but we ended up to be twelve and thirteen. And the -- there were no mattresses or straw or anything. There were just boards, and the boards, some of the boards were far apart, and part of your flesh, if you had some, went in between.

You had no -- I mind you -- you had no underwear. And the nights were very cold; the days were very hot. It was like a desert place, no trees, no nothing. And while we were there, when one person turned over, the other one had to turn over.

You heard people crying quietly, you know, they weren't supposed to make any noise. You couldn't leave the place. It was both sides people. There was -- in the place you needed three times as much space. I mean, if we would stand up -- there is no way we could have stood up in that place. It was that many. It was about thirteen hundred people in our bunk, and I was in -- in Number 11.

We had a Czech block altester, they called them a block altester. One woman took care of that many people. They brought us coffee in the morning, which was in one big pitcher for each bed, like for thirty, over thirty people, thirty, thirty-five. And the coffee was hot water with some drugs in it. You could smell the -- it was to keep us quiet or, you know.

And then in the afternoon we got some beets, sugar beet soup, which was made -- if you were lucky you got from the bottom of the barrel, you got something in it. If not, it was just mostly water.

And we didn't have -- they didn't -- some other camps provided dishes. For us there were no dishes provided because they were going to kill us anyway, so they didn't

bother with us.

From the same pitcher we all drank the coffee; from the same bowl we all drank the soup. And then twice a week they gave us a slice of bread, which was full of sawdust. It was a slice about this big, and you could see the sawdust in it, and it was scratchy.

So there I got to know the block altester. What I did is, because I already went through it once, I went to her --

In the front she had a little office, like. Well, it was like three by three feet, very small; just enough to put her bed in. And I went to -- I went to her, and her name was ----

(Tape ends abruptly)