

YANINA CYWINSKA

INTERVIEW WITH YANINA CYWINSKA  
HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Date: October 17, 1991

Place: San Francisco, California

INTERVIEWER: PEGGY COSTER

TRANSCRIBER: AMANDA VINE HALL

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INTERVIEWER: OKAY. ANYTIME.

MY NAME IS PEGGY COSTER AND TODAY WE ARE INTERVIEWING YANINA CYWINSKA. WITH ME ARE CAROL ROTHSTEIN, ERIC SAUL AND PRODUCER, JOHN GRANT.

WE ARE INTERVIEWING FOR THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA AND TODAY'S DATE IS OCTOBER 17, 1991.

Q: NINA, COULD YOU START BY TELLING US ABOUT YOUR SCULPTURE?

A: I went to college because I stopped schooling at ten, so I wanted to get back my grammar school and junior high school and first year of college at the city college. And I took so many subjects that the counselor suggested that I should do something artistic to release the pressure, because I was carrying too many serious subjects.

So I decided to sketch, paint or sculpt. And I got fascinated with the powder and the baking and this, and I was sculpturing this item and when I finally looked at it, I realized that I sculpted a man in the gas chamber.

His face, he was standing in front of me and the ceiling was very low, and he looked in horror like this. He opened his mouth because instead of showers -- to take a shower, gas came out from the ceiling, and he opened his mouth wide like that and his eyes -- eyes were turning upside down and he was moaning. I cannot describe the sounds of us people inside.

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That was the sight I saw my first time in the gas chamber, this particular man, and when I sculptured this, this came out like this. I mean ballet, I was hoping would come out, ballet, but this is what came out from my inside, from my memory.

Q: CAN YOU HOLD IT UP SO THAT WE CAN GET A GOOD --

CAMERAMAN: I'VE GOT A NICE -- OKAY. THANK YOU.

Q: DO YOU WANT TO GET THE BACK, TOO?

A: He's wearing an Yamika. He had a Beethoven nose. I'll never forget his face, never. That's probably why it came out this way.

Q: HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU WERE PUT IN THE GAS CHAMBER?

A: Somewhere between ten and eleven. I can't say how old I was because I never counted the days during the ghetto uprising. When we were going into ghettos.

The Nazis, I was arrested in 1939 and somewhere between that -- six months later I ended up in a gas chamber, in Auschwitz. One of the, I believe first ones -- I don't know. I don't know anything about the history of that. I just know what happened to me.

Q: WHO WENT WITH YOU?

A: Well, my brother, my mother, my father and my four cousins, and I don't know who else.

Q: DID ANYBODY --

A: The whole family was arrested. Anybody that was related to us was arrested. So there may be

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others, but I don't know about it because there's no one left alive. I went back to Poland and searched, there's no one left.

Q: WERE YOU THE ONLY PERSON WHO SURVIVED THE GAS CHAMBER THAT DAY?

A: I wouldn't know that. There may have been others, but no one would tell us. We were separated. When I was dragged out of the gas chamber, I was still -- I was passed out, but I was still breathing, and Gerta, a Jewish lady, who's job was to pull the bodies out of the gas chamber and put them on wooden sticks, pile them up, and two other people would carry them either to the gas ovens or to the ditches to bury them.

When she pulled me out, she gave me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, slapped me real hard and asked me not to make a sound, not to cry, not to say anything, not to bring my -- attention to myself, and she changed my uniform and took me to her barracks. And I stayed in Auschwitz until the Russians started coming.

Q: YOU WERE SAYING THIS ROOM REMINDED YOU OF A GAS CHAMBER?

A: Yes, because of not having any windows, this -- the gas chamber was wider than this and longer, but it was just concrete. Concrete floor with a hole in the middle to let water out. I guess they used a hose to wash the floor, and the ceiling was extremely low because when I went, I was somewhere between ten and ten and a half, and I was 5 foot 2 then and I'm 5 foot 2 now and my

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family is tall, 6 foot, 6'4", my father.

So my -- my growth was stumped, but as short as I was, I could feel the ceiling so low it made me very claustrophobic, and they -- the gas chamber was underground.

It was like a big valley, built like a big valley, but we had to walk down into the gas chamber this way. It was just bushes and walk down. And when we walked down, up above was grass and trees and benches and park.

*JP: 11/19*  
Immediately next to it was a beer (stuber), a bar with beer and pretzels and you could hear accordion music and singing, Germans, Nazis singing. And as we walked down we could see the Nazis holding hand with the blond girl in the park.

And as we walked down into the gas chamber, it got very tight so I started crying for my father because it was body to body, you couldn't even fall down because it was so tight and they kept pushing people in and pushing people in and pushing people in until there was no room left for another person to stand there.

And I started screaming because I got very claustrophobic. It's something I still get when I go into elevators or come into this room. I have to work with it, not to panic and run.

And I panicked and I started tearing apart -- People were bigger than me too, and I was reaching for my father when -- when the gas -- when the white kind of a

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stuff came out from those type of things as you have here.

It was this man here, looked up in horror and he said something about where is the water, where's the water? We all expected to have showers.

I understand now from a woman that visited me in Fairfield who's father was a Nazi, that they didn't want to tell us that we were going into the gas chamber and would be killed so that there would not be chaos and fighting back and running from -- from the Nazis. So that's what she explained her father said, to me.

I'm always looking for someone to explain this to me.

So then the gas went off and the next thing I knew I was being pulled out of the -- being given mouth to mouth. I was choking and the woman was hitting me and trying to silence me, because they shoot when you make noise. They didn't want noise. They want everybody contained and relaxed and not knowing.

One woman stood before the gas chamber later and told people that they are going to be put in that gas chamber and killed, that's gas, not showers. And the Nazi opened up his machine gun and just totally turned her into hamburger and told us people that this is what's going to happen to us if we tell the Jews when they are being transported and brought into gas chamber, if we tell them what their fate is, we would get it.

So all of us became silent.

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Q: I'VE ALWAYS HEARD THAT ONLY THE JEWS WERE PUT IN THE GAS CHAMBER, BUT YOU ARE NOT JEWISH.

A: Uh-humm.

Q: AND HOW DID YOU HAPPEN TO BE PUT IN THE GAS CHAMBER?

A: Well, I was in the ballet school in Leningrad, Russia. My father send me to the school to teach me poise and grace so I could marry well. And the telegram arrived in the school to bring me home and when I was picked up at the train station by Igor, I asked him, why I'm being brought home so early? That this is very unusual. Did somebody die or is somebody sick? And he said, "I know nothing, you have to wait until you get home."

Well, I got home and we had dinner and my father -- then we played music. My father played piano, my mother played violin and my brother played a flute and I played a harp and my father was telling us stories about the composers which we so much enjoyed listening to.

He was a very close friend with Stravinsky. He was a very good concert pianist, but he was by profession, a doctor. My father refused to do experimental operations on -- he was ordered to do experimental operations on Jewish twins, and he refused and he was arrested and released.

In the meantime, he went to Catholic church, we were Roman Catholics. He went to the Catholic church and

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asked the bishop to get -- to send telegram to all the Catholic churches in the world and ask all the bishops and congregations to surround the Warsaw ghetto because they were killing Jews right and left and torturing them and killing children and old people.

And he wanted the whole Warsaw ghetto to be surrounded, holding hands and he even -- he explained how to object so the news media would come and bring the attention in for what they were doing to the Jews in Warsaw ghetto, and the Catholic church refused him.

The family pressured him not to get involved, not to bother doing this, but he said, "I have -- I have this drive inside, I must help these people in the ghetto."

Then he brought in the whole family for a meeting and told us, "We're going underground and we are all going to learn how to be quiet and say nothing, be very evasive, don't answer any questions to neighbors or anything, if there are any questions asked."

And so we were going underground through the sewers and all of us children and adults would have grenades, bullets, poisons, because some people wanted to relieve the elderly from being murdered there. So they wanted poison to kill them, ill, elderly or take poison themselves in the last minute before being shot. They didn't want to face the fate.

So we went and do this for quite a -- I cannot talk about time because at ten, I had no concept of time.



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I did not -- it was so much going on, I don't know whether it was three months, six months, four months that we did this.

And one day, I arrived in the ghetto and a Rabbi was doing prayer with his shawl and whatever they do, and I came in this particular up-the-steps room. And he took all of my ammunition off of me and we were to -- by the way, we were to take gold rings and diamonds and fur coats to sell them outside to buy ammunition and medicine and poison with.

And he looked at me and said, "Well, the other people behind you are not here and we may have to kill you because you are only ten and if they torture you outside, you will tell them what we're doing, so either you stay here or we kill you, make up your mind what you want to do."

Well, several hours passed and the family showed up, so nobody decided what to do with me, my parents and my brother and my cousins, we all went back out for some more stuff.

One day as we were coming out from the sewers, they put -- the Nazis knew where -- what we were doing and they put gas in that area on one end from the ghetto and we were already in Warsaw under the trolley coming out and the Nazis were there with machine guns and arrested us. And we were dubbed "The Dirty Jew Lovers" so -- and we were put into a building, detention building.

In that detention building in the middle of the

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( night, the Nazis came and took me away from my mother, just me, and they marched us out from Warsaw into the woods. And in the woods -- as we marched towards the woods, there were a huge area of pine trees, and the Nazis give us shovels, we had to dig holes, and we dug ditches several days in a row.

And finally they told us to line up on one end, and they were bringing in trucks -- truck loads of Jews, plus us, marching, quite a few of them were just walking towards that area, and I didn't know anything about machine guns or anything, but I heard a lot of -- as we marched towards the area, I heard a lot of popping sounds like fire crackers. And they got louder and louder.

( When we finished doing the ditches, they lined us up with our back towards the ditch on the loose dirt and there was a Jewish lady holding the baby up and she had very shiny gray hair and she was holding the baby up and I was looking at the baby and she was kooshing the baby and the baby was laughing and her heel was -- the dirt was getting loose and her heel was sinking into the dirt.

( I went behind her to hold her back when the machine guns went off and the body -- her body, the baby's body and other bodies threw me into the ditch and I fell in the ditch, not shot, saved from the bullets and they just keep shooting people and I kept getting again claustrophobic because they kept piling up on top of me and on top of me and I finally dug my way out of the

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extremities.

That's livers, kidneys, hands, heads, ears, blood everywhere, just pool of blood. And I dug my way out and I looked up and the Nazis were lined up facing us and there were people reaching with their hands moaning for help, "save me, save me" screaming like that, and I realized that the Nazis had their pistols and they were shooting anybody that was talking and still breathing.

So I fixed my eyes and twisted my mouth like that (indicating) and I didn't make a move because I knew if they -- if I made a move, they would shoot me and I wanted to live. I wanted to get back to my parents.

The shooting stopped and I heard in the very long distance Nazis playing harmonica and dancing and singing and I tried to get out of the hole and I couldn't get out because it was so much slime and it was very slippery and the bodies were extremely heavy and I was just ten.

And finally, I worked through the night, I decided I was going to pile up ten bodies, eight bodies, seven bodies and make steps and I took some clothes from the dead bodies and wiped the bodies so I wouldn't slip on it and fall back in and I climbed out. And on my fours -- it was nighttime, I looked out there and they had a fire going and they were singing and dancing, and I was just looking that way.

Then, suddenly, like a lightning, I started crawling on my hands and knees and I don't know how far I

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got, but I got to a place full of hay.

And to this day, I have a picture of that hay -- I thought I was imagining things that the hay in America is piled inside too, but over there, there was room. I crawled in and fell asleep and I found out that they made it with sticks and then hay put on top so the air could get in and dry it.

I found that out just recently, I saw a lot of them when I went to visit Auschwitz. I saw a lot of those hay piles right near Auschwitz and it's all over.

The farmer came and he stuck a fork and I screamed loud and he pulled me out, then he started to pull my hair and he said, "Who are you? Who are you. Who are you?" And I screamed and hollered, I was afraid.

And so he hit me and he said, "Are you a Jew? Are you a Jew? Are you a Jew?" And I just didn't know really at that time, what is this Jew business? I knew something about Jewish religion because my parents had friends, but I didn't have a concept, why this Jew business.

So he kept asking me and I said, "Well, what is a Jew?" And he said it's a religion, and I said, "No, I'm Catholic," and so he drove me -- the wagon home to his wife and she got screaming and hollering that we better get rid of me because I may be lying and I may be a Jew and then they are in trouble if they save me or keep me in the house. Then they'll take their children and murder them.

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So you understand, she said, that the orders are not to help the Jews, and not to hide them, so drive her back to Warsaw. So he drove me back to Warsaw and asked me where my parents are.

Well, the night that they arrested us they blew up the house with grenades so I couldn't find the house. So I told him to go to that particular building and they were still there in this detention building which was quite huge, and in -- they turned me into the Nazis and I ended up with my parents again in that detention building.

I suppose you want me to continue from there, right?

Well, in that detention building, my mother made arrangements for one of my aunts to pull out my brother and me out of the detention and send us back to our private schools. So my Aunt Stasha came in with money and paid the Nazis a lot of cash and they let me go and let my brother go, and kept my parents.

And when I -- my brother joined some kind of a group to fight again underground. He was a year older and my aunt kept me, but instead of -- instead of helping me and get me back to Russia to school, she did a lot of torturing and beating me because we helped the Jews.

So this went on, this went on for quite a few weeks, and she put me to work in a factory. And I would bring her chocolates and bring her -- and finally I stole -- I worked for the factory, for this woman

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cleaning her house, and I stole silk underwear to give to my aunt so she would love me and not beat me anymore. And when she found out, I knew she found out because the boss told me that she told my aunt, and so I didn't go home anymore, I stayed on the streets.

I roamed the streets and I rode in the trolleys for free from one end to the other and I slept in the hallways.

Then one day, I was standing in the trolley and looking out the window and the Nazis came in the trolley and took ten men and lined them up against the ghetto wall and massacred them. And the women went running for their husband's brains, and they had their handkerchiefs and the Nazis were saying to the trolley that anybody that helps the Jews will end up like this.

"These are the Jew helpers that we killed, people that help the Jews," so the Jew word just never would end in my ears.

Second time around, later, I came on a trolley, I was lost, I didn't know where to go. There were shootings and killings and I was getting starved and I was hungry and I started going in the garbage cans. And San Francisco reminds me when I see people digging in the garbage --

And I went on the trolley again and I saw that a building on fire and the Jews jumping out of it high, way up, I don't know how many floors, ten, six, I didn't count them, they were jumping out. A woman with a baby

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and everybody because they didn't want to burn to death, so they fell. They just jumped to death and it was behind the wall.

The wall had wires on top plus a lot of glass that stuck out, sharp glass so you couldn't climb and I was stretching out my neck to try to see what was happening inside. I got a good idea of what my father was doing.

And I kept roaming the streets and roaming the streets. And I was afraid that my aunt was going to find me and I finally got -- I don't know how long it was, must have been a month, because I was very, very starved nobody would let me in anywhere to eat.

There was just a lot of chaos going on so I stood -- I went back to the building where my parents were arrested and I stood outside and there were a bunch of Jewish people out there hollering to their relatives outside of the building and one man and a woman and a -- was screaming to this girl "Rita, Rita, Rita, we'll get you out, we'll get you out, we'll get you out. I have the bread here, I have some bacon for you to eat."

And it's not really bacon, it's some kind of a smoked beef or something. "I have this for you to eat, don't worry, I have water for you. Poppa is trying to get the money, he's going to get you out, he's going to get you out. Don't worry, don't worry."

And I went like this (indicating) and I said, "Is my Momma there?" And she said, "Who are you?" I

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said, "I don't have any parents, they are in there. I'm all by myself." And so the woman said to me, "Would you like to be in there?" And I said, "Yes, I would like to go back to my parents, to my mother," but I said, "I don't see her in the windows, everybody else is in the windows but my mother."

And she said to me, "I'll give you food." And I was very dirty and I had the flu and I was coughing and she said, "You are very sick. We're going to take you home." And they drove me outside of Warsaw into farmhouse, and I had a feather bed and beautiful linens and I cuddled up in the linens. And there was a cat and I played with the cat and I got better and I started smiling and I ate a lot. And I had orange juice and food and again, I don't know how many days, and then they drove me back to the building --

[Interruption in tape]

Q: OKAY. COULD YOU START WITH TELLING US FROM WHERE THE MAN WAS DRIVING YOU BACK FROM THE FARM?

A: The family was -- the wife and the husband were driving me back to Warsaw to that building and into an administrative office and while I set around slicing my bread and cheese -- I was so totally engrossed in the food -- Rita came in the room, she was my age, and the parents gave the Nazis money, jewelry, whatever they were exchanging, it was a lot of time passed, and they left me in the room and they let -- and they went out of the building and while I was sitting in the room, I told the



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people in the room that my parents are someplace in the building and the woman said something about, "Yah, you must be talking about the Jew lovers. You are blond, blue eyed, so you must belong to those. I recognize you." And she said -- she took me out of the room and took my food, too, and marched me through the corridors and into the room with my parents.

And once more we were reunited and I was very happy and my mother was very happy that we were together again. And she was crying and she was sewing on a blue and pink material making me an Easter dress and was telling me that we are going to have the most beautiful Easter ever. "This is the dress, Yanina, you are going to wear this dress."

Spelling, And we started playing. When the Nazis came in and asked -- shouted "(rouse, rouse, rouse, rouse)" and they marched us out of the building and made us stand about six people or five people this way and then row after row of people. And Nazis every so many feet with machine guns, and they were pushing us, directing us to the train station. And at the train station, we were all standing on the concrete and my mother and father were holding on to us so we wouldn't be separated. They were separating people, but we didn't get separated.

We got put in a cattle car which was -- there was no place to even lie down because we were packed so tightly. They had one little hole and through the peephole -- I was standing next to that peephole watching

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us leaving Warsaw and somebody pulled me out of there and said they wanted to get some air.

And the train started going and there was a woman standing, she had a heart attack and she fell down and everybody was trying to get away from her and not -- they said she probably has disease and we don't want to get cholera or something. And they kept moving and screaming and getting mad at each other, there was no food and no water.

And I don't know how many nights and days, again, I have no concept of time. The train kept moving.

Through the peephole, I could see it was dark. Through the peephole, I could see it was light and I just got engrossed in the sound of the train whistling. We spent a lot of time going to Ukraine and to Vienna on the train when I was a child. I was fascinated with the sound.

There was a man in there and he died and by the time we arrived. By the time the train came to stop, there were quite a few people that died and there was excrement and toilet stuff and, oh, passing water in the train, it smelled bad, and when they opened the --

When the train came to a stop and they opened the doors, the iron doors and yelled "(rouse, rouse, rouse.)" We couldn't get out because it blinded us, it was dark inside, and so they forced -- ripped on your arms out and pulled us and my mother was fighting. My father was trying to keep us together and she said, "Hold

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on tight to me so they can't grab you out of sight."

And when they took us out of the train, they started to grab people in one direction and the other, and I didn't know what they were doing, but we stuck together and we were marched in and -- when we were marching you could see the gate and I spoke a little English and a little German because my father wanted us to speak a lot of languages and he would talk to us in English, French and German and we remembered the sign that said, (art poke mak fre), which means, "Work makes you free."

So my father said, "Don't worry children, we're just going to work now, we have to go to work, so don't worry about it." And so we marched and it looked very nice because they had kind of bushes on each side and I still thought, oh, maybe we'll be doing gardening and like my parents had people do that, raise vegetables and things.

So I was kidding around and we were marched to this area, it was all concrete and we were told to take our clothes off, and some people refused. So it was in a matter of an eye blink that we realized that we could not say no to those people that we have to take our clothes off, and there piles of clothes here, piles of shoes there and piles of this, and we were being pushed with the barrels of the gun -- back barrel of the gun into the lines and area and naked.

And my father was trying to cover me up, I was

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very embarrassed and I said, "I'm cold and I don't want to -- what are they doing?" And he said to be quiet and hush child and just have faith, everything will turn out right.

And the next thing I knew, they opened those iron gates and we went into that gas chamber and after that, I was given mouth to mouth resuscitation, and I stayed at the camp.

Well, I didn't see my parents anymore. But I looked for them everywhere and pretended that my father and mother were going to get me. When they started to cut my hair, I told them they can't do it because my father would get mad because he loved my long braids and they can't cut my hair and he spat in my face and he said, "You're no different than the Jews, you've got no privileges."

And they said -- he -- they sheared the head, put me in a uniform and put me through the process of numbers. And my daily routine was after roll call to clean the grounds, sweep the grounds and I had my Catholic girlfriend from the school with me and she came to me and she said, "I'm going to a pleasure camp," and I said, "Oh, fine, you are going to be having fun." And she said, "No, you don't understand what I mean." And she described barracks, prostitution barracks with bunks that Nazis mount themselves on the woman and get their sexual pleasures, whatever. She said to me, "I'm not going to go."

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That night we lie -- we were in the barracks where we have no water or anything. We have to drink water from the rain on the outside because there was nothing but stables of some sort. It was no water and no -- straw around and holes in the wood and it was old -- was old buildings.

On the other side of us were con -- brick buildings, but in this particular place, it was hard -- it was just useless buildings, so we were lying on the bunk and she said, "I'm Catholic, I'm not going to that place." And I said, "Well, you must be joking, so far it looks like we have no choice." I said, "But don't worry, my parents will come here and get us. Don't worry about it."

So the next roll call we were going through cleaning up the grounds and she walked up to the Nazi and she spit him in the face and she kicked him in the groin and he just machined Natasha completely to death. But before she was killed, she said to me that, "Whenever one of us survives, you've got to tell the people what happened here because nobody knows. And I don't want to die without knowing that I was innocent. I didn't do anything." And we made a pact that if she dies first, I'll talk, if she dies -- if I die first, she'll tell, and keep my name going.

So my next job was to go to the very building. They dragged me to the other side of the brick buildings where the prostitutes were. I had to do changing the

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bunks and pillow cases and laundry and whatever, the dirt, toilets.

And there were women in there and the rumors, I don't know whether I should believe the rumors or not. The rumors were that if they got impregnated and the -- they were -- had a boy, that the Nazis would take the boys and raise them as Hitler's children in the other orphanages. But if it's a girl, they would put them in the gas chamber and kill them. That was the rumor, but I can't vouch for that.

From there, they -- I went back to a factory where they were working on making briefcases and lamp shades and later on when I was -- after I was liberated I realized we were making soap and we had to pile hair into pillow cases -- and job after job after job -- and we discovered that those were human skins that we were working on.

Some more rumors and -- were going around and the Nazis took me back to the female barracks and there was this woman that was my father's colleague, a doctor in there, and she was crazy. And she kept after me in the barracks and I didn't realize it until I was 20 that she was a lesbian, and she was chasing me and Gerta.

The Jewish women were trying to get rid of her, and one day, she hung herself in the room and she was hanging there and we were so hungry, they started to tear her apart and eat her. And I started screaming, trying to stop the people but they laugh at me and that's when I

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started to pretend that I -- that I was in ballet school, that it was not Auschwitz and I started going into the world of make believe.

I make believe that I was in the school and every transport of Jews that arrived was -- the girls were competition and I better get real good so I better do my steps and I continued to do that every time. I continued to flex between reality and fantasy.

Fantasy helped me not to hurt for my parents. I kept crying for them to come and get me and I made up my mind I was a very bad person because on my communion I stole a lily from the church and my father punished me for it and so he said I'll be punished for it some more. So I decided they are not going to come and get me because I'm bad and I steal, and the Nazis are going to kill me because I'm bad.

So I was dubbed the "Sugar Plumb Nut" because I was singing the music from Nutcracker Suite. I was dying to be Sugar Plumb in the next production in Russia. So they dubbed me, here comes Sugar Plumb Nut, here comes Sugar Plumb Nut.

And this one German woman -- I went to high school to make a speech and they had pictures of the Nazi women that guarded us, and there she was. I have a picture of her at home. She just kept beating me and beating me and beating me, daily. She would tie me up and put me in this hole and there was a grill on top. If you moved, you got cut up with nails and glass on the

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feet. You get infection and people die.

Rumors that many people died in there. She put me in there overnight. Come in next morning, I remember sitting there with my lips cut, my teeth all gone. After a couple weeks of this, she would come in and beat on me again and again, and I would sit there and say I'm going to take it, I'm going to take it, I'm going to take it. And one day, she just disappeared. But I kept looking for her.

Every time I saw a Nazi woman with black boots on, I -- and with a short skirt to here, and blond hair, I would start the sugar plumb business and I'd start pretending I was in ballet school, and I started humming and doing the steps and playing.

I could never get to the soup because there was so little and everybody was so really -- so streetwise or something, that they would get there and get everything so Gerta kept bringing me dried bread or -- and I worked in the kitchen for the Nazis and I would steal food.

And I stole tomatoes, potatoes, anything I could get to bring to my barracks to share. And a cop or woman or whatever they call them, found out about it and my punishment was to put -- this German to beat me and the orders were to beat me to a point where I could -- if I die, I die.

So he came and I was -- this was to take place in front of people so they know you can't steal food, so I -- he grabbed me by the shoulders and started to cry,



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and he said, "I'm only 19 years old, why -- don't do this. I have -- my mother has cancer and she will end up in a camp so you just take it from me and forgive me," and I -- first time I felt compassion and I didn't -- I said, "Go ahead, do what you have to do." And he was being watched, I could see everybody looking, so he had to do a job and my back got so -- I was swollen so badly, it didn't hurt anymore.

And then they put me in there to work in the experimental ward where they take the Jewish man and they tie their hands to the chair and open the skull. And the purpose of that experimentation was to find out how much stress a body can take. So they opened the skull, a big circle opened and the brain would be exposed and the Nazi told me that I'd -- the Nazi doctor told me to watch for the bubbles, because when the bubbles come that means he has taken all the stress he can.

And it was a horrible sight, because he didn't have any medication, this was done without any medication. He was moaning and he was twisting and he was turning and I wanted to help and I couldn't help and so then he -- he was -- the Nazis came, it was -- Heinz came with the Nazis, he was in that ward working, I guess, I don't know.

He looked at me and I looked at him and I don't know, I was getting 13, maybe 14, and I suddenly started to discover I was a woman, a girl. And I started flirting with him and looking at him and he had a special

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look too, I didn't know what it was, he started bringing me crackers and candies and canned food and things secretly. And he would appear here and he would appear there and he would appear there. And he told me to shut up, not to say anything, not to say thank you, not to tell other people that I got it, just eat it and eat it alone, don't share it. And secretly this went on and on, and for a while there -- Heinz disappeared.

And I was put to work in a gas chamber and I had to pull the bodies out, and I had to put the bodies in and I wanted to tell everybody, and I -- people would look at me and stare at me, and I felt so guilty, putting them in, but I couldn't stop because I knew that I was going to go in there with them. I didn't want to go in there and choke again and I didn't care if they shoot me but not choke. I remember choking a lot before that.

So I just kept doing the work and one day, as I was pulling the bodies out, there was a baby, and the baby was alive like -- out, fainted, but alive. So I took the baby in my arms and lost my thoughts and ran for fresh air and held the baby in the grounds in my arms and I was trying to tell the baby that I survived the gas chamber, that I would give it mouth to mouth and don't worry and I felt this thing come over my shoulders and the Nazi blew the baby's head off and I just held it with no head, I kept talking and again, I went -- I guess you'd call it into the world of make believe, but actually I went out of my mind.

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I guess that's when I started forgetting who I was, what my name was, slowly. And one more time I was put to work in the -- I was very emaciated, but I was put to work in the -- in that experimental ward, and they were -- I had to feed these men in the holes.

They were prisons; concrete rooms with iron doors. I had to give them water once in a while and clean the excrement, and work, you know, work, keep everything going, daily.

When Heinz appeared and he told me, "You speak very good German," and I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, you know you are very believable in German." And I said, "Well, okay." And he said, "I'm going to put you in a nurse's uniform and you are going to go out with these German nurses. We are transporting these men to the village of Auschwitz to another area where they are going to do other experimental things on them with their eyes or something, it's another place. Don't talk too much to the nurses, and stay covered, your body, and wear this hat and just the uniform. Don't say anything."

So the nurses asked me what town I come from and I said Nuremberg, Germany and we were driving towards -- and we were out of Auschwitz, gates open and we were out. And Heinz arranged for me not to go with the German girls to coffee house and just go into this Inn, and the Inn had my money for me and we were waiting for the passport and he wanted them to take me -- they had arranged to take me to Hardenberg to his parents' house. And I -- I

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waited and waited and nobody showed up with the passport.

I got careless and walked outside and looked at a dress shop and walked in and I started to take my uniform off to try a dress on just for fun and the woman started screaming at me, and called the Nazis and I was taken back, so they wanted to know who helped me and I just said the nurses.

So to this day I'm hoping that Heinz is someplace alive and would get in touch with me and the Jewish girl, Rita, maybe she's in New York or Israel, would come forward to say hello.

They took me back to Auschwitz, but that was now -- the Russians were coming and the death march came. And we were marched on the border of Germany so that we could -- they were killing people everywhere, shooting, gassing, it was just so chaotic. And in the march, a lot of people died, and I would keep humming my stupid sugar plumb music.

I never got -- I became very professional in ballet, I danced with professional companies and never even got the role. Some reward. Never even got to dance that one, everything else, Swan lake, but not that.

And we were -- arrived at Dachau, we marched, we were put on the trains in the last minute, they pushed us into another train. After a lot of people died, dehydration -- and tried to escape and run, some may have made it, some were shot and that's when I found myself in Dachau sitting on the cattle train -- was open and we sat

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on the train tracks and on the train steps, whatever was available.

And I noticed that the train was here and there was a big ditch there and in the ditch, there were bodies, and there was water. There was a duck or swan, some kind of a bird, and I was looking at that and saying, "Well, I'm going to do Swan Lake some day," or something like that went through my mind, when a little boy, ten years old, grabbed me and wanted to know where his parents were and I said, "I don't know," and he said, "Well, please tell me. I'm scared. I don't want to go into the gas chamber. I know where I'm going, I don't want to die. I want to go to my parents."

And I said, well, don't be afraid, just put your face in my chest here and I'll squeeze you real tight and you won't ever consume the gas because this happened to me and I didn't consume the gas, you will live, don't worry about it. So he calmed down and he was clinging to me -- (interruption in tape)

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: ANY TIME.

A: So as I was standing on there, the Nazi came and grabbed people, including me, and walked us towards the concrete wall which was all full again of blood, body parts, an ear here and an arm there, as I call it, not cleaned up yet.

And lined us up against the wall and he put blinds on me and I found it ironic since they were shooting people inside, why anybody would be so nice as

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to put the blindfold on. I said to the woman next to me, kicking her with my foot, "This is so stupid. Just shoot us and get it over with. We know it's coming. It's the end for us completely. It's -- if we don't make it to gas chambers, then we're going to make it here. It's the end." And I was resigned to it.

We were standing there and I told her, I said, "I don't hear any sound of the gravel or the boots moving on the gravel and no cocking of the guns," and it's kind of scrambling and a lot of people running, but there was no -- no sound of shooting us. It's taking too long, then we heard an awful noise and I said to the woman, "Gee, they are trying to drive us crazy. Don't respond. We'll just stand here." We just decided all together we we'll just don't move, because we figured they were trying to drive us crazy with the sound, squeaking sounds so we'd run so they can shoot us. If you run, they shoot us, faster than anything.

And so you know we're going to stand here just another minute, you know, we're not going to run. Let them shoot us. We will just stand here, we are not going to cooperate.

When suddenly, somebody was pulling on my blind and the person could not pull the blind off forward this way and he couldn't get it up, too, because he was so short. So he jumped up and pulled the thing and I saw a Japanese man in a uniform. He had U.S. on it but I started telling him, "Oh, yeah, now you Japanese people

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are going to finish us off, right?" And the woman said -- kept blubbering about that they destroyed the Nazis, and so the man threw himself on his knees and did some kind of a Japanese gesture and bowed his head to me and said, "We are your liberators." And that's when you know the story about the Japanese.

Q: GO AHEAD AND TELL IT FOR THIS TAPE.

A: Oh, and his colleague handed the woman next to me a Hershey Bar, and she ate it -- I found out later -- and she dropped dead so we were all looking to the side, what happened, when the man behind the man that saved -- took the blinders off -- screamed about something, "We have strict orders not to feed these people. Don't feed these people. Don't feed them." And I kept saying, "Well, why would you" -- I started to realize that they were talking about feeding us and not shooting us, so I looked over to the right and there were men, prisoners, Jewish men and I don't know what else, and Jewish men prisoners, they had the Star of David on, and they were grabbing the Nazis running, and they were grabbing the Nazis and one of them was pulling off the arm, another was pulling the leg and it was a sight unbelievable.

And I started feeling, "Oh, I think I'll go over and spit at him and hit him," and at the same time, I looked at the flag on the stand and I started to move towards it. "I'm going to climb up. I'm going over there, I'm going to hug the flag. We are free, we are

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free, we are free!"

One of the Japanese soldiers restrained me and told me not to move, that I'm in bad health, that I'm to stand there until I'm processed, dah dah, dah dah, and I was free, free!

And here I am, free. That was the day of my liberation, which I didn't enjoy, I didn't have the health or the capacity to enjoy it. I just enjoyed it last Sunday for the first time, really enjoyed my freedom being liberated.

Q: COULD YOU --

A: Well, -- yeah.

Q: I'M SORRY. COULD YOU EXPLAIN FOR THE TAPE WHAT YOU MEANT BY LAST SUNDAY?

A: Well, the Jewish Holocaust decided to honor other -- I don't know the number of the battalion, Japanese soldiers that liberated us in Dachau, they were -- the Japanese. American-born Japanese men who instead of going to concentration camp or detention camp in America, volunteered to go up to front, the first -- the most dangerous part of their job, the first ones finding the Nazis, front row. And the Holocaust people were honoring them and brought us together to meet each other.

The man that saved my life, and it was a real wonderful feeling. Knowing I have no family, at least I had someone that saved me. That's what the last Sunday was -- I never got to the lox and bagels, though. I'm



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going to go get some lox and bagels as soon as I leave here. Get so busy.

What battalion is that?

Q: 440.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: IT WAS THE C BATTERY OF THE 442nd FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: 522nd.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: 522nd, I'M SORRY. 522nd FIELD ARTILLERY.

A: Yeah, it was a really interesting -- I often wonder why the word, Jew, it just scares me now. I wanted to become Jewish and I wanted to get back to Catholic and I don't know whether God's scared to be the one now.

Q: TO BE THE ONE?

A: I'm scared to be a Jew for sure. Because I'm just scared to death of being Jewish or Catholic or anything.

But it was wonderful to hear these stories of the Japanese.

That it was a common occurrence for us to eat dead bodies or dead horses or dead rat or dead bird or anything, or a dead cat we ate once. It was a common story and I was so surprised to hear them say it, that they found us -- not me, but other prisoners sucking and eating dead horse that may have been bombed to death or shot to death because at that point they were bombing and shooting and planes were coming down with ta-ta-ta-ta,

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( you know those -- very chaotic war and I was surprised to hear them --

I saw them fall apart in Dachau when they were standing in front of me. The men were -- some were throwing up, some were crying, some were praying. These Japanese people, because they were so surprised, what they saw, the emaciated bodies and the ditches and dead bodies and this and that and it was just wonderful to hear their side of the story. Just great. And what they thought of us and that was it.

( Spelling  
Spelling  
And here I am. Alive and healthy as a horse and I don't know why. I keep asking myself how I could have saved people, and I got mad at God and told him he's a -- called him a name in Polish, (shak-rev-oh-lara) -- the color of blood to you or something like that and I was mad at God for not getting out of his (lunchtime) and helping those people because we felt so helpless.

(  
( And to this day, the word Jew just is a nightmare and I've known Jewish people, but I didn't understand the concept of religions and what Jew is, what Catholic is. And I asked myself and I answered only one way, that 99 percent of the Jews are educated and good people and they are merchandisers and they are clean and they work and they prosper and they become wealthy. It must be only jealousy or something that by 99 percent illiterate Arabs or illiterate people that are jealous or something, I don't know, because it still goes on here and there, prejudism.

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And I wanted to be Jewish for Gerta, and I like Jewish philosophy, but I'm scared to death that I'll be killed again. And I want to finish my life and not -- I once made a speech in Sonoma to high school kids and they had a -- the man has since been arrested for -- for raping his own son, and a few years ago, maybe eight years ago or so, but I made a speech and he told me that they should have finished me off. That I wasn't worthy of living, I was a vermin of earth like the Jews. And it's very hard to feel significant, even today, not having family, not having parents to help you. I had to make it.

But I'm scared -- scared of the skin heads. People do a lot of publicity of me on ballet and when they ask me about my past, I freeze, I'm afraid to tell them because I'm afraid somebody might come around and pick on me because I helped Jews, so the fear stays forever.

I remember my father in the gas chamber yelling, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." I still don't understand why he said, but maybe he meant that he got everybody involved, that he shouldn't have. But that's all hearsay, because I'm looking for people to come forward.

Maybe in Israel, maybe in New York. Maybe Rita is alive. Maybe Rita would like to see me to know that at least she survived like I did and it didn't take a second time. My mother mentioned they were going to be

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shipped to America, maybe she's here. So it's over, it's over. I hope --

Q: I'M SORRY.

A: Go ahead.

Q: COULD YOU TALK SOME MORE ABOUT HEINZ, WHO WAS --

A: I don't know, he was a Nazi. 19 years old, blond, blue-eyed. Handsome. He just appeared.

Q: HE WASN'T A DOCTOR?

A: I don't know. I don't know. I couldn't say that because I didn't ask. I was afraid of them so I didn't quite trust him. I just did what he said. And I didn't -- I felt that he was a friend and I remember when I got my first period in Auschwitz, I started running around the barracks I was shot and bleeding -- excuse me, gentlemen -- and the ladies were laughing, the women were laughing, they were making fun of me all day. "You are shot, you are shot, you are bleeding." Nobody explained to me what it was. And they started to become aware of Heinz around that time and I started and kind of like chemistry working, we were flirting, we were staring at each other, he was crying.

I'd be across the grounds and he'd be across the other end with a machine gun watching and he'd be crying and just staring at me and I'd be staring at him, and I remember chemistry working. So it was my kind of a little inkling that I was getting older and that I was a girl and he was a boy and something is supposed to take

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( place. But I didn't know what, so it felt good. It felt alive and it felt different from anything else, it's just one of those little personal memories. I know he lived in Heidelberg and I never allowed myself to think about my life.

I wrote it down. I wrote a book. I got the chronicles. I have it written out and even edited, but I don't know how to sell it or something, so I just let it sit there. I don't know how to go after people. I just know how to dance and make a good waltz of the flowers and choreography. That I'm good at, but selling books and things or going to editors --

( Spelling I remember talking to one editor and he said I experienced my liberator's rape. I wasn't raped in camp, but I was raped when we were being transported to (Auchsbach) D. P. Camp. There was this French woman that befriended me for two days and I felt she was older and I felt she was so warm towards me, and in the middle of the night -- we had to sleep in the barns on the hay, walking Spelling towards (Auchsbach) D. P. Camp, and she asked me to go with her in the middle of the night in the woods and I wouldn't go.

( So the next morning early, sunrise, she asked me again, and I said okay, and I trusted her and we went up the hill and there were French men and she was French and they were helping the Americans, and they tied me to a tree with the arms and the other two held me and they all did their thing, and then they laughed. They were

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(  
speaking  
laughing because I was still a virgin and she got paid a lot of money, and she was laughing and they kept saying merci, merci (becuu). I guess that was thanking her for bringing me up there.

I had a hard time understanding why anybody would want a skeleton, so the story goes on and on and on. I left there, I was pregnant and I gave birth to a child that they were going to put up for adoption and I kidnapped her and took her to Paris with me and raised her and today she hates my guts. She abandoned me at 17 because she is a child of rape and I don't have her understanding.

(  
She's an alcoholic and she's drunk 24 hours a day and I can't make her better. So the pain of war goes on and I have to stay sane in the middle of it and I keep on dancing again. Sometimes I feel like I just want to go crazy, but -- and so many people died so that I can live, I'm going to stay alive and die doing double pirouettes.

(  
It's difficult to live day-to-day without family. And any time somebody says -- even my husband says, "Oh, I'm going to go see my sister, are you coming with me?" Or my students say, "I'm going to see my aunt and my uncles and my cousins are coming over for Thanksgiving." And I have this horrible hate with the Germans. I want them to explain why even at 62, you can't shake it off, you just can't. And I'm not going to let them destroy me by making me crazy. I'm going to

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stay and eat your heart out Nazis, that's what I say.  
I'm here.

So whenever you can put an end to this, I'm getting  
a headache. It's an awful lot to remember.

Q: YOU WANT TO TURN IT OFF FOR A MINUTE?

(A pause in the tape.)

A: Well, I make speeches for the high schools.  
When one of my students knows my past, and she brings me  
in and they study Nazism, and I wasn't able to tell them  
as much as I did today, the memories just flashing back  
at 62, more than it did two years ago even, and I don't  
know whether it's good or bad.

Probably good because when I -- last Sunday, I  
came home, I had nightmares of suet, human bodies boiling  
and hands sticking out and sweet smell and screaming for  
help and I couldn't get down there to help them.

I had nightmares and I don't know if this is  
good or bad, but I don't know how I found myself in here.  
It's so much easier out there. When I tell the kids in  
the high school, they are absolutely fascinated about --  
they don't know anything about Jews and what they  
suffered.

They know -- they are studying about Nazis, but  
they don't know what the Jews had to go through. And  
they cry and they write me letters and they hope that I  
write a book so they can have it on their night table,  
read it and they tell me how they are happy -- if I can  
survive that, they can survive dope and things and they

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are such sweet people. But I'm totally amazed that they don't know the details of the daily food and things that happened in camp. So --

Q: COULD YOU TELL US SOME OF THE THINGS --

A: Some of what?

Q: THE DETAILS OF THE FOOD AND --

A: There was no food. There was just water and something that looked like sawdust and potato peelings bobby pins, razor blades, dirty water. Yes. It was just liquid, and bread. Chunks of bread. Towards the end we couldn't even see that. We started eating anything that -- anything that walked past us, we started eating it.

Q: YOU SAID THAT AT ONE POINT YOU WORKED IN THE GERMAN KITCHEN?

A: Um-hum.

Q: DOES THAT MEAN THAT YOU WORKED IN THE KITCHEN THAT FED THE NAZIS?

A: Uh-hum.

Q: WHAT DID THEY HAVE TO EAT?

A: Oh, everything. Potato pancakes. Sausages, sauerkraut, sauerbrauten. I learned how to make sauerbrauten, and sauerkraut a special German way. I baked -- sliced a lot of apples. I am the best apple slicer and potato slicer in the world. I not only go around like this perfectly, but it's thin. It's tissue thin because I got so spat at if I dug in deeper by a cop -- a woman, standing there, the boss. So I am the



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best potato and apple peeler in the world. And they had apple strudel.

Oh, they ate wonderful food, and I snuck some in my own mouth, apples and things. That didn't last very long. I wish it would have lasted forever. Just forever.

Q: WERE YOU ALLOWED TO TASTE THE FOOD OR DID YOU HAVE TO SNEAK IT ALL?

A: No, no, you are not allowed to touch it. It was against the rules. But we did, we snuck it in our mouth and ate it. They relaxed here and there, you know. And we had to do the dishes, and -- and polish the utensils, whatever was dirty, make it shine. Polish the boots sometimes in there -- the Nazi boots, until they can see their faces in it.

I was little so I could always see those big men with those boots, boots, boots, black boots. I think if I ever write about this I'm going to call it The Black Boots. That's all I saw.

When I worked in the kitchen, there wasn't very much atrocities going on. There was a little more relaxation. A normal kind of -- the Nazis seemed normal talking about taking their daughter to concerts.

Before my girlfriend was shot to death, when they shot her, the one Nazi stepped to the other Nazi and said, "I just -- I took my daughter to see opera for the first time. The (Fleur de Mous) opera," he said. And it was very mentally hard to think that he could kill her

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and she was about the -- probably the same age as his daughter that he took. Those were the daily things.

Q: HOW OLD WAS YOUR FRIEND WHEN THEY SHOT --

A: Umm?

Q: HOW OLD WAS YOUR FRIEND WHEN THEY WANTED HER TO GO TO THE --

A: Probably my age, we were in the same class.

Q: HOW OLD WERE YOU?

A: Like I said, I don't know. I --

Q: WERE YOU STILL --

A: I don't know how long I was in camp before they shot her. I have no concept of that.

Q: WERE YOU STILL PRETTY YOUNG WHEN THEY WANTED HER TO GO TO THE PROSTITUTION BARRICK?

A: Well, let's put it this way, it was after my period. Somewhere in there. We did a lot of talking about that, she and I. So I don't know how old she was. I don't know how old I was.

By the time I was brought into Auchsbach) D. P. Camp, as they walked us into the dispensary to check our health, they asked me what my name was and I couldn't -- I went blank and they asked me again. They started yelling at me, "We have to process papers here. Hurry up, tell me your name." And I started to cry and I said, "I don't know my name." "How old are you?" I said, "I don't know." "Where were you born?" I said, "I don't know." I didn't know. I felt very uncomfortable. And the guy came in running, asking for Bayer aspirin and I

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( Spelling  
said, "My name is Jeanette Bears." And they processed my first papers in (Auchsbach) D. P. Camp as Jeanette Bears.

Q: WHO YELLED AT YOU? WAS IT LIKE --

( Spelling  
A: American soldiers. They were Americans there. The French men transported us with trucks or walking and guided us to (Auchsbach), and then the Americans took charge. Real Americans. Not Japanese-Americans. That's a terrible thing to say. They were real Americans, too. What I mean, is that they looked blond and blue-eyed. God.

Q: STEREOTYPICAL AMERICAN?

(  
A: I do think that I attribute that to roll call. In the roll call, I believe they overlooked me because I had blue eyes. I think if I had brown eyes and dark hair and darker skin, they would have sure enough taken me to gas chamber, but somehow they always overlooked me.

(  
And by the time I got -- so they processed my papers, I asked them if I could -- the Red Cross came in and said, "You have no relatives, we have to ship you back to Poland," and I said, "I'm not going back to Poland." Communists are the same as Nazis and I wouldn't go back so I asked the GIs if I could wash their shirts. I said, "I'm very good in ironing, making those three wrinkles in the back on the green shirts," and they discovered that I spoke German and English, so they put on a uniform on me as it shows on that picture that I showed you in the newspaper, and they gave me an identity

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card, I.D. card, and used me to translate papers from the Nuremberg trials.

Spelling  
I got to see (Goering), and I got to see all those Nazis sitting there and -- and I got to see some women testify and men testify. And I remember somebody asking me, well, would you like to go up and, you know, hit him or something? And I remember saying -- I said, enough is enough. I think I'd just like to eat and get on with life, something like that. I said you take care of them.

Spelling  
But I got to look at (Goering) in the eye. Really close, I passed by him and I was very happy when I heard that he poisoned himself.

And so I worked for them as an interpreter in Nuremberg, Germany. And I got some D. P. camp that used to be artists and I formed a ballet company and we worked for U.S.O. shows dancing, and U.S.O. shows doing some ballets.

I knew I didn't have any relatives. I went -- we did the U.S.O. shows here and there and everywhere. I got paid. I was training them. I was trying to get back to help myself. And so forth and so on.

Come on in.

Q: IT'S NORMAN.

[Break in tape \* \* \* \* \* end of tape.]

Janina Cywinska  
Pronounced Yanina Savinaka

Oct. 17, 1991

Interviewer: Peggy Coster

Seconds:  
Carol Rothstein  
Eric Saul

Janina was ten when the war began. Her father, a doctor, was asked by the Nazis to perform medical experiments on Jews. He refused, and began assisting Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto with food and arms.

When she and her family were arrested, they were taken to a detention center. Janina (age 10) was the only member of her family placed in a group of people who were taken to a forest, where they dug ditches for several days. They were then shot into the graves.

Janina wasn't shot, because she was standing behind a woman with a baby, holding the woman up. Janina climbed up through the bodies - described as through kidneys and legs and body parts. When she reached the top she heard victims moaning and asking for help, and she could see some raising their arms. Each time the Germans saw someone show life they shot the person. So Janina fixed her eyes and looked dead.

Later that night she climbed out of the pit and hid in a haystack. The next day she was found by a farmer who returned her to her parents in the Warsaw Detention Center. Her aunt bribed guards to take Janina and her brother out of the center. Her brother lived with another relative. Janina went to live with her aunt. Her aunt tormented and beat Janina. She put Janina to work in the home of a wealthy family, where Janina stole some silk underwear, hoping that giving it to her aunt would make her aunt love her. The woman found out and told her aunt.

Janina knew the woman did that, so Janina (still age 10) was afraid to go home. She lived on the street until, unable to think what to do and lonely for her parents, Janina returned to the detention center. A farmer guessed her desire to get inside, asked if her parents were inside, and upon receiving an affirmative answer offered to help her. First he and his wife took her to their farm, where they fed and took care of her until she got over the flu. Then they brought her back to the detention center.

Eventually Janina was taken to Auschwitz, where she was separated

from her parents. She was put in a gas chamber (still age 10 or maybe 11). She survived, and many years later made a sculpture of a man she watched die. A woman assigned to removing bodies saw Janina was still alive, and took her back to the barrack with her.

While in Auschwitz Janina was at various times assigned to cleaning the prostitute's quarters, assigned to work in the Experimentation Wards, assigned to the kitchen that cooked the German guards' food, assigned to work in a section that made products out of human fat and skin, assigned to work in the gas chambers, sentenced to be beaten to death, placed in a hole lined with nails and broken glass that cut her if she moved, and almost escaped with the assistance of a German guard named Heinz.

When the Russians approached Janina participated in a death march that ended in Dachau, where she was liberated by Japanese American soldiers. After liberation she was raped by French soldiers while in transit to the displaced persons camp. The rape resulted in a pregnancy.

Following the war Janina translated for the Nuremberg trials, and danced for the USO. She was unable to recall her name for ten years. She currently operates a ballet school in Sonoma.