

Interview with VERA LIEBAN-KALMAR

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Place: San Francisco, California

Interviewers: Alan Peters

Carol Rothstein

Bill Froming

Transcriber: Heather G. Slate

1 BY MR. PETERS:

2 Q. TODAY IS WEDNESDAY, THE 18TH OF DECEMBER,
3 1991. WE ARE INTERVIEWING MRS. VERA LIEBAN-KALMAR
4 AS PART OF THE SAN FRANCISCO ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.
5 MY NAME IS ALAN PETERS. AND I AM BEING ASSISTED BY
6 BILL FROMING AND CAROL ROTHSTEIN. LAURIE SOSNA IS
7 OPERATING THE CAMERA AND THE PRODUCER OF THE SHOW.

8 MRS. LIEBAN-KALMAR, WOULD YOU PLEASE TELL US
9 WHERE AND WHEN YOU WERE BORN AND TELL US A LITTLE
10 BIT ABOUT YOUR HISTORY, THE HISTORY OF YOUR FAMILY,
11 AS YOU SEE FIT?

12 A. Okay. I was born in Katowice, Silesia,
13 upper Silesia, 1930, 16th of October. My family
14 lived before in Bielitz, upper Silesia, where my
15 grandmother's home originally was. And my
16 grandfather had a factory of textiles. And the
17 story of the family goes that the family moved to
18 Vienna after the First World War because of
19 grandfather's untimely death through an accident and
20 because my grandmother's family was mostly in
21 Vienna. My mother consequently was quite a lot of
22 time in Vienna, spending her time to catch up with
23 the family and to enjoy some cultural life of
24 Vienna.

1 My father comes also from Bielitz. But
2 during his lifetime, he was also educated in Vienna.
3 He went to the engineer's college, Technisch
4 Hochschule. And when my mother and my father
5 decided to get married, they married in Vienna,
6 apparently for the reason because my father's
7 student years were spent in Vienna and she preferred
8 to have the wedding there.

9 After the war, my father received a very
10 opportune offer to become the director of a
11 structural concern, (KARO KORN), in Silesia,
12 Katowice, about 60 miles away from Bielitz. And my
13 family, my parents, and at that time my sister,
14 moved to Katowice to get settled and live a very
15 rather very well-to-do life, this taking into
16 consideration that after the war things were not
17 very prosperous and there was a general depression
18 everywhere, both in Poland as well as in Austria.

19 My earliest memories are that of having had
20 governesses, having had a cook and a maid to look
21 after our home, having a chauffeur to take us
22 around, and traveling in the many places where we
23 enjoyed vacations. In other words, having sort of a
24 child's paradise.

1 Very many memories from Vienna. My
2 grandmother's home was simply furnished to suit the
3 grandchildren whenever they wanted to come to her
4 home. It took us usually a train ride overnight
5 with the overnight sleeper from Katowice to Vienna.
6 And there we were expected by another very
7 comfortable life in the suburbs of Vienna, in the
8 garden where there was always fresh air to breathe.

9 And considering Katowice was my hometown, my
10 town of birth was a town where the coal miners --
11 coal mines were rampantly puffing out smoke and
12 giving it a smudgy, gloomy and clouded feeling and
13 atmosphere. So that's about what my childhood was
14 like.

15 My sister was four and a half years my
16 older. And we started off, since my earliest
17 memories, on a very intimate footing, we liked each
18 other very much. I'm now referring to her memoirs
19 stating that when I was born, she considered me to
20 be her property, not so much my mother's and my
21 father's child, but she took it upon herself to
22 raise me. And the anecdotes of her trying to carry
23 me where she was herself four and a half years old,
24 not a very big child, but she stuck to it very

1 consistently. And when in later years I did my
2 doctorate, I dedicated it to my first teacher. So
3 anyhow, she's dead now. And we spent a very, very
4 pleasant childhood together. We were very often
5 sick and during that time we had to be separated.
6 And Grandmother's home in Vienna was a very
7 convenient place to ship one of us out while the
8 other got over their illness.

9 Summertime was very pleasant because we
10 hardly could wait to get to Vienna. From there, we
11 started trips into the mountains and we would meet
12 with a cousin of ours, with cousins of ours, first
13 cousins, that have been born in similar distance
14 from one another as my sister and I. They spent
15 the -- we spent vacation together with them in some
16 of the mountain resorts in Austria. All that went
17 on until 1937, I suppose.

18 After that, we stopped visiting Vienna. As
19 a matter of fact, my grandmother still under the
20 passport of the change in the boundaries between
21 Austria and Poland, figured as a Polish citizen that
22 my father could get her out of Vienna when Austria
23 was occupied by the Germans in 1938. She succeeded
24 to come to our place, to Katowice, and didn't -- I

1 think she didn't take too much along with her, just
2 some items that she could, some furniture, and just
3 I think a sort of limited amount that came over. I
4 don't remember drastic changes of our household
5 after she arrived. But from 1938 on, she started to
6 live in our household and remained a part of our
7 life throughout the war years and later on after we
8 returned to Vienna to live in Vienna after the war.
9 She lived to be 83 years old and had later on quite
10 a satisfying life.

11 So how I am I doing?

12 Q. YOU'RE DOING VERY WELL.

13 FOR THE RECORD, KATOWICE IS IN WHAT COUNTRY
14 BEFORE THE WAR?

15 A. Okay. Katowice, before the First World War,
16 was part of Germany. But after the First World War,
17 it was moved to become part of Poland, Silesia,
18 Poland. And it was a predominantly German speaking
19 territory.

20 My background of my parents are Austrian
21 schools, however, because Bielitz belonged to a part
22 of Silesia that was part of the Austrian-Hungarian
23 monarchy. It also was then attached to the other
24 part of Silesia, because the German part of Silesia

1 became part of Poland. So my parents really
2 belonged to what is called the
3 Deutschokulturellkreis, German cultural background.
4 They hardly spoke any Polish. And it was quite a
5 considerable difficulty between them to communicate
6 with the Polish-Polish population. They were always
7 a minority in this particular situation after the
8 war.

9 Q. YOUR SERVANTS IN THE HOME, WERE THEY POLISH?

10 A. Yes, they were. But not all of them. One
11 was a cook, Millie, she was an orphan. She spoke a
12 beautiful Polish. And my sister usually went to her
13 to ask her to have her essays corrected because she
14 really knew -- had the Polish accent and spoke well.
15 Marta, the housekeeper, was bilingual but she was
16 Silesian, so she was from an area where she spoke
17 German and probably went to German schools. The
18 governesses were speaking German and I am not aware
19 that they had considerable knowledge of Polish. At
20 the end, in the last year, we had a French governess
21 who only spoke French and had difficulties
22 communicating outside of French altogether.

23 So yeah, we had little contact with the
24 so-called Polish population. Next to our house was

1 a Polish school, elementary school. But we did not
2 go to that school. We went to a private school.
3 The private school was academically very advanced
4 and apparently they knew what they were doing there
5 and was on a high level and German and Polish was
6 taught at the same time.

7 My sister then after the elementary school
8 went into a Gymnasium or Lyzeum -- and Lyzeum
9 combined, which is junior high school and high
10 school, which was Polish-Polish. And it was a
11 school that like in the United States courted
12 districts, from districts all the people together,
13 and was again academically tracked, track school.
14 So that you had to excel in order to go to the
15 school, otherwise you had to be put back into a
16 (PUBSCHEKNER SCHULE), it's called, a school that was
17 not academically leading into university studies.

18 So we had lots of friends in Katowice. My
19 mother had a very active social circle. Very good,
20 close friends. I am still befriended with some of
21 the people who had survived by emigrating in time to
22 United States, and on occasions we do see each
23 other.

24 Q. TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR RELIGIOUS

1 PRACTICES, SUCH AS THEY WERE, GROWING UP.

2 A. Yes. Well, religious practice was very --
3 treated in a very non -- impersonal way. There was
4 quotations and sayings of my parents where the word
5 "God" was included, but it was not strictly a Jewish
6 religious education that I ever had. As a matter of
7 fact, before 1936 or so, or '37, we had a Christmas
8 tree in our house. We celebrated birthdays with
9 great aplomb. And there was little awareness of
10 traditional religious holidays. Apparently they
11 were picked up later on, but I was also not very
12 aware of it. My sister notes them down but I have
13 no recollection of it.

14 There was -- a part of the fact that there
15 was little traditional Jewish upbringing in our
16 household, my parents did belong to organizations
17 that had been formed to aid the refugees from
18 Czechoslovakia, and later on as people that
19 protested against the ongoing Nazification of all
20 Europe, they were pretty active about it. But not
21 as religious Jews but as the circle of Jews that
22 belonged to this German emancipated form.

23 Q. YOU SPOKE OF YOUR PARENTS' WIDE CIRCLE OF
24 FRIENDS. THEY WERE GERMAN-SPEAKING JEWS PRIMARILY?

1 A. Primarily, and non-Jews too.

2 Q. AND NON-JEWS?

3 A. And non-Jews, yes.

4 And this goes also the same thing for my
5 father's side as was for my mother's side. I
6 remember my mother's maiden name is Robinsohn and
7 her father came from a religious, orthodox religious
8 home environment. My grandmother had a story where
9 her mother-in-law would not even sit down in her
10 home because she was afraid that it was not kosher.
11 She did not take a drink of water in my
12 grandmother's home because she was cognizant of the
13 fact that my grandmother did not practice kosher.

14 Q. FOR THE RECORD, I BELIEVE YOUR MOTHER'S
15 MAIDEN NAME WAS SPELLED R-O-B-I-N-S-O-H-N, GERMAN
16 SPELLING; CORRECT?

17 A. Correct, yes.

18 Q. NOT AMERICAN SPELLING?

19 A. Not English.

20 MR. PETERS: Bill, do you have any
21 questions at this point, comment or question?

22 BY MR. FROMING:

23 Q. JUST A POINT OF CLARITY, SO YOU'RE GROWING
24 UP, YOU'RE GOING TO SCHOOL IN POLISH AND --

1 A. I went to school in Poland.

2 Q. YOU SPEAK IN POLISH AND GERMAN?

3 A. Yes, yes.

4 I went to school -- I'm born in October, so
5 they let me stay one more year -- I would have
6 qualified to come to school as a five-year-old, but
7 I was a rather immature five-year-old, so they let
8 me wait until I was six to go to school. And that,
9 apparently I managed, it was very wise.

10 I had a speech defect, I didn't speak
11 clearly. And my parents thought it was very cute,
12 but apparently it had its bad consequences because I
13 had a speech -- auditory speech deficit. The
14 hearing -- my hearing was impaired at the time when
15 I developed my language because I was very often
16 home, sick, with packed ears full of pus with ear
17 infection. So it had to do something with the fact
18 that a little slow, contrary to my sister, who was
19 excelling with everything, did everything perfect,
20 so.

21 MR. PETERS: Carol?

22 MS. ROTHSTEIN: I have a few.

23 BY MS. ROTHSTEIN:

24 Q. I WAS WONDERING HOW LARGE A CITY KATOWICE IS

1 OR WAS AT THE TIME.

2 A. I think a hundred thousand. Not very
3 impressive. An active industrial town, quite
4 active, not pretty, no culture.

5 Q. AND WERE THERE MANY JEWS?

6 A. Again, I was very little when I was there.
7 I don't really know. I know that in our house,
8 where we lived, there were, out of six families, I
9 think four were Jewish. And in the other house,
10 since I knew every kid in that house, there must
11 have been the same ratio. So in the middle class,
12 probably had a larger percentage of Jews than any
13 other. I cannot be more exact.

14 Q. IS IT YOUR PERCEPTION, DID JEWS LIVE IN A
15 DIFFERENT PART OF TOWN --

16 A. No.

17 Q. -- OR WAS THERE ANY KIND OF SEPARATION?

18 A. No. No, it was not. I don't think that it
19 was a town that had a history of -- a long history
20 of Jews or that there were many Jews in that town.
21 I'm not aware of it.

22 Q. SO YOUR PERCEPTION IN GENERAL IS THAT
23 RELATIONS BETWEEN JEWS AND NON-JEWS WERE EASY IN
24 SOCIAL SITUATIONS, FAIRLY FLUID?

1 A. That is a very interesting question which I
2 cannot answer because I don't know enough about it.
3 I know it from some remarks in my sister's memoirs
4 that we did encounter anti-Semitism. And it was
5 usually from the so-called low class people, who
6 obviously saw us being walked in white gloves and
7 with the governess and so on, that had some hatred
8 against us. Whether this was very frequent, whether
9 this is enough of an indication that there was
10 anti-Semitism, I don't know. But to me it says yes,
11 there was anti-Semitism. I haven't had any of this
12 evidenced in me personally. Or maybe if I have, it
13 might have been forgotten.

14 Q. SO YOU DON'T PERSONALLY RECALL ANY AT
15 SCHOOL?

16 A. In that school, no, I don't recall. I
17 recall being very fidgety and being unable to sit
18 still and having difficulties remembering to go to
19 the bathroom at times. These were my problems at
20 that time.

21 BY MR. PETERS:

22 Q. DO YOU RECALL THE SCHOOL BEING HEAVILY
23 JEWISH?

24 A. I think it was heavily Jewish. In my class,

1 I remember there was a big disciplinary problem and
2 I contributed to it.

3 Q. SURELY NOT BECAUSE IT WAS HEAVILY JEWISH.

4 A. No, not because it was heavily Jewish. But
5 it had to do with people being individualists and
6 differently raised from other standards, and could
7 be.

8 Q. SO WHEN YOUR GRANDMOTHER ARRIVED AT YOUR
9 HOUSE IN 1938, WHAT DID YOU THINK? WASN'T THAT
10 UNUSUAL? DID THAT MAKE ANY KIND OF IMPRESSION ON
11 YOU?

12 A. It did make a great impression on me because
13 I remember greeting her, she was in a fur coat, and
14 she didn't let me touch the fur coat, for some
15 reason it was full of germs from the Germans. And
16 there was an expression of horror on her face, I
17 remember that.

18 And then there was a lot of discussions
19 going on in the living rooms. And I remember Mother
20 and Father listening to the Hitler speeches. And
21 then we were not going to Vienna anymore, we would
22 be going to resorts in Poland. And the total idea
23 was -- I mean the total impression I gained is that
24 there were some changes going on, some serious

1 changes, because there was a definite atmosphere of
2 tension and dis-ease in our surroundings.

3 In 1939, sometimes in September, end of
4 August, September, my mother came to us, into our
5 children's room, announcing that there will be a
6 war. And she received a telephone call from a
7 friend of hers, who was a British subject, telling
8 that friend to pack up and leave for England because
9 the English consulate is not going to vouch for its
10 British citizens in case of a war. And they would
11 give -- they would issue her immediately a passport
12 to enter -- and a visa to enter England. On that
13 account, my mother made very drastic changes.

14 Strangely, it is my mother that stays in my
15 mind, and I figured it out, it must have been
16 because Father at that time, being 42 -- 41 going on
17 42, went ahead to Warsaw to register as a volunteer
18 into the army. But the Poles have not been
19 recruiting, particularly people in that age
20 category, and they have not been mobilizing, alerted
21 sufficiently. So Father was not drafted. But
22 Father was not around.

23 And I remember Mother packing huge trunks
24 with clothing items and treasured heirloom items.

1 And these trunks were supposed to fit into a car
2 that we had at that time, which was the same that
3 Hitler drove in, the one with the top coming down,
4 big seats.

5 Q. CABRIOLET.

6 A. Cabriolet.

7 Anyhow, the seats were taken out from that
8 Cabriolet and the trunks were put in its place.
9 We -- our household was dismissed except for our
10 cook. We were boarding the train for Warsaw, the
11 night train, and our chauffeur, (BILK), was supposed
12 to drive our car with the trunks in there to Warsaw,
13 where it would expect further decision. It was a
14 farsighted plan of my mother and wisely taken, which
15 we have done. We boarded the train, the night
16 train. It was very exciting. I remember not being
17 allowed to get undressed but wait until I think
18 11:00, 12:00 o'clock at night and then board the
19 train.

20 We arrived in Warsaw and Father expected us,
21 probably with the news to tell us that he was not
22 drafted, and found for us an apartment of a friend
23 of the family or maybe a distant relative, who had
24 fled already and left the apartment vacant,

1 furnished but vacant. In the same house, for
2 similar reasons, moved other relatives of my father,
3 the Tugendhart, who were also stranded and didn't
4 know what next steps to take.

5 Now, we were starting to count the beginning
6 of September. And apparently the weather was so
7 good that they decided -- the family decided to take
8 a weekend into the surrounding area of Warsaw. They
9 were in no hurry. And they were sitting there
10 vacationing and discussing politics but they were
11 not moving, they were not getting going.

12 When they came back, my cousin Tugendhart,
13 who was at that time an 18-year-old girl and had a
14 fiance, something 20, Friedl Franck, with her,
15 stormed one morning into our house, and I remember
16 that, very excited, very hysterical, saying that she
17 had noticed some war maneuvers in the air taking
18 place between our Polish airplanes and German
19 airplanes. And we tried to dissuade her that she
20 has seen this spook because they are practicing,
21 these are military maneuvers going on to practice,
22 the Polish fleet is there to defend us at all times,
23 until some explosions were sounded. And we run to
24 the roof and we have seen that there has been some

1 anti-aircraft machine guns firing at the airplanes
2 and there have been some hits. And we noticed that
3 the Germans had attacked. At the same day, the
4 radio announced that Katowice has been taken by the
5 Germans and the Germans are marching into Poland and
6 there is little resistance.

7 Q. THAT WAS YOUR FIRST REMEMBRANCE OF HOW THE
8 WAR STARTED? YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANY RADIO
9 ANNOUNCEMENTS OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT? IS THAT
10 BECAUSE OF YOUR YOUTH? YOU DON'T REMEMBER YOUR
11 PARENTS TALKING ABOUT IT?

12 A. My parents were talking about it,
13 definitely, yes, there was a lot of that going on.
14 But I myself experienced that. I was there on the
15 roof and I have seen it. I have been very aware of
16 that the big announcements were that the first bomb
17 exploded in an orphanage, either 60 kilometers away
18 from Warsaw or killing 60 orphans, I don't know, but
19 the number 60 stuck in my mind.

20 There was a big problem with fleeing --
21 well, we didn't know what to do. The cousin
22 Tugendharts, who were very well-to-do, factory
23 owners, and had a lot of property at stake, they did
24 not feel like fleeing. They decided to stay on and

1 see what the situation, how the situation will
2 develop. We, however, had the car with us. The
3 chauffeur drove the car to us and now we had the
4 car. And Father had some ways of procuring the
5 magical fluid, the gasoline that became very scarce
6 in those days, and we decided to take off.

7 And we drove off after the first few bomb
8 attacks, leaving Warsaw in the direction to a city
9 called Lublin. And there we went directly into the
10 lion's den because, without our knowledge, our
11 Polish army passed through that town and stayed at
12 that time in that town. The Germans knew about it.
13 It was bombed to an extent that I will never forget.
14 There was practically every house on fire. And when
15 we arrived, bombardments were still -- were ongoing
16 but not at that frequent pace.

17 By the time the night fell, we had found
18 some accommodations. But I know that my parents
19 were separated from my grandmother, my sister and I,
20 we stayed in one room, my parents in another,
21 adjoining room. Whether it was the same house or in
22 adjoining house, I cannot tell. I know that during
23 the most dreadful three or four hours of
24 bombardment, my parents were not with us.

1 And it was morning when we went to one of
2 those cellars that were run by all the people that
3 were living in those houses and staying there. The
4 air pressure from the flying bombs was something
5 dreadful, scary, the noise and the scare, panicking
6 among the adults and other people, and bringing in
7 the wounded and telling me not to look. But I saw
8 things that at one point I just couldn't stand it
9 anymore and I had it, and I recall that moment quite
10 clearly.

11 I decided to break loose and run into the
12 open air. And I started to scream: "I want to be
13 killed. I want to die. I don't want to live
14 anymore. I don't want to stand this anymore." And
15 my sister ran after me, she had a towel in her hand,
16 and she hit me over the face with the towel, grabbed
17 me and pulled me in. And just as she pulled me in,
18 we were just pushed inside from the air explosion of
19 the bomb that was going to hit just where I was
20 yelling outside. So that was a very traumatic
21 experience.

22 And I don't know, suddenly by a miracle it
23 was like in a dreadful nightmare, you wake up and
24 you suddenly realize you have -- you are in reality.

1 I suddenly realized my parents managed to come back,
2 and that gave me a great feeling of relief. And my
3 parents spent the bombardment in the bank, which, by
4 the way, had fat walls and saved them. And they had
5 been in the bank to get some cash.

6 And without waiting up till the sirens were
7 calling off the bombardment, we got into the car and
8 took off. And that was one of the most incredible
9 sights. We didn't even pull our things together,
10 there was nothing there left in our room to get
11 together, all our belongings had been bombed, we had
12 been just in -- whatever we had, we just took with
13 us, and the car was in one piece.

14 Q. WAS YOUR FATHER DRIVING?

15 A. Father was driving. Father was driving.

16 Q. THE CHAUFFEUR WAS GONE?

17 A. The chauffeur was sent back to Katowice at
18 that time.

19 And Father was very -- getting out of Lublin
20 was sheer, sheer hell, it was incredibly stressful,
21 with all the people in panic and flames, people
22 burning, we saw them, and children screaming. It
23 was dreadful. He decided to stay away from the main
24 roads. He couldn't get through the main roads,

1 everybody was running. So he went with his car
2 through the fields. And the car took it like a
3 tank, it's just incredible how we were able to get
4 through.

5 By the way, this was the fall where rain was
6 expected and didn't come, and this was very much to
7 the advantage of the German troops. Because once
8 the rains start falling, there are such, at that
9 time, with these road conditions, there would have
10 been such tremendous mud holes all the way through
11 that any hard equipment could not have made it
12 through. But as the situation was, we could drive
13 on the open fields.

14 And I remember the planes were following us
15 and my parents would say they recognized that this
16 is a German car and they left us alone. Several
17 times we would get out of the car and land in the
18 ditch, ourselves, trying to be protected in case
19 they explode the car. But we were not hit; they
20 left us alone. So on we went.

21 Our plan at that time was to move southeast
22 to hit -- to get through the Rumanian border. Now,
23 on the way we would hit some roadblocks. And it
24 must have been somewhere maybe Cieszanow, a town,

1 where the military would stop us and wanting to take
2 our car away, which they did. But Father was the
3 only one that knew a device that was locking the
4 steering wheel. It was a new car, a very new model,
5 and the soldiers, the Polish soldiers didn't know
6 about this device. When they took the car, they
7 tried to drive it and the car started spinning
8 around in circles. No matter what they tried to do
9 and whom they tried to consult, they didn't know how
10 to fix it.

11 So they returned the car to us. And Father
12 admitted sort of half guiltily, he says, yes, I knew
13 that this car was difficult to drive, only I'm used
14 to it. And the Poles said no, thank you, we don't
15 want your car. But you can do us a favor, if my
16 father would let a person ride in the car along, a
17 Pole of a high military rank on some mission, some
18 mysterious mission, and he would get some gasoline
19 for it. And it fitted very much into our scheme of
20 wanting to flee. So we took him along. He spoke
21 perfectly German. And he was going to head towards
22 Ternopol. And he had some papers, documents to
23 deliver in Ternopol.

24 We moved along because this was getting

1 quite close to about 30 miles from the Rumanian
2 border, something of that, I am not quite sure if I
3 am exact but it seemed to be in the same direction.
4 This was the 17th of September.

5 Now, the mission in Ternopol was
6 accomplished by that major, Polish major, major,
7 Herr Major, my family called him, and we wanted --
8 we had to wait for him to come back, which we did
9 because we were decent. And when he got back, he --
10 we wanted to go on to Rumania. But on our way, he
11 checked out where we were going. And finding out
12 that we wanted to leave Poland, he pulled out the
13 gun on my father and said: "Turn back, I have
14 another mission to do." And under the gun, we had
15 to go back.

16 Now, he asked us to go onto the main road,
17 which goes north-south in Poland, and at that time
18 the entire Polish army and whatever had wheels or
19 didn't have wheels was on that road. And we were
20 stuck in one of the typical traffic jams as you see
21 them in so many documentaries, couldn't move, were
22 stuck. And to get into one of those fields we
23 couldn't either because the highway was so high up
24 that there was such a deep ditch on the side that

1 our car would have rolled over if we had to do that.

2 So in the meantime, on the 17th through the
3 18th of September, there was this battle that ensued
4 from both sides of that road. From one side, the
5 Russians, Russian tanks approached Poland. From the
6 western side, the German tanks approached Poland.
7 In the air were the airplanes. In the middle were
8 the Poles fighting. And the family Schneider, that
9 was my maiden name, was among them. Not only that,
10 but there was a very severe weather storm in front
11 to boot. And so the whole night we didn't know
12 whether the lightning was from exploding bombs, from
13 lightning done by the God almighty, or what was
14 going on, but we were in the ditches.

15 And the troop that we were surrounded by of
16 Poles decided not to fight, so there were no
17 particular shrapnels coming in our directions but we
18 could observe it from the ditches quite well. And
19 we stayed in the ditches because it was told to us
20 that we were safer in the ditch than in the car
21 because the car could be hit and could explode.
22 Well, we survived this particular night, which was
23 quite a memorable night, there was lots going on.

24 In early morning, there came a motorcade of

1 French-speaking Russians, who reassured us that
2 nothing will happen to us and that we will be taken
3 into protective custody by the Russian military and
4 treated as civilians. Well, that was at 5:00
5 o'clock. At 7:00 o'clock, the Cossacks arrived on
6 horseback with guns, with big rifles, and were
7 hording us like sheep. And any objections to it,
8 telling them that we were told differently, were
9 useless. First of all, they didn't understand us.
10 They couldn't speak Polish, they couldn't speak
11 German, they couldn't speak French. They spoke
12 Russian. So we were made to go into formation of a
13 prisoners colony.

14 My father wanted to take out the keys of the
15 car but they stopped him with a bayonet. And I
16 remember at that time my father's younger brother
17 was around, who dived into the car to take out a
18 little blue-lacquered overnight valise. They were
19 making a lot of fuss, asking him to put it back, but
20 somebody came up there from the Cossacks or
21 non-Cossacks, I don't know, but told them to let go,
22 let him take that valise, and he took it along. And
23 remarkably, that valise had some things in it that
24 later saved us from quite some unpleasant

1 situations.

2 Q. CAN YOU TELL ME, ANYWAY, MAYBE I MISSED IT,
3 WHO WAS IN THE SCHNEIDER FAMILY GROUP? YOU TALKED
4 ABOUT A YOUNGER BROTHER. TELL US WHO AGAIN, WHO WAS
5 IT, YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER?

6 A. My grandmother and my sister. Then there
7 was this (PORKOVNIK), that major, whatever his name
8 was, this Polish man, who was sitting next to my
9 father in the front seat, who had some military
10 mission.

11 But then I remember, and I am the only one
12 to remember, and there is nobody around to prove it
13 or disprove it, my younger uncle, my younger
14 father's brother, Leo, sitting in the seat which
15 before was reserved for the spare tire of the car in
16 the back of the car, and taking the ride along with
17 us. I think he joined us somewhere in Cieszanow, at
18 that point, at that juncture when our car was taken
19 away from us and returned to us because they
20 couldn't manage it. I am not sure. I would like to
21 check it out and I think I might have a way to do
22 that, but I am not sure yet.

23 Q. ALL YOU REMEMBER IS ALL OF A SUDDEN YOUR
24 UNCLE WAS THERE?

1 A. He was there.

2 Q. HE WAS THERE.

3 A. He was there.

4 And once the march started, he gave that
5 valise to my father. And I remember speaking to him
6 that he is going to, at the first earliest
7 commotion, try to disappear, to get lost from that
8 column. And he did. Because later on, during the
9 transport, walking transport, which was something
10 like 14 miles to -- late at night, he wasn't there
11 anymore.

12 Q. THE COLUMN, WAS IT A MIXTURE OF CIVILIANS
13 AND POLISH SOLDIERS?

14 A. There was predominantly civilians but there
15 were some soldiers too.

16 And the Cossacks took no pity on those who
17 lingered behind. They were savages and they were
18 shooting them. To speed up the column, they would
19 shoot in the air, not the people, of course, but it
20 was military brutality already at that time
21 prevailed.

22 We arrived late at night into a town called
23 (BUCHACH), where we were stopped by thousands of
24 tanks pushing through that town, Russian tanks.

1 After some endless waiting, we were taken into a
2 gymnasium, the local gymnasium that has become a
3 makeshift camp for all those taken prisoner in the
4 road, on the road. We were in one of the classroom
5 where the furniture was pushed to one side and we
6 were just spreading out on the floor, totally
7 exhausted, of course, no food in the meantime, no
8 drink, nothing. It's incredible how one can very
9 well function with that when you have to.

10 Father was scouting -- Father left us after
11 everything settled down, before even there was a
12 person or head count, Father left the area and
13 started to scout the gymnasium altogether. And he
14 found at the entrance gate a youth in a leather
15 jacket with a red scarf pretty quickly,
16 makeshiftedly put around himself, telling he is one
17 of the militia. He was Jewish. Where Father made
18 some proposition of whether he could let us out of
19 that gymnasium for a bribe.

20 And pretty soon Father came back, saying
21 that he will come and see us when it gets -- when
22 the lights will be turned out in the classroom,
23 which he did. He came even before that. He opened
24 our valise. And in our valise, the one that my

1 young uncle took out, there was all sorts of
2 nonsense in it, photographs that I have now in the
3 photo album, some nail filing equipment and some
4 other little knickknacks. And among them, there was
5 an opera glass that must have been of some value
6 because he picked that. He says: "I want this.
7 This you won't need where you are going." And we
8 gave it to him. He said: "Wait till the lights go
9 out and I will show you out." And he did that.

10 So he took us through the back door and took
11 us to the gate. And it was dark, the lights did not
12 shine, the street lights were off, out at that time.
13 And he made a certain effort to let us have a plan
14 to safely cross the street. So I remember that.
15 First was my mother and myself, and then my sister
16 and my grandmother, and at last my father crossed
17 the street.

18 And we crossed it into a residence, a home,
19 like you have them in private homes here, a wooden
20 house, two-story house, where we just rang the
21 doorbell and asked whether they can accommodate us.
22 And a very polite family let us in and let us stay
23 in the attic. And this was a family by the name of
24 (FROYERSTEIN). The gentleman was a lawyer and quite

1 a known person in the community. Apparently he was
2 in the Polish underground. His wife was also a very
3 fine person but, according to my sister's memoirs,
4 she must have had an advanced state of Parkinson
5 because she had very slowed-down reactions. And the
6 husband was in charge of everything, the entire
7 household.

8 We were given the attic for five people to
9 stay in with beds, with pillows, with blankets, with
10 some pots and pans to live on. And we slowly got
11 ourselves organized to lead life in the emigration.
12 That was in (BUCHACH) in September of 1939.

13 Q. ONE QUICK QUESTION. HOW OLD WAS YOUR
14 GRANDMOTHER AT THAT TIME, DO YOU REMEMBER? SHE WAS
15 OBVIOUSLY AN ELDERLY LADY.

16 A. She was around 64 or 65.

17 Q. AND FAIRLY FIT?

18 A. That is very interesting too. She was at
19 all times in sanatoria, had continuous problem with
20 doctors and specialists and was known to be a very
21 weak and sickly woman. The moment we started to
22 have difficulties, she was a real trooper. She had
23 resources and knew how to cook and produce miracles
24 out of nothing. And she was very frugal. And she

1 originally came from an impoverished household and
2 very quickly fitted into adapting herself to
3 difficult situations. She became very healthy.

4 MR. PETERS: Any questions on either
5 one of your parts?

6 BY MR. FROMING:

7 Q. THIS GOES BACK TO YOUR GRANDMOTHER, WAS HER
8 HOME IN VIENNA, DID SHE DISPOSE OF IT HERSELF OR WAS
9 IT CONFISCATED OR WHY DID SHE --

10 A. Well, this is -- she -- no. She let the
11 home stay in the hands of a lawyer who rented this
12 house, it was a considerable villa, who rented this
13 house for something like \$50 a year in our terms, to
14 some SS Nazis. They never found that fee offensive,
15 so they never made any step, never had taken any
16 steps to disown us from that house. So it remained
17 in our possession until 1945, when the Russians came
18 to Vienna. But that's later.

19 MR. PETERS: We can come back to that.

20 MRS. LIEBAN-KALMAR: Yes.

21 MS. ROTHSTEIN: I have a number of
22 questions.

23 BY MS. ROTHSTEIN:

24 Q. FIRST, I WAS WONDERING HOW SUDDENLY WAS YOUR

1 MOVE FROM KATOWICE BETWEEN THE TIME THAT YOUR MOTHER
2 HAD SPOKEN TO THE FRIEND OF THE ENGLISHWOMAN TO THE
3 TIME THAT YOU ACTUALLY LEFT?

4 A. Yeah, well, this was rather sudden, it was
5 quite sudden.

6 Q. WAS IT A MATTER OF A FEW DAYS?

7 A. It was in a matter of, to us, would seem to
8 us already a made decision and acted out on it. The
9 moment she announced it, she started packing.

10 Q. AND I WAS WONDERING WHAT YOU AS A CHILD WERE
11 TOLD ABOUT WHY YOU WERE MOVING. HOW MUCH
12 INFORMATION WERE YOU GIVEN?

13 A. We were given a few things to worry about;
14 namely, my sister being the older person and more
15 alert had her fears transferred on me. I probably
16 would not have noticed that in my own dream world.
17 But in her school, in her Gymnasium, in high school,
18 in junior high school, where she was at that time,
19 they started to discuss the situation of -- the
20 political situation, and they started to train the
21 children to be prepared in case of an air attack.

22 And then in our street, next to our street,
23 there was an office that had huge display windows
24 outside showing how to protect yourself with gas.

1 masks against gas bomb attacks. And we passed that
2 window every time and we were scared, petrified
3 whenever we saw that. So there has been some
4 anxiety growing in us from this particular tension
5 that was building up among the adults too.

6 Yes, I had nightmares of flying cows, not
7 that they are planes, but screaming was my forte at
8 night. So I had lots of anxiety dreams. Whether it
9 was as a result of this particular problem or other
10 ones of growing up as a child, I don't know.

11 BY MR. PETERS:

12 Q. WELL, WE KNOW THAT THE GERMANS CROSSED THE
13 POLISH BORDER ON THE 3RD OF SEPTEMBER.

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. PRESUMABLY YOU LEFT JUST BEFORE THEN.

16 A. No. I think we left after the 3rd of --

17 Q. AFTER?

18 A. Yes. Because this was already -- we knew
19 already that there was a war. We saw the planes
20 being shot down in Warsaw.

21 Q. BUT BY THAT TIME YOU WERE ALREADY IN WARSAW?

22 A. We were already in Warsaw, that's right.

23 Q. NOT THAT IT MATTERS TO BE THAT PRECISE --

24 A. Yeah.

1 Q. -- BUT THEY CROSSED THE BORDER ON THE 3RD OF
2 SEPTEMBER AND ON THE 17TH YOU WERE ALREADY IN
3 TERNOPOL AND BEYOND.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. SO IT DID HAPPEN VERY QUICKLY, THAT IN THE
6 COURSE OF TWO WEEKS OR LESS, YOU HAD GONE TO WARSAW,
7 YOU HAD STAYED SOMEWHERE, YOU HAD LEFT WARSAW --

8 A. We stayed someplace else, in (KUROV), we
9 stayed for about five days hiding out.

10 Q. SO IT ALL HAPPENED VERY QUICKLY. BECAUSE
11 THE WHOLE POLISH CAMPAIGN WAS ONLY THREE WEEKS.

12 A. That's right. That's right. Yeah. It was
13 a very dramatic period in our life.

14 Q. OKAY. SO NOW YOU'RE ENSCONCED IN THAT ATTIC
15 IN (BUCHACH)?

16 A. In (BUCHACH).

17 Shall I go on?

18 Q. Please do.

19 MS. ROTHSTEIN: I have a couple more.

20 MR. PETERS: I'm sorry. I beg your
21 pardon. I beg your pardon.

22 BY MS. ROTHSTEIN:

23 Q. I HAVE ONE MORE QUESTION, REALLY, WHICH WAS
24 I'M WONDERING WHAT YOU REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS,

1 TO WHAT EXTENT IT WAS AN ADVENTURE, TO WHAT EXTENT
2 IT WAS TERRIFYING. I KNOW THAT ONCE YOU GOT TO
3 LUBLIN IT WAS OBVIOUSLY SHEER HELL, BUT UNTIL THAT
4 POINT.

5 A. My feeling was being a component of the
6 family. I was so part a member of the family that I
7 would reflect all the sentiments and emotions of the
8 family. I very often was the counterpart to my
9 sister's anxiety. I would comfort her. But I still
10 would feel it. I know that our family was very
11 individualistic and incredibly insisting on having
12 their own way, each one of them, except in crisis.
13 The moment there was a crisis, we were all one soul
14 and one mind. It was very interesting how we all
15 pulled together. So I have received a role model to
16 endure.

17 My fears, of course I had to bury because
18 nobody else showed their fears. There were some
19 things that did indicate that they were under
20 stress. I remember during the time when -- just
21 little vignettes, you know, just -- when this
22 fellow, Polish fellow started to pull the gun on my
23 father telling him to turn around back to Poland,
24 direction to the inside of Poland, heading west, my

1 mother -- nobody spoke a word, there was complete
2 silence in the car. And my mother, in order to let
3 my father have a little bit of a relief from this
4 tension in that car, she would take an apple and
5 with her teeth peel the core of the apple, take a
6 bite and shove it in my father's mouth. This was a
7 little gesture of reassurance that I felt through
8 this kind of a vignette that was going on.

9 My sister was on the other side of the car,
10 I was sitting on -- there were two adults between
11 and on each side were the children. I was on the
12 right side, my sister was on the left side. She was
13 usually nauseated when she drove through bumps in
14 the car and so she had to have her nose out the
15 window. She stated she hadn't noticed this
16 particular incident of that major, Polish major
17 pulling the gun on Father. So, you see, it was this
18 kind of a tricky situation.

19 BY MR. PETERS:

20 Q. BY THE TIME YOU GOT TO THIS GYMNASIUM UNDER
21 THE RED ARMY, THE POLISH MAJOR HAD DISAPPEARED?

22 A. The Polish major disappeared in the moment
23 that things became tricky. And we found out he was
24 a spy for the Germans. Yeah, yeah. The moment we

1 got stuck, he was the first one to get out of the
2 car and he got lost. Yeah. But we were in the
3 mess.

4 BY MS. ROTHSTEIN:

5 Q. WHEN YOU WENT TO THE FROYERSTEINS' HOUSE --

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. -- THAT WAS PURELY BY ACCIDENT THAT YOU
8 FOUND SUCH SYMPATHETIC PEOPLE?

9 A. It was just purely by accident. And we
10 found them -- they were extraordinarily
11 understanding and fine people and did everything
12 possible to accommodate us. But really,
13 humanitarians a hundred percent. You rarely find
14 such fine persons.

15 They had sublet one floor in their house to
16 a person with a name of Madame (COO) and this lady
17 was less gracious because she had to share the
18 kitchen with us. And she had the water tap, which
19 we did not, and so we had to be always very
20 considerate of her. However, this Madame (COO) had
21 knowledge of Eastern European cooking. And my
22 mother would quote Madame (COO), how she would
23 encourage my mother to give one more egg and one
24 more egg and put one more egg into a soup to make it

1 richer. She says fill them up, they look skinny.
2 And that helped us later on to survive in Siberia
3 because we were well fed.

4 Now, sure, they promised that they're going
5 to return our belongings and the car to us, the
6 Soviets, but that of course never happened. Our car
7 was sighted in (BUCHACH) a few days later on being
8 driven by the military. Of course, the car was not
9 locked, they didn't know how to steer it, they
10 didn't know probably about this contraption to lock
11 the car, and gone were our things and gone was the
12 car.

13 After a few -- the first incidences in
14 that -- in (BUCHACH) were very traumatic also
15 because there was a shooting going on. (BUCHACH)
16 was situated in the valley and there were hills,
17 they were surrounded by hills. There was shooting
18 going on from one hill to the other hill. We
19 assumed they were opposition of the Poles that were
20 trying to defend themselves and be suicidal heroes.

21 But after three days of this shootout, or
22 maybe even longer -- and I know that we couldn't
23 sleep because our blankets and pillows were all in
24 the windows because we were afraid that if some of

1 those shots hit the glass, we can get injured. It
2 was the Russians shooting at each other. The
3 communication was so poor that they didn't know that
4 these were -- their own people were shooting at each
5 other, the soldiers. This was later on, I don't
6 know how they justified it, but there were
7 casualties, of course. And you heard gruesome
8 things happening all the times with the Russians in
9 that town. But we have been cautious.

10 We survived from that time onwards with
11 hidden jewelry which we had in our clothing. To be
12 specific, it was in our bras. And father would sell
13 such commodities as watches and rings and wedding
14 rings and other rings and so on and procure some
15 food. But of course after one month, the stores
16 emptied rapidly because the Russians were buying
17 everything out, and I suppose the population was
18 also hoarding, and I would be surprised if they
19 didn't, it would have made good sense to me that
20 they were part of the people that tried to make some
21 survival plans.

22 We, however, were facing the winter without
23 any provisions for the winter. With some miracle,
24 selling some jewelry items, my sister and I got

1 sheep fur coats that were very beautiful costumes of
2 that time of the Ukraine, they were embroidered on
3 the outer side, and they were a little bigger than
4 we were so we could grow into them. We had them and
5 they were a lifesaver. We procured some shoes that
6 we were to winter in. But it was a great struggle
7 to get fuel for this one room in the attic and to
8 get anything to eat. Not always you could get food.
9 And if so, it was on the black market. And the
10 prices were going up. And of course we were living
11 on our resources and we had no new to come in.

12 BY MR. PETERS:

13 Q. YOU WERE NOW IN SOVIET OCCUPIED TERRITORY OF
14 POLAND.

15 A. Uh-huh.

16 Q. HOW FAR EAST WAS (BUCHACH)?

17 A. (BUCHACH) was in the Ukraine, about
18 southeast of L'vov or Lemberg, maybe 80 miles.

19 Q. CAN YOU, I JUST --

20 A. I'm not too sure.

21 Q. BUT YOU WERE QUITE A WAYS EAST ALREADY?

22 A. In the Ukraine, it was the Polish Ukraine.

23 Q. POLISH UKRAINE, IT'S NOW SOVIET UKRAINE.

24 A. Now, there the population was quite

1 extensively Jewish and there were remnants of shtetl
2 life and you heard Yiddish spoken on the streets.
3 And we felt we were at a disadvantage for not being
4 able to speak that language. And they were looking
5 at us as (YEKKAS).

6 Q. DID YOUR FATHER WORK?

7 A. No.

8 There was, two weeks after --

9 Q. HOW COME?

10 A. Well, there was no work possible to get at
11 that time, everything was at a standstill. It was
12 not an industrial city, as I recall it, (BUCHACH).
13 It was a very small place. In my recollection, it
14 was one quarter of the size of Katowice, just, what,
15 30,000.

16 A few weeks into the Russian occupation, we
17 had to register and indicate when we came, what we
18 were doing at the time of the 18th of September,
19 were we on this side of the Oder-Neisse or on the
20 other side, what documents do we have to prove that
21 we are from Katowice, what our plans are, whether
22 they want -- whether we want to stay in (BUCHACH) or
23 do we plan to resettle. And we wrote it very
24 clearly we want to resettle and we would like to

1 emigrate, we were fleeing, we wanted to leave for
2 Rumania, we had in mind Israel, England, America, in
3 whatever sequence priority. And so did quite a lot
4 of people that were refugees like us.

5 Then came a few months later some
6 information from the other side of the occupied
7 Poland by Germans. We found out that our cousin
8 Tugendhart had left -- was successful leaving Warsaw
9 during the time of the German occupation by having
10 obtained Catholic papers and, under the protection
11 of the Pope, would leave for Rome, and from Rome to
12 Brazil.

13 This gave my father an idea that we should
14 also obtain Catholic christen paper, documents of
15 having christened, been christened. But he went
16 about it in a rather -- perhaps it wasn't possible
17 to do it differently under those circumstances. He
18 had to get a priest. And because we were children,
19 he agreed that it would be the best way to give us
20 information in Christian catechism. The priest did
21 that, taught us the prayer, the Lord's prayer,
22 taught us to do the cross. And at one point, we all
23 ended in the church to a mass where we had to take
24 in the (HOSTIA) and we were christened in the name

1 of the cross. And from that time on, we're going as
2 Catholics.

3 It, to me, it meant a farce. Whether I see
4 it today this way or whether I saw it that way in
5 those days, I don't -- I cannot say very clearly. I
6 was a nine-year-old child. But it did not imprint
7 on me as being something going to my bones as now I
8 have to be a Catholic, now I am Catholic. I was not
9 a Catholic before, I was Jewish before. There was
10 this little christening of water and teaching me
11 that I have to say the prayer, I have become
12 another -- belonging to another religion and
13 cultural heritage.

14 It was a far more traumatic experience for
15 my sister because she writes about it in her
16 memoirs. We were, however, made to go through a
17 tradition of saying the prayers before going to bed.
18 My parents assumed that I would fink and let out
19 that we are not really Catholics, that we are in
20 reality Jewish, that we are just doing it for the
21 sake of protecting ourselves. And so because I was
22 the youngest in the family, the whole family had to
23 go through this rigmarole. I knew exactly what was
24 happening, but they felt pained to go through this

1 ritual in order to make sure that I would stay in
2 character.

3 Q. DID YOUR GRANDMOTHER DO ALL OF THAT, THE
4 SAME PROCEDURE?

5 A. Yes, yes. Every one of them followed it.

6 We did have -- I have memories of an
7 incredibly united and harmonious family, things like
8 in the evening sitting together with one lamp and
9 Father reading to us some books that he procured
10 from a library that he scrounged around and reading
11 to us out loud. I remember this and I cherish these
12 moments. We had nowhere to go. We had no new
13 people that we made acquaintance with. We were very
14 much kept to ourselves.

15 As the winter rolled along, the schools
16 opened up and I started to attend my class, third
17 grade or second grade, and my sister started to
18 attend high school again, only the school has been
19 changed to the Russian school system of a ten-year
20 school, (DISATILYETKA).

21 But sometimes my sister was staying away
22 from school because she had to stand in line to
23 procure some food item that was suddenly showing up
24 in the store. And there was immense lines formed

1 and each person got only a little smidgen of it, so
2 the more that were in line, the more we could get of
3 this treasured item. And very often, to the
4 detriment of her health, one day she even rushed so
5 hard to another store where there was a shorter line
6 for the same food item, it was sugar, fell and cut
7 her lip on the ice. And there was no medication to
8 do, no suturing methods in that city, in that
9 (BUCHACH), which was not really a city, it was a
10 town. Her lip grew back with a big scar and she
11 suffered from that scar that disfigured her lower
12 lip for all her life, she was very much aware of it.

13 Back to the (FROYERSTEINS). A couple of
14 months into our stay with the (FROYERSTEINS),
15 Mr. (FROYERSTEIN) did not return and rumors had it
16 that he, together with the other Polish officers,
17 was sent out to the White Sea or to cut. Anyway, he
18 ended his life, with so many others.

19 As the summer moved along, we have been
20 seeing tremendous amount of trains, cattle cars,
21 moving into the train station. And rumors were
22 spread that there is going to be (ERATZIA). Well,
23 at that time, we were told -- the police, the
24 Russian police came into the (FROYERSTEINS') house

1 and we were told to vacate that house within one
2 day. They took the remaining (FROYERSTEINS), Madame
3 (FROYERSTEIN) and her two sons, they were children
4 of five and seven years, and she disappeared into
5 oblivion. Mrs. (COO) remained but she was also
6 asked to go, the house was going to be confiscated
7 and Mrs. (COO) took over, so to speak, the command,
8 and said we can take everything that the
9 (FROYERSTEINS) gave us without thinking of returning
10 it because she has a hunch they will never come
11 back. Mrs. (COO) was a remarkable woman of
12 remarkable wisdom. Of course she was right.

13 We found another room in the vicinity, which
14 was not a big problem to us. But two weeks later,
15 in the middle of the night, it was in June, we were
16 awakened with a very hard knock, the knock that only
17 means one thing, and that means trouble, with three
18 soldiers coming into our house. My sister and I, we
19 were sleeping on the floor. I was wakened by a kick
20 of the soldier to get up and get going, we have one
21 hour to get ready. Down on the street, there is a
22 horse with an open cart waiting for us to take our
23 bundles to the train station. We're going to the
24 place that we registered we are wanting to go,

1 namely Israel, America, England or whatever.

2 Naturally, we thought it was too fictitious
3 a situation to believe these people. Besides, we
4 heard about those trains that were being amassed on
5 the train station. And I remember my father
6 panicked and tried to bargain with those soldiers,
7 thinking that he can persuade them to leave us
8 alone. My mother, however, remained the cool-headed
9 one, and whatever she could hoard, she would put
10 into bundles, and Heidi helped her. I don't know, I
11 probably helped too. It didn't take long and we
12 were out on the street.

13 On the train station, we met a few emigres
14 that we knew from standing in line and so on. And
15 they were also horded in the same manner as they had
16 horded us. We were pushed into cattle cars as we
17 were filling up into the train station. And when
18 the cattle car was filled in, we were just closed up
19 and then the next cattle car would fill in. And
20 that was still of course the nighttime. The
21 Russians were great in working at nighttime, they
22 were very efficient.

23 At first in the train, I remember we were
24 completely petrified, in a stupor. It wasn't only

1 us, but it was the rest of the people too. You
2 would not believe that there were people in there,
3 there was no sound in that car after that door shut.
4 And I think we remained that way until we could
5 discern that there are some faces in the car. And
6 there was a count, head count, name count, took
7 quite some time for the Russians to read our names.
8 They were of course very un -- inept to read names o
9 German origin and some Czech origin, some Polish
10 origin, some Yiddish origin.

11 So I don't know, how long do you want me to
12 go on?

13 Q. OH, A LONG TIME.

14 HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE IN THE CAR?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. CAN YOU GIVE US SOME IDEA? BECAUSE WE KNOW
17 ABOUT CATTLE CARS.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. A LITTLE DIFFERENT, I THINK.

20 A. Right.

21 Q. WERE YOU SITTING DOWN? TELL US ALL YOU CAN
22 REMEMBER ABOUT THAT CATTLE CAR.

23 A. Right, right, right.

24 I made out that we might have been something

1 between 28 and 48 people in the car. I don't know
2 if that is a fair estimate but it must have been
3 roughly that.

4 I must admit our cattle car was one of the
5 more fortunate ones because very soon, there was a
6 government set up inside the car, an organization, a
7 system was devised. We were very fortunate because
8 among the people were maybe four families with
9 children, we included.

10 Then there was one family that had adult
11 people in it, two adult girls, but they must have
12 been something in the category of our street people
13 of today. They were very bedraggled,
14 extraordinarily poor, and very unrealistically
15 oriented. They didn't know what was happening to
16 them. They didn't speak Polish, they didn't speak
17 German, they didn't speak Russian. They spoke no
18 other language except Hebrew and Yiddish. And the
19 man, the father, the head of the family was
20 extraordinarily frightened. He had a prayer shawl
21 on and he was praying all the time. He would not --
22 he was like in a trance. He would not respond to
23 questions that people were asking of him. In the
24 middle, they sat in the middle of the wagon, they

1 wouldn't move, they were like a solid rock. And the
2 rest of the family, consisting of wife and two
3 daughters, teen-age daughter, would continuously
4 lament upon their fate and cry. There was no -- the
5 moment we were spoken -- they were addressed to,
6 they started lamentation and crying, afraid of us,
7 panicky afraid of us.

8 And then there were about 20 to 24 bachelors
9 from Czechoslovakia. Apparently they were Jewish
10 bachelors, highly cultured people, very disciplined
11 and considerate. And one among them emerged as a
12 spokesman. He had a father with him with the name
13 of Karl (BERM), (BERM). Now, I don't know -- Ernst
14 (BERM), it wasn't Karl, it was Ernst. He started to
15 develop a system. He says if we pull it together,
16 we may survive. But if each one is just minding his
17 own interest, we are going to suffer tremendously.
18 He was having an idea of how to conduct a meeting in
19 a democratic process because it sort of became a
20 consensus upon suggestions that were approved by him
21 and came from the group.

22 There was -- there were two big boards or
23 shelves in the cattle car and there was an aisle in
24 the center. The upper shelves were given to the

1 four families because the family in the center, the
2 very orthodox family, would not move, we left them
3 there. The older people, the grownups, so to speak,
4 the bachelors, spread underneath those shelves on
5 each side.

6 There was one spot designated where they
7 decided to change that spot to a toilet, in that
8 they decided alternately stomp on the boards until
9 they made a hole through that car so that you could
10 use it as a toilet. We were also -- somebody
11 donated a privacy blanket which they fixed up.

12 They helped us -- on the top of the shelves,
13 on each side, there were windows. Those windows
14 were barred at that time but they, having good
15 boots, some of them, would stomp on those windows
16 until they opened up and we had fresh air. Mind
17 you, it was in June.

18 They agreed that every bit of food that is
19 in the wagon will first go to children to be shared
20 equally, was for every child, and then after the
21 children ate, the adults will eat, which was rather
22 very unusual but it worked.

23 Q. EXCUSE ME, VERA. WAS THE TRAIN THEN IN
24 MOTION OR WERE YOU STILL SITTING ON THE SIDING WHEN

1 ALL THIS WENT ON?

2 A. The discussion went on I think while we were
3 still in -- while we were standing. We were
4 standing a great deal of the time. We would be
5 going only a few hours a day and then we would be
6 put on a side rail, railroad track. I remember
7 there was plenty of time given to those discussions,
8 plenty of time.

9 The people in charge of the train actually
10 insisted that somebody is being chosen as a
11 (STAROSTA), commandant (VAGUANA). The (STAROSTA)
12 means the leader of the -- the spokesman for the
13 people in the cattle car. And this was, by
14 consensus, chosen to be this Ernst (BERM) and my
15 father. So they were the ones that put the names
16 together, they were the ones that always spoke with
17 the military that was coming for daily check or
18 sometimes couple of days to check.

19 Each time that the car -- the train
20 approached a bigger town, the doors were locked, the
21 windows were locked repeatedly, and we were not
22 allowed to see where we were going.

23 Food, we received once a day slop, called
24 itself kasha, which was tasting bitter and was

1 always burned, but it was food.

2 Once we were even permitted to leave the
3 train, and that was -- that must have been after war
4 was declared between -- after the Germans
5 attacked -- no. No, I don't think so.

6 Q. WHEN YOU TALKED ABOUT JUNE, ARE WE TALKING
7 ABOUT JUNE 1940?

8 A. 1940, that's wrong, that's wrong. No.

9 Q. THAT'S A YEAR PRIOR TO THE WAR.

10 A. Prior to the war.

11 What was happening that we were told
12 something that we found out? I have to look that
13 up. I don't remember that. But we had some news
14 about -- I think we had news that other people, that
15 there were about -- it was a mass transportation,
16 that we were not one of the few ones that have been
17 transported to Russia, something like this, in that
18 time that we were let out, it was where there was a
19 river and we were able to wash up.

20 Q. THE PEOPLE ON THIS TRAIN, THEY WERE NOT
21 LOCAL PEOPLE FROM POLAND, WERE THEY, FROM THE AREA
22 WHERE YOU BOARDED THE TRAIN, WERE THEY MOSTLY
23 REFUGEES --

24 A. Yes.

1 Q. -- PEOPLE WHO HAD COME FROM SOMEWHERE

2 ELSE --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- EAST OF POLAND, CZECHOSLOVAKIA?

5 A. Czechoslovakia, uh-huh. Except this family,
6 I think they were just taken off the streets, they
7 were homeless. They were terribly poor. They got
8 swept in with us because they were clearly as if
9 from a different country. And later on, we were --
10 everybody was helping them to survive. But at that
11 time --

12 Q. WERE THEY ALL JEWISH, INCIDENTALLY?

13 A. Yes, the family -- everybody in that train
14 was Jewish. I think so. Maybe not. But I think it
15 was.

16 There was a family with smaller children.
17 And we did share, there was some people had
18 crackers, some people had vitamins, some people had,
19 I don't know, maybe vitamins wasn't known in those
20 days yet, but some apples or some sweets or
21 something, these were shared to be going to the
22 children. And there was a lot of things that the
23 adults were doing for the sake of the children, but
24 they really tried to keep their spirits up. They

1 were playing games with us. And they are making
2 evenings where they were telling stories. And it
3 was a very congenial group.

4 Q. SO HOW LONG HAD YOU BEEN TRAVELING NOW, DO
5 YOU HAVE ANY RECOLLECTION?

6 A. It was over two weeks in those cattle cars.
7 And of course the deeper we went into the forests,
8 the birch tree forests, we knew we are heading
9 towards Siberia, and that's what we did.

10 At one point at nighttime, the train stopped
11 and we were told to get out and they loaded us on
12 trucks, automobile trucks. And the voyage started
13 into the thickest of the forest but without much of
14 a road to speak of. There were this incredible
15 improvisation that made the impossible happen, where
16 trucks would get stuck beyond their wheels into mud
17 holes and men would be asked to file trees to yank
18 the truck out of that hole. And people who were two
19 weeks without decent nourishment, in the middle of
20 the night, exhausted from all this stress, would put
21 the incredible energy together to get those trucks
22 going again, and off we continued into the
23 thickest -- thicket of the forest.

24 The whole night and a great deal of the day,

1 we would ride until we got to a settlement which
2 called itself (KABAN) number two. So there was a
3 (KABAN) number one. And that was in the mines,
4 where they had metal mines.

5 Q. IRON ORE?

6 A. Yeah. Not iron. It was tin, I think.

7 Q. TIN.

8 A. (ABATSKI MIERDNI RUDNIK), it was called,
9 number two, (NOMERTAVA).

10 Well, we were there, there was a clearing in
11 the forest with some eight or ten barracks on one
12 side, one beneath the other, piling up to the height
13 of the clearing. On the other, there were
14 individual homes, huts. And then in the back was
15 some river. And there was a sawmill, which run, by
16 the way, on some turbine and had some sort of
17 electricity. There were previously settled Polish
18 settlers there already and Russian settlers from
19 some kind of (ERATZIA), because they were at the
20 wrong spot at some given time and kept under
21 suspicion that they were political dissidents.

22 Whatever it was, we were under
23 commandantura, which was under commander and his
24 office. And we were given the first introduction to

1 our future life. They found a woman among us, among
2 our transport, who understood Russian and could
3 translate what he said to us into Polish.

4 And this is what he said in a nutshell:
5 This is a working camp and we are here for life. If
6 we dream of escaping, we will never make it. We
7 will see of our country as much as he can see his
8 own ears with his own eyes without using a mirror.
9 Or another metaphor he used, his hair will grow on
10 the palm before we return to our country. And he
11 indulged and took pleasure in making such nice
12 speeches to make us understand that this is not
13 going to be a honey ducking. Everybody has to work,
14 children exempt, starting from 14 to 65, something
15 like that. And the only time you can be excused is
16 when you have a 38 Celsius fever and that a
17 (FELCHER) is going to explain, decide whether you
18 are ill or not, otherwise you belong at work.

19 And so they let us form, get us accommodated
20 in one of the barracks consisting of ten rooms on
21 each side of the hall. The rooms were rather small,
22 something like 11 by 11 maximum. The barracks were
23 not finished yet. They were built by other
24 settlers. And we didn't have the roof yet over our

1 head. They were made out of logs, like log cabins,
2 with moss in between. The floors were there, they
3 were made out of fine wood, it was not wood -- not
4 earth, not dirt floors. And we were put seven
5 people into this little room, the family (BERM),
6 Ernst (BERM) and the father was one and we the
7 other. We were given some boards to hammer our own
8 furniture together and wooden shavings to use as a
9 mattress.

10 And with the help of this (BERM), we managed
11 to build our furniture, consisting of one bed and a
12 couple of benches and a table. There was not enough
13 room for anything else. No electrical light to
14 speak of, and no window. So it was rather gloomy.

15 Q. COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CAMP A LITTLE BIT
16 MORE? WAS IT A CAMP WITH BARBED WIRE, WITH
17 WATCHTOWERS, OR WAS IT A SETTLEMENT? YOU TALKED
18 ABOUT SETTLERS.

19 A. Settlement.

20 Q. YOU WERE NOT PRISONERS?

21 A. We were prisoners.

22 Q. YOU WERE PRISONERS?

23 A. But we haven't been delineated that the
24 barbed wire is the limit. We were not allowed to

1 leave one kilometer past the settlement. We didn't
2 have watchtowers but the main road was watched by an
3 office of the commander. The commander came every
4 day to count heads in the morning. There were no
5 locks on the doors. Every morning, he supervised
6 the head count and the transport to the work site.

7 Father was soon identified as being an
8 engineer and he was made to work on the road. The
9 others went to the mines, to work in the mines. My
10 mother had first to use -- make -- reduce the large
11 size rocks into smaller rocks for the road. This
12 was done manually with a hammer. So she would
13 describe her occupation as (STEINERKLOPFEN).

14 Father later on made it possible for her to
15 become a different type of worker, namely what is
16 called (GRUSCHIK). A (GRUSCHIK) is a carrier. She
17 was carrying hot water to the workers. Hot water is
18 (KEPYATOK). So my mother called herself Madame de
19 (KEPYATOK). She was carrying it out to help people
20 have their little respite. And she needed to make
21 some fire and put the kettle on and carry water to
22 the kettle to make it boil and then carry the
23 boiling water to those workers who were working on
24 the road.

1 This went quite well for some time until my
2 mother had a gallbladder attack from some of the
3 dreadful food that we ate. And since that time, she
4 refused to go to work anymore. My grandmother was
5 not needing to work because she was past the age.
6 My sister, however, 14 years old and rather adult
7 looking, was made to work. And pretty soon she
8 became very ill, she got tuberculosis, and had no
9 way of getting any medication or help, but at least
10 under some influence of some doctors that were in
11 our group, the (FELCHER) conceded and let her stay
12 home.

13 Q. THAT WAS A RUSSIAN --

14 A. (FELCHER), yes.

15 And then came the winter. And the winter
16 was dreadful, just as expected. And we didn't have
17 any equipment to protect ourselves from the winter.
18 We had no food. And yet there was sharing going on
19 in the -- well, we would share our food with the
20 (BERMS), whatever we cooked. I remember that period
21 as one of dreadful frost, freezing terribly, and
22 being awfully hungry, and of course having these
23 constant illnesses to boot, and dysentery, and it
24 was a bad period.

1 Q. DID YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WERE?

2 A. Yes, we did know where we were. But then
3 again, we are in the country of the impossible.

4 In that place was a telegraph office. And
5 to send a telegram abroad was something in the
6 relationship of our money a dime, a lengthy telegram
7 of 40, 50 words. It was incredibly cheap. And my
8 mother was very active once she was able to think
9 things through. She sent telegrams out to everybody
10 she knew was outside in -- either in England or her
11 friends or relatives, in America or in Israel. And
12 she figured they all are censored but one may slip
13 through.

14 And so it happened, one telegram slipped
15 through. The impossible happened. At the end of
16 the telegram, there was a plea to notify all those
17 other people, in case they get that telegram, of
18 where we are and what is happening to us.

19 So about maybe eight months into Siberia, we
20 suddenly receive a package from United States. A
21 friend sent us a package consisting of buckles,
22 zippers, scissors, needles, safety pins, snap
23 buttons, snap-on buttons, what's that called,
24 snap-on buttons.

1 Q. SNAP BUTTONS.

2 A. Snap buttons.

3 You can't imagine what a treasury this was.
4 This was a gold mine. We couldn't sell our jewelry
5 because they didn't understand what jewelry was, but
6 this they understood. All of a sudden we could buy
7 potatoes. Now, it was -- they were miserable
8 potatoes. And we didn't know how miserably cold we
9 were because we put it, in order to hide it, to make
10 sure that this treasury is not going to get stolen,
11 we hid it under our beds. One night did it and it
12 all froze and the potatoes were rotten. You know,
13 these kinds of things happened to us all the time.

14 So but in other words, it allowed us to get
15 some felt shoes, (VALINKE), for our feet. It
16 allowed us to get, in trade-in, one of those huge
17 (FOFIKAS) that became coats for me. (FOFIKA) is a
18 quilted coat, like they have been fashionable here
19 in the last years. Galoshes over those felt shoes
20 and some kind of rags that we could wrap our feet
21 in. Because you had to have multiple layers in
22 order to sustain you in that cold.

23 Your eyelids froze to the eyebrows and your
24 breath from the nose froze to your lips when you

1 were outdoors. Your face shriveled up to the
2 consistency surface of an orange in the cold. I
3 mean, this was real cold. It perhaps -- United
4 States has places where it get that cold but you
5 have a full stomach and you have some heat inside to
6 warm you up. But there, there was nothing to get us
7 going practically and we froze miserably.

8 Q. HOW ABOUT YOUR OWN LIFE, WAS THERE A SCHOOL
9 FOR THE YOUNG CHILDREN? TELL US ABOUT A DAY IN YOUR
10 LIFE IN THE CAMP.

11 A. For us there was a school. And we -- I left
12 in the morning -- I had some duties to perform too.
13 My duty consisted either taking out garbage or
14 bringing in water, which was not an easy chore
15 because it was icy and it was dark in the morning.
16 It became daylight around 11:00 o'clock.

17 How much time do you want to stay here?

18 Q. WE'LL TAKE A BREAK ANYTIME YOU WANT, IF YOU
19 WANT TO GET A DRINK OF WATER OR SOMETHING.

20 A. Right. I am going to just finish that and
21 then maybe we should break.

22 Q. ALL RIGHT. YOU WERE BRINGING IN WATER AND
23 TAKING OUT GARBAGE.

24 A. Yeah, that was one of my tasks. Another

1 task was bringing in wood shavings to heat the stove
2 and bringing in fire -- logs to the fire.

3 School started early, in the dark. I think
4 our classroom had electricity. There were two
5 grades in that school. The ones who were on
6 alphabets and couldn't read and write, to which I
7 belonged, and then there were ones who were bigger
8 kids who knew how to add and subtract and read in
9 Russian. I didn't belong to that group.

10 I had a very systematic introduction to
11 penmanship in Russian and into writing words before
12 reading them. The teacher was very systematic and a
13 rather well-designed curriculum.

14 The kids were, some of them, were
15 impossible. I was in the same grade as the son of
16 the commander, who took it upon himself to torment
17 all the girls that were from the new settlers. And
18 he did that to me too. He pushed me once and I fell
19 on the backbone very hard, and I must have hurt
20 myself. But for some strange reason, I didn't say a
21 word about it. My parents scolded me for not being
22 able to bend down. I wouldn't tell them that I
23 hurt. And I don't know why I didn't tell them. It
24 is to me unexplainable today that I wouldn't say

1 something like this, but I was apparently scared of
2 my parents, scared of consequences, scared of
3 troubles. And I had enough aches, I didn't want to
4 bother, maybe that was it. But I remember that was
5 quite an ordeal.

6 The school lasted until something middle of
7 the day and we came back when it was already getting
8 dark because I remember I was hurrying very fast,
9 being afraid that one of those kids, those
10 hooligans, would jump me or pick me up or get even
11 with me in some ways. So that was the school day.

12 Once in that school, they showed a movie,
13 The Land of the Impossible, and it was called The
14 Great Waltz, showing Vienna, the (GLORIET), the
15 (SCHERNBRUN), Strauss waltzes. And we sat there
16 crying our heart out seeing these things, comparing
17 ourselves, our situation to this particular movie.
18 It was an English movie. Little did they know where
19 it ended. So that was that.

20 After Heidi got sick, my sister, stopped
21 working too and later on went to school also. She
22 was one of the bigger kids. The school didn't last
23 long. In summer somewhere, May, it ended. And I
24 think in June was the time when the war was

1 declared.

2 Q. JUNE '41?

3 A. June '41 at that time.

4 Q. YOU HAD BEEN THERE A YEAR?

5 A. We have been a year, over a year, 18 months
6 or something -- 16 months at that time. Less than
7 that, 14 months. It became 18 months by the time we
8 left.

9 Oh, I am getting hot.

10 Q. WERE YOU GETTING NEWS? WAS THERE A RADIO?

11 A. All right. There was neither news, nor was
12 there radio, nor was anything to be known that was
13 going on. There have been some situations where
14 some people escaped from the settlement and then let
15 us know through their acquaintances what is
16 happening elsewhere.

17 Next door to us was a woman who had -- whose
18 husband just couldn't stand being in that camp and
19 he just escaped. He let her know that he is waiting
20 for her next opportunity to escape in (KRASNURALSK).
21 But through him did we know that there were some
22 changes going on in our situation, and that was when
23 the war broke out between Germany and Russia.

24 We got to know through him that there was a

1 Sikorsky government, Polish government formed in
2 exile in England, that Stalin had made an agreement
3 with that Sikorsky to defend the invading -- the
4 invaded territory, which at that time Poland became
5 an invaded territory by the Germans, with Poles,
6 Polish army. There had been a considerable amount
7 of Polish military, as well as Polish settlers,
8 resettled into Russia. That these settlers would be
9 allowed to organize several divisions under Unders,
10 General Unders, to fight the war against the
11 Germans.

12 This particular agreement has changed our
13 status from being settlers, suspect political
14 element, to being refugees. And it took a few
15 months until this message penetrated into the
16 Siberian work camps. But once it got there, a
17 commission came and declared us as being free to
18 leave the camp. We will be given documents to
19 travel, if we so wish, and we will be allowed to
20 work for money. Because at that time we didn't work
21 for money.

22 So that's what happened somewhere in October
23 1941.

24