

INTERVIEW WITH IRENE OPDYKE

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEWER: Sandra Bendayan

TRANSCRIBER: Donna Shaffer Lee

THE INTERVIEWER: I'm Sandra Bendayan, I'm here with Irene Opdyke, interviewing her for the San Francisco Holocaust Oral History Project.

Today is May the 5th, 1993, and John Grant is our producer.

Q IRENE, WOULD YOU PLEASE TELL US YOUR NAME, WHEN YOU WERE BORN IF IT WASN'T OPDYKE, AND WHEN AND WHERE YOU WERE BORN?

A My name was <sup>IRENA Gutówna</sup> Elaina, (Gutówna) and I was born in Poland in little town of <sup>Koziemice</sup> (Kozanizka).

Q KOZANIZKA? HOW DO YOU SPELL KOZANIZKA?

A K O Z N -- if I -- if you ask me now for spelling, forget it.

Q OKAY. KOZANIZKA.

A Yeah. I can write, but I cannot spell it in English.

Q OKAY. WE'LL MOVE RIGHT ALONG.

A So, if we start all over again or --

Q NO. NO. THAT IS FINE. IT'S OK.

A Well, my spelling is -- I have to write to be able to spell, otherwise I don't know. I don't remember.

Q IS KOZANIZKA NEAR A BIG CITY?

A Yes. That is around <sup>Kelca</sup> (Kentza) and I guess <sup>Kraków</sup> (Crakal). Just in that -- somehow in some other place. I don't know. I was only born there, and when I was a year and a half <sup>my</sup> parents moved. So I've never been there ~~before~~. <sup>since</sup>

Q AND WHEN WERE YOU BORN?

A I was born in 1922.

Q MAY THE 5TH.

A May the 5th. And today is my birthday.

Q YES. HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

A Thank you.

Q AND CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?

A Well, my father and mother were young. I was their first born. My mother was only 18 when I was born. And my father was still in the army in 1918 when Poland was fighting for independence. And they were wonderful people. And then I did have four other sisters. We were five girls.

My father was a <sup>SULTAN</sup> (pasha.) He had five girls, mother, grandmother, and even the dog and the cat, they were all females. It was a very happy family. We were at peace with God and people.

My mother was a saint, because there were gypsies around in the forests and they were poor and -- my mother twice took gypsie to our home because she did have pneumonia, she was very sick. My mother also encouraged us always to help, no matter what.

And when we were coming from school we brought the dogs and the cats and lost children and birds and whoever. My mother never said, "Why are you doing that?"

It's too much." She knew how to fix. She knew how to help. And so we grow in that type of a home.

I was born into catholic faith. And I believe *IN GOD*, *WITH* school we did, go to church on Sunday, but many times I could not pray because if you go with a bunch of kids they just laughing, giggling. And so when I needed to pray, and <sup>WAS</sup> *AWAY* from school, there was my favorite place, a little birch tree surrounded with the evergreens. There, if I needed prayer, that was my God. I could almost feel and see him. And I can tell him everything.

It was a very precious time for me and maybe, maybe because of that, *DURING* the war and prosecution, I could pray to God in any place I was, and he was there for me.

Q DID YOUR FAMILY KNOW THAT YOU HAD YOUR PRIVATE WAY OF PRAYING?

A Oh, in a way, yes. I loved the trees, I loved the flowers, I loved the *MEADOWS*, I loved the greenery. In that, I did see the *CREATOR*. I did see God. I was very affected by that, yes.

Q BUT YOU WENT TO CHURCH REGULARLY, ALSO?

A Well, when I was in school, we were going with school, yes. We -- my mother -- my father did not go often. He believed in God, he was a wonderful man, but we were not really every Sunday going to church family.

Q DID YOUR MOTHER GO TO CHURCH REGULARLY?

A Not really, because many times she did have five of us to take care of, you know. But, she taught us the ten commandment, what's right and what's wrong; and she taught us, myself, I was the oldest and my sister *ganina*), we were forced to do our room and clean and she would check it out and she taught us what is important. Naturally, we were raised to be good wives and mothers.

Politics, I didn't know anything. That was because in Poland at that time the children were raised that way. So, we were a happy family.

I did have very happy times with my sisters. There were many poor people, <sup>AND</sup> at the holidays, there was always a place for poor people <sup>AT OUR TABLE</sup>. And when somebody was down on their luck, my mother and my father were helping. So, I have to say that that was the important thing in my life.

Q SO YOUR FATHER WAS INVOLVED ALSO IN HELPING?

A Yes. My father, *ALSO*. But, matter of fact, when my youngest sister was born, she was, what, 12 years younger than I am. I was 12 years. And I remember that my father's best friend, *HE* brought <sup>HIS CHILD</sup> -- the mother died in childbirth. This was sometime when my sister was born. My mother was nursing the baby, she did have so much milk. I don't remember the name . -- but I remember that she was nursing the baby.

Q AND YOUR GRANDMOTHER, WAS SHE ALSO THAT KIND OF PERSON?

A My grandmother was a widow and she did have two boys and one girl. That was my mother. Oh. Two girls and two boys. Excuse me. And when -- my mother was the older, and she took over. She could not go to school. She finished only ~~three~~, third grade, you know. That's all. My father was very intelligent. He finished college. But there was not difference. My mother pulled herself to his standards.

Q I WAS JUST WONDERING WHETHER IT WAS A FAMILY TRADITION TO ALWAYS HELP THE POOR, LIKE THROUGH YOUR GRANDMOTHER, EVEN.

A Well, my grandmother, I don't remember much about her. But I know she did struggle very hard to make a living to raise the children, her two boys and two girls. That I know. And she was for a few years with us and she was a very nice lady. That's what I remember.

Q WHAT WAS YOUR PARENTS' NAMES?

A My mother's was Maria and my father's was *WŁADYSLAW*. That's a slavic name. And my father was blue-eyed, blond man, not very tall. And just before the war , my father *BUILT* a factory, *A CERAMICS* factory. And he did have many people under study and there were Polish and Russian and Jewish and Christian and Germans and many of the people were married. So we did have a

united nation with children, and we played together. There was not any hate between us. We just tried to find a nicest way to have a pleasure in playing. That's all.

Q SO YOUR PARENTS ALWAYS WERE ACCEPTING OF OTHER KINDS OF PEOPLE.

A Yes. My father did have a factory with Jewish men. David was the son of the *PARTNER* and we were wonderful *FRIENDS*. I did not know the word antisemitism. I learned that during the war and after the war. There was not any difference in that place I lived. That's true. There was nothing this is a Jew or this is a *Dirty Gypsy* or *ANYTHING ELSE*. I didn't hear my father or mother speaking about that. Matter of fact, they just said, "You have to be good and play together." And they tried to put lots of love in us, for us, for ourselves and also for other people.

Q DID YOU HAVE NEIGHBORS WHO WERE JEWISH OR GYPSIE?

A Yeah. The gypsies in the forest. We always help. And they were neighbor. But there were Jewish neighbors and Christian neighbors. I don't remember really thinking any big thing. We were all kids together playing.

Q HOW DID YOUR MOTHER COME TO KNOW GYPSIES IN THE FOREST?

A Well, they were very close to our house because we lived out of town and we did have a nice villa and, you

know, the gypsies play music and so many times our people did go to see and they tell you story of your life, you give a hand and they tell you story.

So, my mother many time share with them food or something *THEY NEED*. And then when the gypsy was very sick and she was dying, so my mother did go and took her to our home. That I remember. And the doctor come to help. So, when there were poor people we brought them food and we -- on holidays, there was always *THREE*, four people at our tables, you know.

Q SO WHERE WAS IT THAT YOU GREW UP? YOU SAID YOU MOVED AFTER A YEAR AND HALF?

A Well, I was born in *KOZIENICE* then my father built factories in *RADOM*, and *CHENSTOKHOVA* and then just before the war in *OBERSHLASIEN, POLAND*. That's where I was a teenager and did go to school. And it was a very nice small town and there were lots of forests. I remember it was beautiful.

Q WHEN WERE YOU FIRST AWARE OF TROUBLE FROM THE GERMANS?

A Well, in the newspapers my father read, that was just in 1938 when German did the (*crystalNACHT*) in Germany and, you know, like I say, we were not asked about political questions, but *THEY* had discussion. And my -- the <sup>*DAD AND*</sup> ~~men~~ that did have the factory, Jewish men, David's father, I don't know his name, I don't remember his name, but they were



talking that, "The Germans, *ARE BAD*, they're very powerful." *AND DANGEROUS*

And my father even tells how his Jewish partner, he said, "You know, you have to think about, you know, you have to maybe leave, go someplace. Because I am afraid that the Germans will come here." We were only seven kilometers from German border. That's where the factory was, you know.

But I, in this same time, I finished high school and I decided -- I was a candy striper in hospital, and there was a Mother Superior, she was beautiful, she was so gorgeous with the white *HEAD*. And I told my father I want to be a nun. So he said, "Okay. First finish school. If you want it, that will be fine with me." So, he did sign me to the best nursing school in the middle of Poland. About 200 kilometers from my home. And I did have to leave my home to be able to study.

At that time, they say that it was very close. The Germans were talking. But, really, they took Poland without declaring war so we didn't really know. I was at that time in school.

Q WHAT TOWN WAS THAT?

A In town. That was -- that was in *RADOM*.

Q YOU WERE STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL?

A I had just finished high school and I went to *RADOM*

to study to be a nurse. And at that time you live in the hospital and you study and learn there to be a nurse. And I wanted to be the best. I try. I study. I mean, I did not have a boyfriend or anything. At 17 we were not allowed. I was not kissed even, by a boy. We study.

And Hitler. One day I was going to the hospital and I did see airplanes coming very heavy. And I was standing and looking up, somebody pulled me into the ditch because they were dropping something. I didn't know what it was. Explosions. Fires. People dead and wounded. One of the doctors pulled me into ditch there.

Then when we came to the hospital it was a nightmare. People were bringing people wounded and people dead. People looking for each other. We tried to help. Day and night we were trying to help the wounded. But Hitler was moving with the speed of lightening. Polish military did have to retreat.

At that time some of the nurses joined the Polish army and they took me with them, you know, and we were running for days. We did not have time to stop and dress the wounds even. Because then every 10, 15 minutes another airplane was coming low and dropping the bombs, even when you have the Red Cross mark and trucks. And finally we retreated almost to the Russian border and we thought that will be it, you know, that the Polish army will be able to

get together and fight back.

But, the Polish general said, "Thank you. The war is over. Hitler and Stalin took my country in half." Poland was no more.

And at that time I realized that I am a little girl. I felt like to scream, "Mama, where are you?"

I didn't know what I would do, where I would go. So the <sup>①</sup>WAREN houses were open and Polish soldiers from different parts of army, we took -- they took the staples, they took blankets and what they could, and we did go to the Ukrainian forest.

Ukraine had a big beautiful big forest and we were thinking, no, everything is over, what we will do then. And it start to get cold and I did not even have SHOES I did have sandals on my feet and it was starting to get winter. So at that time a group of Polish soldiers, maybe ten, and another nurse that is older than us, we did go to the villages to barter.

I remember they left me, left me to stay by the truck. And they did go through villages trying to exchange tobacco and sugar and this for other things. And all of a sudden I did see a big, big truck coming from far away and I did see the Russian soldiers jumping off with the bayonets fixed. And it was snow already and you could see the menacing glitter of the steel. I was so scared. And

①  
COMMISARY

so I ran. And when I ran, I ran to the forest because that was my home.

Three Russian soldiers got ahold of me. I was brutally violated. I was beaten, I was raped. I was fighting, so they beat me in my face, and they left me in snow to die.

And as they did capture the other, the soldiers, and they did see me laying on the ground there, so the soldiers, Polish soldiers, made a noise, you know. Said, "*SHE* is ours, from our group." And I guess, "The Russian was supposed to come to help, not rape the women." So they took me on a truck and because I was hurt, they dropped me at the Russian hospital and they took the other as a prisoner of war because I was not in a condition *TO BE TAKEN*.

So, I remember when I came to, I knew it is not cold. My eyes were so swollen that I could not see. And I was screaming, "Mama. Mama."

And at that moment, two warm arms wrap around my shoulder and woman voice was saying --

[Interviewee speaks a foreign language.]

You know, I remember cuddling into the arms and cry and cry and cry. That was the Russian woman doctor.

Q AND WHAT WAS SHE SAYING?

A She say, "I love you. You like my daughter," you know. The men hurt me; but there was a woman doctor that

did *TAKE* care of me. And at that time --- when I felt a little better, she gave me work in the hospital and I worked there. But in 1940, end of 1940, there was exchange of Polish population between the Germans and Russians and I wanted to find my family.

So at that time I was sent to middle of Poland to *RADOM* where my nursing school was because I could not go where my home was because that was Germany *AIREADY*.

Q HOW DID YOU GET TO *RADOM*.

A Well, there was an exchange by the Russian, between the Russian and German. There were trucks.

Q TRUCKS?

YOU HADN'T BEEN IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FAMILY ALL THIS TIME?

A No. I did not know. It was not easy, also, because we were quarantined. And when we came from the Russian side, then the German -- Poland was taken by *BOTH* So the Germans put us in quarantine. And finally I came to *RADOM* And I tried to find someone. Luckily, I find people that went to the nursing school and I did have place to stay.

And one day I was picked by the Germans from the church and sent to work to ammunition factory.

Q YOU MEAN YOU WERE GOING TO CHURCH AND THE GERMANS JUST PICKED YOU UP?

A I was in church, and after the service was finished, they surrounded the church and they picked up all the young men and women, took us on a truck. The other people they let go. And we were brought to special encampment and we were told we would be sent to Germany to work in fields and factories. But, instead, just before my trip to be sent to Germany, a group of German officers came to the encampment. One of them was *GERMAN MAJOR*

Q SURE.

A I am so tired.

(Recess)

Q WHAT I STILL WANT TO SAY IS PLEASE GIVE AS MUCH DETAIL AS YOU LIKE AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT HOW LONG IT'S GOING TO TAKE. OKAY?

A Okay. Fine. That's what I didn't know.

Q ANYTHING THAT OCCURS TO YOU THAT IS RELEVANT TO THE STORY, TELL IT.

A Okay. So, a group of the German officers came to the encampment and one, the oldest of all of these, started picking people at random and they picked about 20 and I was one they picked up. We did not know for what.

They put us on big trucks and we were riding through the town, we didn't know what to expect. And finally they brought us to ammunition factory. And I was forced to pack ammunition into little boxes. Then for the

first time I realized what was happening to my Jewish friends, to prosecute the Polish people, to the gypsies, to see how they were treated. You know, people were <sup>SCARED</sup> -- one day they work, then the next day they are not here. They fainted, they got beaten and <sup>KICKED</sup>. It was a nightmare. I could not understand what was happening. I just came from the Russian side.

And in the beginning of my teens I did have beginning of tuberculosis, so my lungs were very weak. And the chemicals that they make the ammunition with was so strong that one day I fainted when the <sup>MAJOR</sup> was examining our work. I was so scared of him.

When I came to I pleaded with him, "Please, forgive me. I want to work, but the chemicals make me sick."

He asked me what my name is.

I said, "My name is *IRENA GUTOWNA*"

He said, "Are your folks *Dutchen*"

I say, "No. I am Polish." Because my name was *Irena Gut*, but in Poland it was pronounced *Gutowna* Mr. *Gut* Mrs. *Gutowna* I was *MS. Gutowna*.

He said, "Well, you're honest. You don't want to <sup>TO BETTER YOURSELF</sup> ~~GIVE UP~~ the opportunity, so I will give you another job."

So he give me a ticket so I could leave. And he said,

Next day, you come here and here." The place where

I was supposed to work.

Q WHAT KIND OF LIVING CONDITIONS DID YOU HAVE IN THAT CAMP?

A It was bad. It was cold. We didn't -- we did not have a special -- they were barracks with sleeping condition one on top of the other and we did get food, *SOMETIMES* you know, because we have to work.

Q HOW MUCH FOOD DID YOU GET?

A Well, you know, I was so scared. I was not big. It was enough for me, you know. But I guess it would not be enough for man, you know. But we got bread and we got some vegetables and we got some, even meat from time to time, you know.

But when the major *ANOTHER* *got me* *job*, I went back to my girlfriend's house, and next day I came to the work, it was a big hotel that was made to be a place for the German officers, major's officers. He introduced me to Mr. Shultz. He was a, not *GESTAPO* he was an army man. And short, fat, with the red cheeks. He was very friendly to me. *MAJOR* said, you know, that "He should take care of me." I remember that Shultz give me eggs with wine, with sugar, to build *ME UP* -- I was so anemic, to build my blood. And he assigned me to work, to serve, to put the dishes on the table and this and that.

And I remember one day we were -- they expected



big parties and at that time Shultz took me on the second floor and told me to wash the silver, wash the -- everything. Preparing. It was big, like a ballroom with big beautiful velvet drapes.

And I was standing by the table and doing that. All of a sudden I heard noise like shooting and crying. I ran to the window. I open the heavy drapes. I did not realize that the hotel was in conjunction -- almost behind was a ghetto. And I could see people running. I could not understand. For the first time I did see. It was so horrible. And I was standing there almost petrified and Shultz walked in and he did see me. He come. I said, "Shultz, Shultz, what it is? Why? What it is?"

He put his hand on my face. He say, "Shh...the officers coming pretty soon. You don't want them to know that you are Jew lover." He warned me. Well, it was hard to work and hard to ~~hold~~ *hold BACK TEARS*, it was awful. Then --

Q DID THE OFFICERS TREAT YOU WELL?

A Well, I didn't have much to do with them, and because the major brought me and he was the head. So I just put *DISHES* *ON* the table, the food and that is all.

Q WHAT IS THE MAJOR'S NAME?

A Edward *RUBEMER*

Q RIGAMA?

A *RUBEMER* yes. And he was -- I mean, I will not say

that he treated me bad or that Shultz treated me bad.

Now the Russian were coming closer. I mean, the Russian -- German and Russian now were fighting. Now the Germans were pushing the Russian almost to Kiev. And part of the ammunition plant was supposed to move behind that advancing German army.

I find just before that that my second sister was in my aunt's house.

Q HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?

A Well, through people that were working there I find out. I was *TOLD* about *HER* I went so much through, I had even forgotten the name of my aunt, you know. And somebody said, "Helena *PAVLOWSKA* is my neighbor." And, oh, that ringed a bell. And so I did have my second sister, *Ganina*. When *Ganina* did find out that I was there, she did want to go with me. The major said he is taking me with him. She didn't want to stay alone.

Well, at that time I asked Shultz if I can have my sister with me. I say I am responsible, she were three years younger. But she was taller and developed more. She was a beautiful girl.

Q HOW DID SHE COME BY BEING IN *RADOM*

A Because my parents sent her there to my aunt.

Q THINKING IT TO BE SAFER, YOU MEAN?

A (Witness nods head.) Because she was already young

lady and the Germans -- nice, blond Polish girl, they sometimes put into the pleasure homes. So my mother decided that that's what will be the best.

Q AND DID YOU GET NEWS OF YOUR PARENTS AND YOUR OTHER SISTERS THAT WAY?

A My sister said that they left someplace. That they ~~WENT TO~~ the place where the factories is. My father was scared ~~by the Russian now, you know, and Germans -- for the Russians we were there to reach, you know.~~ For the Germans, we were Polish in *OBERSHLASIEN* Because in *OBERSHLASIEN* we came there from other state and all the *OBERSHLASIEN* people, they *HAD* German *NAMES.* They were German *OF* descendant, they spoke German So my father was not very happy there *SO* *THEY ESCAPED.* And he left and they sent my sister to my aunt.

But, anyway, we were leaving *RADOM* pretty soon. I *TAKE MY SISTER* asked if I can, and she went with me. And we now went to *LWO'W* very close to the Russian border. In *LWO'W* we were assigned both to serve dinners. And one day I met a young woman, Helen. We were speaking together and she told me that she's married to a Jewish man, and that she's here because they were supposed to have *A SHIPMENT* from the *GETTO OF* Jewish people, and I met *HELENS* mother, they both lost everything, because the Germans killed their father. Why they did -- if anything happen to

a German car or anybody, they did go to a home and pull men, ten, eight men and shot them, you know, because they were *PARTISANS* and so sometimes something happen to the Germans.

So now Helen was trying to find her husband and she find out this. So, they were very poor and so I was able with my sister to help them because there was plenty of food. I was serving breakfast, luncheon and dinner. And at that time one day Helen said, "I know my husband is here." And here, you know, they will bring the people from work places. She say, "I want to see him."

And we took the train -- she asked us to go. I *TOLD* Shultz ~~that~~ *I FOUND* some family I wanted to see and with my sisters we go there. We were on a bus. When we came out, there were quite a few people waiting, also, to see their loved ones. Many were Polish married to Jew or Jew married to, *CHRISTIAN GIRL*

So, as we were going there, there were barbwire and they start yelling, the Germans, "Don't go here. Halt." "You don't go" is verboten. *FORBIDDEN* And *THEY WERE* pushing, pushing us away., And we were scared. Everybody. Because they start even shooting in the air, you know, because more people were coming. And so we ran. And there was an empty house and we got into the empty house. *IT WAS IN*

probably a Jewish home. The windows were broken and there

were boards -- but through the boards we were looking. And we were *SEEING THAT* they were pushing, the *gESTAPD*,<sup>A</sup> Mass of people. I mean, young and old and children and people on crutches, people wounded. Unbelievable procession. How the things to this day that I can remember.

I did see a man with a white beard, white head, looks like rabbi. They were beating him. He was going. I see a beautiful young woman, blond, with a little girl. You know, the girl was holding to her and she was wounded in the leg because she was pulling her leg. The child was screaming. And I -- we were standing there and crying. Then I did see, you know, a woman with a baby in her arms and I did see one of the *gESTAPD* pull the baby and threw the head to the ground. A nightmare. Unbelieve horror. And I cry, my sister cry. We were -- we could not believe our eyes, our soul. "What is happening? What is happening?"

Then when the procession left, when they moved them, we were coming down and we could hear shooting from far away. We were moving behind far away. We did want to know where they go to take them. They took them behind the *Town*. It was a shallow grave already dug. They were putting them all around and shooting with machine gun. Some of them were buried alive. They were hardly wounded.

the Germans posted soldiers

all around so nobody see the crime. We were ~~from~~ far away to see that. There is no way I can even today tell you how it was. Unbelievable. Finally, we were returning back to the city. Not one of us spoke. We could not speak.

*Mutely* we parted.

When I came back Shultz would say, "Where did you go? We didn't eat. We have a party. We need you to serve." He was upset with us, but then he look at our faces and he said, "What happened?" We could not hide it.

I said, "Well, we did have some news from our parents." I could not tell him. And I say, "We just could not leave. We were upset. My parents have been mistreated," and this.

So he said, "Well, you wash your faces and dress and we have to serve dinners." So that's what we were doing.

Q WAS HELEN'S HUSBAND AMONG THOSE PEOPLE?

A She did not see him. No. She did not see him. But it was hard to see anyway, you know. I mean, they were not going single, they were going in groups.

And we were doing the work, serving breakfast and luncheon and dinner. And one day there was a big party, the (Strumenfer *ROKITA* brings his frauline. And we did have in the kitchen a Jewish man and Jewish woman working, washing dishes and this. There were many Jewish people, 12

working in the laundry room, there were about five working as cleaning the offices. That part my sister took. She took care of the five Jewish people that worked. She brought food for them in baskets and in the *PAIS* you know, *SHE* -told them to work slow so they can be a little longer. And two of them were in the kitchen with the diner and the rest were in the laundry room.

Q WERE THESE PEOPLE FROM THE GHETTO?

A That was people from the work barracks.

Q THE WORK BARRACKS.

A See, when the Germans took over really distant cities, they took all the Jewish people and segregate them. Like machines they did ~~take~~ out heart and soul. Those that could work and those that could not work. Those that could work, they put them separate in work barracks, *As* slave labor. And those that could not work, they're old, they're children, they're this, they took them and forced them to be in ghetto for later disposal.

And so right now I did have these two people, young couple, they were married in the work barrack. Beautiful children. I say children. They were young. I was young at that time, too. I loved them very much.

And we were standing in the kitchen and blond Ukrainian with a big *Bosem, she* walked into the kitchen *AND* say, "Oh, Irene, . . . (Strumenfer Rokita) talked

so much <sup>About you,</sup> I wanted to meet you." She ~~was~~ his big girlfriend. And before I had a chance to answer, she looked at (Roman) and she said, "What you doing <sup>HEIR SWINE JEW</sup>

Well, I didn't know what was happening, but <sup>ROMAN</sup> was white, and his wife start crying, you know, and she ~~was~~ saying "Here, in the German officer's casino, you can poison everybody." Thank God that Shultz walked in because I was ready to grab her by the hair and throw her out.

He walked in and he say, he assess the situation and he said, "You know, Frauline, I am here responsible. What I say they do. And they don't cook. They wash the dishes and clean. We serving dinners, please go." Sent her out. Death to us all, I prayed and cried. <sup>SHULTZ</sup> sent them -- he sent them to the barracks -- and I didn't see them anymore.

Q WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED?

A What happened? That skunk, she was a frauline to the ~~gestapo~~, so she must say something and he just wrote out a death warrant. See, what happened is somebody else told me that he was from very good Jewish home, quite wealthy, educated, and that blond thing was throwing herself on him and he didn't want to have anything with her to do. He wanted to marry the Jewish girl, you know. So now she find him, she was screaming, "This is better for you." And,



well, I swore that when I survive I will pay her.

You know, now we did have somebody that need to serve. So at this first time they ask me that my sister will help me to serve the dinners. And she put on just a plain black dress, but she did have big beautiful gold hair. She was beautiful. I was ugly duckling at that time but she was

Q NO.

A -- but she was so beautiful. And so she went with me to serve. Herr Røkita spot, spot her, like, you know. And then he asked the major who she is. And so we were in the kitchen, the major called. He was drinking, he was drunk already, drinking with Røkita. And he said Strumenfer Røkita wants to meet my sister. So he came there. I thought he would jump up and kiss her hand, you know. He was so taken with her when we serve. But he start now, every night that he come, he insist. I was so scared. I was so scared because at that time I was already helping the Jewish people in the laundry room. In the laundry room we had 12 Jewish people.

Q AND HOW WERE YOU HELPING THEM?

A Well, many times I had borrowed extra food, you know. I brought clothes to be washed. Food was no problem because there were, you know, in the diner there were butter and bread and whatever, cookies and fruit and

whatever. And another thing, too, when I met them, you know, at first they didn't trust me. You know, that is understandable. But when we start speaking and I told them that I am alone and I don't know where my parents are and this, they trusted me and they start telling me story of their broken lives, about their families and everything.

Q CAN YOU TELL US WHAT YOU REMEMBER OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL STORIES?

A Yes. There was a lawyer, a (Steinner), he was a grey hair *ATTORNEY*. He said that his family was taken by the *GESTAPO*. They tied him in, he heard the family scream and cry, and they tied him and they took them away.

And there was Fanka Silverman, she said she had family in the ghetto, that they hungry and they very bad off. Many stories they told me. We did not have a big time to stay because I did have to watch what I am doing, too. But, anyway, they trusted me.

And at night when I was serving the dinners, I was listening to the conversation. The *GESTAPO* man was quite often sitting with the major at the dinner table. They were drinking. And so I was listening to their conversation. And I was realizing the *GESTAPO* man was saying, "Herr Major," ~~you know~~, "Herr *RUGENER*," you know, "I will teach the Jews how to work. They will do fine for you."

And I remember the major saying, "Must you do that? I need my workers. I need my workers. I am very important for the front, or fort. We make ammunition and guns. I have to have ready." You know, he was arguing always.

Q DO YOU THINK HE HAD SYMPATHY FOR THE JEWS IN ANY WAY?

A I don't know. Maybe because it was his work. But I did not see him hurt or kill anyone or strike anyone. He never did that.

Q AND SHULTZ SOUNDS --

A And Shultz was very good. With Shultz if he were to survive, I would swear for him. He knew I would never talk but he knew what I was doing, because when the gustedo starts to want to invite my sister here and there, I went to the major and I told him, I say, "Look, I am older. I am scared of RØkita. I am scared. I don't want my sister to be involved with him. Please, help me. Send her home. Give me paper." He give me the paper. But he insisted, "But you will be here."

I say, "Yes, I will stay with you until after the war. Please." So my sister crying, crying. I and Helen, we were friends, we said "Look, there is no place for you. I was scared that what I do. And she was young. She was pretty girl. And when he force her, you know, maybe she can say some word, you know, and we all be in trouble. So

finally she left.

Q WHERE DID SHE GO?

A To *KADEM* to my aunt's house.

Q BACK THERE?

A Yeah. She was there. And at that time it was winter, it was cold. I asked Shultz for some blankets. The blankets I give to the Jewish people. They made a cover for themselves. And we made a hiding place in a little, in the washroom. There were one wall full of shelves. The shelves were nice and deep. We made the shelves very narrow in some places, put the blankets, folded so it looks like it's full. And then I overheard that guestapo Rakita say there will be raids on Wednesday or Friday, don't look for the Jews to come to work, you know, we have some cleaning to do.

Well, I did have to tell that to my friends. And I noticed that many people did not come, you know. So, we created our own little hiding place there. So, when I knew, they did not go to the barracks.

Q AND WHERE WAS THE HIDING PLACE?

A In the laundry room at that time. That was before I hide them. See, when you speak you cannot tell *ALL* You know, if you half an hour. So when I told them what happened, a few of them did not want to go, so they slept there behind the shelves. And I lock the laundry room. I

was responsible and that is it.

So, but more and more German were coming, Russian were now fighting together, it was by far, many of the German come and the situation was very bad and the Major at that time insisted to RDKita that he doesn't bother his people because the front is coming, they are fighting now, so, "Please, you know, I need." So they worked double shift at night, too. And the major sent coffee and food and everything to their people. My friends in the laundry room, they thought that I did that. I did not. I didn't have anything to do. But they insisted that I find --

Q SO THE MAJOR HAD A SOFT SIDE, TOO?

A Yes.

Q WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

A Edward. Edward *RUGEMER* The major, Edward *RUGEMER* He was a man around 68 years old, old man wearing big glasses and he has a problem with hearing, you know.

Q HOW WERE THINGS FOR YOU? WHEN YOU WERE WORKING THESE THREE MEALS, DID YOU WORK 12 OR 14 HOURS A DAY OR --

A Well, I worked from morning, I prepare for the breakfast. Then I have a little time, you know. I have a little room by the diner, right by the diner. Inside. The place was about four blocks long, all fenced off, and there was only one entrance through the gate on one side, and one entrance on the other side where the factory was, and

officers had their own entrance through, from the diner, you know, through the hall. There is stairs to go up and then there ~~WAS A~~<sup>DO</sup> so, every day was happening something else. I did not see the major kill anyone or beat anyone or anything like that.

And I sort of did have the courage to tell him when somebody was hurt, I was upset. I cry. So he in a way asked me how I feel and I said, "Well, that nobody has right to kill. They are innocent people." You know, I didn't have the courage to tell him that, you know.

And the time come that now, the time is very short, and I overheard that soon there will be liquidation of gettos and ~~the~~. They were talking. The gustepo open his big mouth and he was talking. ~~Well~~, my friends, I did have to tell them. They ask me, "Irene, help. We don't have anyone. What we will do? We don't have place to go." You know, they were in the work barracks. And the gustepo did have the barracks. I didn't know what to do, too. I did not have home, I did not have family. But I wanted to help. I wanted to help.

And finally I find out when the liquidation will be. Okay? So I told them I didn't want them that day go to the barracks, you know. I say, "That is the day." In the meantime the Major find the villa, and he call me and he say, "I have a villa. I want you to be my housekeeper."

I did see the villa, I knew that there is a place. And I trusted that in the last minute it is special for me. God gave me, put me in the right place at the right time and that's it.

But, the people were living there,

One Polish, one family Ukrainian.

And the time was so short. I was racing against time. Polish family left. The Ukrainian family, they talk to Major alone and they got exception that day. "We'll leave two days later." And the time was there that was coming that, that will be the last thing. So, I lock them --

six of the people left for the forest. I helped them smuggling them out to the forest.

Q FROM THE LAUNDRY ROOM?

A From the laundry.

Q HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

A Well, I work with the Christian girl, Helen, you know, Helen that was married to the Jewish man. Helen took work on a farm. She special to the farm. And she send sled, I mean, send carriage, horse and buggy, and the people were hiding and did not go to the ghetto to their work barracks, they hiding in a park, you know, on the way to the forest. And so I was --

Q WHICH PEOPLE WERE HIDING IN THE PARK?

A Six Jewish people.

Q THE SIX JEWISH PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN IN THE LAUNDRY?

A Yeah.

Q SHE TOOK THEM TO THE PARK IN THIS HORSE AND BUGGY?

A Yeah. And I took them to the forest.

Q FROM THE PARK?

A Yes.

Q IN THE SAME HORSE AND BUGGY?

A (Witness nods head.)

Q AND WHERE WERE THEY? WERE THEY UNDERNEATH SOME --

A Trees and this, you know.

Q AND DID YOU HIDE THEM IN THE BUGGY, TOO?

A Yes. Covered them.

Q WITH WHAT?

A Blankets and put hay. It was not buggy. It was like a wagon, you know. And I looked like a farmer bringing something. And I dropped them off in the forest so there were only six left in *THE LAUNDRY ROOM*

Q WERE THEY ALL MEN LEFT?

A Men and woman. Was Fanka Silverman, there was *IDA HANER* with the husband, and Clara Bower, and I have to look at -- so many. But, anyway, I lock them in the laundry room and I said, "Well, tomorrow, you know, the people moved out the Ukraine. And I will open the door and we'll let you go."

But did not happen that way because next day in



the morning I heard that there will be gustedo searching all over the places where Jewish people were working. Two German secretaries were saying, "Oh, dress nicely, because tomorrow the principles, some *SS MEN* will come, and they will find <sup>*SEARCH FOR Jews*</sup> -!" she said, "You know they hiding? Huh. They hiding."

*THAT* day -- my feet were trembling, I was so scared, I didn't know where they would look. There is six people in there. And I knew if gustedo look that day they will find them. Okay?

So during the night that night there was a performance from Berlin, a German artist coming and the whole plant, you know, the German officers were going *TO THE THEATER*. I could not take them to my room because it's small. But, I took two and hide them in my room in the closet. And four I smuggle on the third floor to the German major's apartment suite.

Q YOU TOOK THEM UPSTAIRS?

A Uh-huh. At night. And there was over, above the bathtub was like a little window. -the air vent, okay? I did see that air vent a thousand time but I didn't pay any attention, but when I needed the place, it comes to focus. There. So I took the chair, I climb, I took the net, you know, and did see that it was not big, but there was a big air vent and in Poland the walls are very heavy *& THICK*

and I did see, like, a little light on the other side. There is where I put four of them. I smuggled them out.

Q HOW DID THEY GET OUT, THROUGH THAT VENT?

A I -- I -- through the bathroom. You know, we put chairs and they climbed. It was metal. I was scared, you know. If the major come and they will move, it will make a noise. But they knew about that. We put blankets and this and I did have to lock them in. About maybe one o'clock at night I finish and I went downstairs to my room and I heard *THE OFFICERS* were coming. They drunk. They were singing and *SLURRING*. And I heard the major, you know, talking going up. And the major did not hear so good, you know. So that was a good plus for me.

And next day I was serving the breakfast and I noticed, like, cockroaches the gustepo was every place crawling. And my heart was just beating. And I wait for the secretaries and the German officers to go out. I'm itching to go there. I heard shooting. We could hear shooting from the ghetto. Explosions. And I just felt -- I said, "My God, how the people must feel." You know, so, finally the major left and I asked Shultz if I can go upstairs and clean the Major's apartment. I went there and -- the door was open. I was surprised. And as I was going in the hall trying to get to the bathroom, gustepo man did come out from the bathroom. I'll never forget. My

feet were shaking. My heart was beating. He look at me and he salutes because, you know, I'm working there and he salutes and he advises me, "Frauline, did I scare you?"

And I said, "Well, I did not expect here anyone." And he did go out. He did go out and lock the door from <sup>TO THE BATHROOM IDA</sup> hall and open the door? <sup>I DID</sup> WAS sitting like a budda, you know, ~~HER~~ body you could see through the screen. <sup>THE Gestapo MAN HAD GUN</sup> there for his physical need and he <sup>THEN</sup> turn<sup>ed</sup> around and walk<sup>ed</sup> out.

Oh, that was -- at that time my friend said, "Irene, there is no use. We will give our lives up."

I told them, "My life is not much more worth than yours. We did so far stay." I said, "By the night you'll be in the villa." I didn't think how I would take them to the villa. See, I was doing that because I wanted to help, but I was not smart enough, like I <sup>I LISTENED FOR</sup> say, a whisper from my <sup>God</sup> both, ~~you know~~. I listen for the help but I did not have a plan.

Q YOU HAD THE CAPACITY TO SEE A RESOURCE WHEN IT WAS THERE AND USE IT.

A Yes. That is what I was trying to do.

So, the evening come, they were night before having balls, they were tired, so everybody retired. Finally. The major did go and he had a headache like this from drinking and so he asked me if I bring him a glass of

milk, you know. And I did see that he took something with the milk, some medication. I assume that was maybe for sleeping.

So I wait and maybe couple of hours went downstairs, couple of hours later, I sneak upstairs, open the door to his bathroom -- bedroom, he was in bed, he was snoring, oh, very loud. He had a big nose and he snored a lot. And the key to the officer's passage was right there on the night table so I took the key and lock him in. Dumb, dumb. Then I did one by one let them down from above the majors, <sup>BATHROOM</sup> and I brought them three flights down and through the entrance where the officers go because I could not bring them through *THE GATE* -- I let them into the night. I could not go with them. I let them. They knew where the home was.

And so next day I was so excited. I wanted to go there, and good that the major said, "Irene, I want you to come only to serve the dinners, breakfast and luncheon. You take care of the house because the painters will be there. Painters. The people are just there. So I run like crazy, I came to there and walk to the celler. There were 12 people, not six. There is six I did not know. Friends to take friends, you know, family. There were 12 standing there looking at me like children.

Q WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

A Well, I guess when they were -- somebody tell somebody where they will hide. You know, people, *GRAB* for grass, you know. But, anyway, I did not have time to know one was Helen's husband, you know, and there was *WEINBAUM* and *LIFSHITZ*. There were 12 people.

Q HOW DID HELEN FIND HER HUSBAND?

A She did not find. She, in the last minute, she knew that her husband was the orderly for the head of the gustepo. Okay? He promise him that he let him go when the time come. Okay? But when the time come, he told him to go to the ghetto. And they communicated somehow through some letters or some messages.

But, anyway, Helen come to me crying. She said, "Irene, I work so hard, I thought that we will be together, but he said that he sent him. And he goes to getto, that is out." *HE IS DEAD!*

I told Helen, I say, "You know, I save many lives in my life, I have a place." So, that's how he came. But, anyway, they were there. "Well, what I will *GERMAN SOLDIERS,* do? *LIVED* They will come paint." Because the *LIVED* 2 FAMILIES THAT MOVED OUT OF THE *VILLA* one family upstairs and one family downstairs and the place was so dirty, *THE MAJOR* has to *HAVE* the Germans soldiers paint and clean everything. *Jewish* The people are there. What will I do?

So I -- only one thing, I lock them in the attic.

That was only one place, and that was in the last minute. The painters were arriving. And it was -- I remember walking back and forth and this -- I get something on my legs. They were hurting. I could not walk really straight, you know. It was a nightmare.

Q WHAT DID YOU GET ON YOUR LEGS?

A Like --

Q BOILS?

A Boil, yeah. I wear pants that were not washed, you know, and the chemicals *DID HURT ME.* Oh, I remember at night *IT WAS SO HOT,* it was hot upstairs? *FOR MY FRIENDS IN THE ATTIC.* But the major did not move. So at night, you know, they could come down and wash themselves. <sup>2</sup> And pails, I brought pails for fresh water, pails for waste, and then they could move around. But then I did have to lock them again. But, finally they did finish the job downstairs and they said they will do it upstairs. So, then I put them in the celler, you know. I mean, I tell you, I don't know today when I am speaking, you know, how. That is the reason I say I didn't do. God was with me. He gave me the inspiration.

And so they were downstairs and the downstairs was servant's quarters. It did have a little stove and they did have a bathtub with the heater. You didn't have to heat the water, you know. And there were nice, big, ~~like~~, closet, but bigger ~~for~~ like a pantry. We made it the

honeymoon hotel, you know, for the married couples, you know. And we would hide during the day and take the blankets and we thought that way we be living there. You know, I thought I will live there. I asked the major if I may move to there. He say "Oh, no. You move back to the kitchen." In there, I had my own *ORDEAL*. Well, I thought the end is coming, so only one thing I could think, I say that I was raped by Russian soldiers, I was 17, I was not kissed by a boy and I am scared of men. Please don't bring men here. Please. I will do everything for you; but, please, believe me, if I cannot do it, you will see, you know."

And he finally said, "Well, you've been with me for three years, so, we will try. But if you cannot do it, then we will have to." Well, at that time I knew that we in reprieve for short time. But I didn't know really if it something that can happen. He brings the men, what I do? Where I put the people? ~~So two of the people from 12, I was --~~

*FANKA SAID,* (Interruption in tape)

A -- "You know this villa was built by Jewish architect." We know because we were born in that town and there must be a hiding place.

Q WHY?

A Because it was builded by Jewish architect and he was doing something in a garden as the Germans would go from

Germany to Poland to Ukraine.

Q SO WAS THIS COMMON FOR JEWISH ARCHITECTS TO BUILD A HIDING --

A Well, no. But they *NERVOUS ABOUT* Kristallnacht. *IT HAD* Already happened. And they knew this and so the house was built already but he made it a hiding place for himself, I *Female?* guess. So we were starting to look, and then we find it. Was right underneath the, *COAL* shoot, was a wooden wall. The men was knocking and looking, you know, major did not move yet, and they find the passage. Dr. Lifshi *Tz* was smallest in size. He said, "I will go check it out." So he did. You could not stand. You did have to crawl. There was like a ladder on the ground and you pull yourself on that, you know. And then in a gazebo, it was in the ground it did have high, high *FOUNDATION* -- so tall man could not stand, but it was a hiding place. See, we did have to clean it up. There were many rodants there, you know, hidden. But the were *AIR VENTS* , clever *HIDDEN AIR VENTS* and *THERE WERE BUSHES* all around. Well, thank God we had place. And it was unbelievable. We tried to see how fast we can go from this, because Major did have big parties and the parties were there. They were hiding every day when I knew nobody -- they were in the celler.

Q SO YOU DIDN'T TRUST THEM TO BE IN THE CELLER IF THERE



WAS A PARTY GOING ON?

A No, because I was not trusting the Germans secretaries.

Q THEY MIGHT COME DOWNSTAIRS?

A Oh, yes. They were running like mice all over. You know, the men ~~know~~ they were drinking and this, but the woman, they were everywhere. And they find my room by the kitchen and they were -- they were jealous of me.  
*observing me*

Q WHY?

A Because I was young Polish girl, and the head of the organization have me working. I am there. So they assume that. They say, "You Polish swine," you know, "you will see he will use you and throw you on your back and you see." And I felt a few times that I would like to throw them out, but I was scared, you know. But at that time I was glad that we have the place *to head* -- because they were running every place.

Q WERE YOU AT ALL BOTHERED BY SEXUAL ADVANCES BY THE GERMANS ALL THIS TIME YOU WERE WORKING THERE?

A Well, at that time I was working for the Major. He was old man. And he liked me very much. He didn't push himself on me, but I knew that he liked me very much, you know. He sort of protected me.

But, in the villa when there were parties, I remember one party that the Strumenfer come over with his

frauline. -- who do you think prepared the parties? I was so scared that the Major said if I cannot, that he will bring from outside people. So, Shultz and I, we went to the *WAREN* houses, we wanted, whatever *we* needed for making good hors d'oeuvres, for drinking, for this, for that, we buy. And many times I buy many more things than what I needed. You know, so when the major was not there my Jewish friends were making the parties, the hors d'oeuvres and everything. And he was thinking I was magician. He was saying, "How you can do all?"

I said, "My mother was a great entertainer, I learned that, you know." But I was scared. See, I was young and pretty; and it was easier for him to believe everything. He was a man, you know. And something pretty around him, you know. So he believed, you know.

But I can remember one day they did have big parties and I noticed that Strumenfer Rokita with his frauline were going to the gazebo. Ida was sick, did have a cough, so she took a pillow with her. I was so scared that they don't know if there be a big group, one thing, but only two were sneaking in. So I took a tray and put two glasses of wine and put hors d'oeuvres, ran from the kitchen. "Strumenfer, I have something for you and your lady." I yell from far. He was so mad. He was not

dressed properly, you know.

Q OH.

A Uh-huh.

Q HE WAS HAVING A SEXUAL AFFAIR.

A I did interrupt something, you know. And so he was so mad. He said, "Frauline, I did not ask you for anything." But, they pick themself up and went to the house. And in house was many rooms and in the older rooms after the party they were every place, people. I was in kitchen. I tried to wash dishes. Herr Strumenfere Hayes come, and like a *CAVE* man, pick me up and tried to carry me to the room. Well, I was scared. I didn't wanted to be raped. But I was scared to yell, to yell and scream because if I cannot do it the major next time bring some other people to help. So, as he was carrying me, there was a big vase on *A TABLE ON THE* marble floor. I -- I kicked with my foot and the vase fell with such a crush the doors start opening. Herr Strumenfer Hayes dropped me like hot potatos on the floor. Major come, come sometimes, *with* two fraulines, German secretary, big painted lipstick all over his face and he said, "What happened?"

I said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I broke the vase. I've been see clumsy." But I could not tell him *THE TRUTH* could not. So he believed that that was so. And, you know, there are many things like that happening in a villa.

soul, there was, like, for reason that is happening, that ~~like~~ God gave me the responsibility, in a way. So I pleaded for the life of the baby because I knew now the Russians were fighting the Germans and I believed that maybe they will come soon, huh? So I say, "No, Ida, you will not have abortion. Hitler will not have your baby." I pleaded for his life, and they listen to me. And in the meantime in Poland on every street corner there were signs saying that the town is *Jew* free and whoever will help escape Jew, the sentence is death. -- only in Poland, not in France and other country. But in Poland there were streets on every corner the gustedo posted, but we were still surviving.

But Now was coming 1943, end of 1943, and the ~~room is where the front is closed~~ -- I never realized that I was hiding them in the best house in (Tanapole) and right under the noses of the gustedo and the Major. We could read the newspaper, we could listen to the radio, you know, when he was not there, so we were pretty well know what is going on.

Q SO YOU DIDN'T FIND OUT HOW WONDERFUL A SITUATION IT WAS UNTIL AFTER THE WAR?

A Yeah. I did not realize because I didn't plan it. It happened. So, at that time the front was coming closer and one day I was in town, I don't know for what I went, but,

anyway, the gustapo was everyplace and whoever was on the street, Polish crying, they push us to one place, they force us to watch Polish couple with two little children and Jewish couple with their child they were hanging in the middle of the market place, because there were warnings saying "If somebody will help, the sentence is death."

Q YOU WATCHED THEM BE HANGED?

A Yeah. I closed my eyes but, you know, to this day I can hear scream of the children, the awful gargling.

When I came to the villa, I was so distraught, I was so shaken up, I forgot to close the door.

And standing in the kitchen three Jewish girls came out and they ask me what happened because I was white like snow. I was trembling. I could not tell them. How can I tell them? So, I said, "I am sick, coming with a cold. Please forgive me, you know, I cannot talk. I am sick." And, we did not start good conversation. The door open and the major was standing right in front of us. He was watching from one to another, his eyes big. He was trembling. Then without saying one word, he turned around and was going very fast to his room, to his library. I was scared that he's going to call the head of the gustepo. So I ran after him. I kneel down, I was kissing his hands, I was holding to his legs, I was praying, I was pleading.

First he pushed me away but then he said, "Irene,

I don't want to see you dead. I'm old man, did see enough killing and murdering, but I have my orders." And he said "I will go to my office. I need the time to think about, to compose myself. But, in meantime, don't you dare to do anything stupid." He warned me, you know.

So he left, I locked the door, I ran downstairs, everybody was ready to run out. I could not let them go, because it was during the day. And I was not sure that he's not talking, the major, to the head of the gustepo and he's on his way to get us.

So we made a quick decision. Only one thing I could think, they go underneath the gazebo. So we said good-bye, and I told them if in three days I will not come and get you, it means I'm arrested or dead. Then you have to go by yourself to the forest, there where the other Jewish people and other people were hiding.

And the major came about, maybe three hours later. I, in the meantime, clean up the downstairs, the celler, so when they would come they would not find that there is hiding place. They would not find evidence that some people lived there. So I was running like crazy doing those things.

Q YOU MEAN IF THE GUESTEPO CAME?

A Yes, because I did not know. Major maybe talk with them, maybe the gustepo will come.

Q SURE.

A So I was scared that if I don't clean, they will find something and they find the passage to underneath the gazebo.

Q SO, AT THIS POINT, OF COURSE, BECAUSE THE MAJOR WOULD HAVE TOLD THE GUSTEPO THAT HE MET THREE JEWISH WOMEN THERE, BUT YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN THE ONE ARRESTED?

A I would be arrested. But they could also, they could also search the premises, so I did have to clean it up so there will not be any lead to the place.

Q BUT THEY WOULD HAVE PROBABLY TORTURED YOU FOR THE INFORMATION. NO?

A Well, I don't know. But I knew that I was not sure if the major would speak or not. You know, I knew I would be arrested. I was prepared for that.

Q BUT YOU WERE TRYING YOUR BEST TO SAVE THEM ANYWAY.

A That's correct. That's exactly I was trying to do, because if they would find something, I know how they use all kinds of metals to tell so I was trying do best I know how.

The Major come, he was drunk and he was coming alone, you know. And I was, just needed to know. So when I was standing in front of him, he put me on his lap and he said that he don't want to see me dead and that he will do everything to protect us, but I have to be his, and

willingly. And it was not easy. I don't tell you it was easy, because I remember the Russian. But it was a small price to pay. So I give myself to him.

He used to say, "Irene, is that so bad? I keep your secret, and I even help, and you give an old man the last joy of his life." He didn't pull my hair, he didn't beat me. He wanted me willingly, and that's what I did.

Q HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

A The man is 68 years old. He did have (chronic CATARRAH Awful smell from his mouth and nose. It was hard. It was hard. But later on I could not even hate him because he could HAVE me and everybody else, <sup>KILLED,</sup> give us up, you know.

Q YES. WAS HE GOOD TO YOU?

A Yes. That's what I say. He was in love with me. There is no question. He didn't push himself on me because I was free, I could leave. But when he did ~~get~~, caught me with the women, he knew that I would not leave, and I guess he could not help himself. He was a man. I was pretty woman.

Q HOW WAS IT THAT YOU WERE FREE TO LEAVE BEFORE THAT?

A Well, because I was Polish. I was a "housekeeper" there. But if I would want to leave, I could.

Q I SEE.

A I could leave, you know. You know, it would be maybe



harder to get back by myself from Ukraine to middle of Poland, but somehow I would manage, you know. I hoped that I would. But I could leave. And he knew that he doesn't have a hold. I mean, I was not a prisoner and under lock. I did go shop, I could go to the store, you know. But...

Q HE DIDN'T HAVE ANY WIFE OR FAMILY LIVING WITH HIM?

A Well, I don't think so. He was a widower. No. Nobody. Because he was in Poland and his family was (MUCHE n) in Germany and we were surviving.

Q WHO DID YOU TALK TO ABOUT ALL OF THESE FEELINGS GOING ON IN YOU?

A I could not speak to my friends. I wanted them to be all assured that we survive. I could not tell them that I have to sleep with him, because it would give them -- they would feel guilty ~~still~~. Okay? So I could not say. I needed to talk to somebody.

If we can stop?

Q YOU DON'T WANT TO HAVE THIS ON THE TAPE?

A (Witness shakes head.)

Q THEN LET'S JUST CONTINUE WITH WITH WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE ON THE TAPE.

A Well, I could not think. I pray. And God was for me every place, and I prayed for if I do right or wrong. No bitterness that, that was sin to live with somebody, you know. I mean, it was heavy on my heart, but I knew that

God who give me the place to save them in the last minute, he will not abandon us. So I was doing what I was doing.

Now the time was coming that the front was coming very short. The front was coming. The Russian were fighting. And you could hear already there was

*fedunclip*, you know, we had to black out the windows because it was war, full scale war.

In the meantime, I was many times going to the forest. I collaborated with Helen, whose husband was, you know, I was hiding. And many times she brought potatoes and some other things, and what I could steal or organize from the Germans, I brought it to the forest and I left it in some place, you know.

Q HOW WERE THE PEOPLE LIVING IN THE FOREST, THOSE SIX THAT YOU BROUGHT?

A In a little hole underneath the ground.

Q A LITTLE HOLE?

A Yeah. Little bunker, a hole.

Q THEY DUG A HOLE? YOU DUG A HOLE?

A Oh. They did have a shovels and they did, naturally. And summer times was not hard, but winter times was cold. The rain, cold.

Q SIX OF THEM?

A Yeah. Well, there were more. There were about 200 people in the forest that hide. Not from our place, from

other places, too, that the Germans, that they escaped.

Q ALL LIVING IN HOLES IN THE GROUND?

A All around different holes, you know. And I only once did go there, because otherwise I drop off in a second place they knew.

Q YOU SAW THE HOLE?

A Yeah. And I brought even a roll of tar paper because they use the tar paper to close the windows, so is warm so the light would not go through.

Q THIS WAS IN A BUILDING?

A Yeah. So I organize one roll and brought it to the forest so they can put it in, you know, around <sup>THE GROUND</sup> so the water, <sup>would stay out</sup> and they would keep a little warmer, you know.

Q LIVING IN THE HOLE, HOW WOULD THEY DISGUISE THE TOP OF THE HOLE?

A Well, there is trees and shrubs. You know, it's forest. And so they put some shrubs and cover that. That is not a big thing, you know. When you live like that, you find a way to escape. When it comes to survive, people survive, you know. Because there is sub zero temperature, and living in a little hole underneath the ground and everything, without any necessities to live. But people were surviving.

Q WERE YOU THE ONLY ONE BRINGING FOOD TO THOSE SIX?

A No. There was a little village and there was old

priest and I attended sometimes. I went to the church there. And I remember he said that, "There is many poor people around us, don't not any one of you stain your hands with the blood of innocent." He was preaching like that. And that the people say they were finding bread, potatoes, and everything in the forest. People just drop some things, you know. Who did? You don't know. They didn't want it to be known. And, you know, but people were helping, also.

Q SO THERE WERE MANY LOCAL PEOPLE OR PEASANTS OR FARMERS WHO --

A Yeah. Yeah. Then, also, there was a Mr. Pamlovski, Sigmund Pamlovski. He was the, the forest man. You know, he was with the partisans. I even find out that he's there and I was trying to make contact with him because I knew that people were hiding in the forest. I wanted -- so I went, it was summertime yet, and I told him that I was with my mother, I was picking berries before the war and mushrooms and I loved the forest, and I was asking if I may, to do that here, too. I say -- and I told him, I say, "I am here alone because," and I was telling "I'm working for Stuart, for German Major, and I am lonely."

Is time?

Q NO.

A "I am lonely." And I said, "At first I was captured

by the Russian." And I say, you know, "We went to the village for things," and I say, "I was hurt."

And he say, "You are the one who was raped!" He was with the little group of the people in forest. Small world?

Q OH, WHAT A COINCIDENCE.

A He said, "You are the one." So we hug and kiss. You know, it was like family. And I ask him, I say, "Would it be all right if I tell the major that I find my nephew?" You know, "My cousin"?

He said, "Oh, yes. Fine."

See, I was opening the door.

Q AND HE TRUSTED YOU, OBVIOUSLY.

A He trusted me and he did not tell me he was partisan and I didn't tell him that I was hiding Jewish people. We were playing, you know.

Q TESTING OUT.

A Testing out the ground. Well --

Q MAYBE IT WOULD BE GOOD TO STOP RIGHT HERE.

A Yeah. That's good. I am sitting too long.

(End of tape)