

Interview With REGINA HANOVER  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
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INTERVIEWER: THIS IS TEMPLE BETH JACOB.  
IT'S DECEMBER 5, 1989. THE SURVIVOR IS REGINA HANOVER.  
I'M PEGGY COSTER AND THE OTHER INTERVIEWER IS HELEN  
LANG.

Q. COULD YOU START BY TELLING US WHERE YOU  
LIVED IN Poland AT THE TIME?

A. When the war is -- before the war -- I was  
born in Poland and raised in Poland. We got an  
education. Just high school education.

Q. WHERE IN POLAND?

A. In Lodz.

Q. OKAY.

A. And didn't have a chance to go any further  
because of the war.

Q. HOW MANY BROTHERS AND SISTERS DID YOU  
HAVE?

A. There's a family of nine kids. I'm the  
only one survivor. Oh, well, excuse me. I had two  
brothers that were living in the United States at the  
time.

Q. AT THE TIME?

A. Yes, of the war. They came to the United  
States much earlier.

Q. SO YOU WERE THE YOUNGEST OF THE CHILDREN?

A. I was the youngest, the baby.

Q. OF --

A. Of nine children.

Q. HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN THE WAR BROKE OUT?

A. 20. Not exactly, but close.

Q. HOW LONG HAD YOU BEEN AWARE THAT THERE WAS DANGER?

A. Well, not too -- not too -- how much before the war, yes?

Q. YES.

A. That there will be a war? Well, who ever expected that there will be a war like that?

I'll never forget it, when they bombed Gilodz (?) and we were sitting in the basement. And my brother at the time the bomb fell down -- my son -- my brother wanted to make jokes that the people should laugh, that they shouldn't worry. And he was making jokes, it's nothing. It's all that business. So he told stories.

And then, in the morning, my father went out. And he was wearing a beard but he was -- he had his -- he would live through the first World War. So he came back pale like a ghost. "I could never believe it," he said, "what was happening. Two officers were coming to me as I was walking the other side. And I

walked this way and they stopped me. Walked this way. I walk this way, they walk this way. I did not know what to do, so I ran into a building. It's not like the first World War was." It wasn't like the first World War.

Q. HOW FAST DID THE CHANGES COME?

A. Very fast. Took them, I think it was three days that they were already took over all of Poland. But they left Warsaw. And around Warsaw, they -- that was supposed to be the Polish little country. They was supposed to give it to the Polish.

Before the Germans came in, there was -- everybody said -- all the men ran away because the Germans were coming, a lot of older men. And everybody was yelling. Not everybody, but a lot of people were yelling.

But then was, my brother that was left there and he -- and he was running a little bit. And then he said, "No, whatever it will be with me, it will be with my whole family. I'm coming back." And that's what happened.

My brother had a fur shop, making fur coats. And it was making -- selling to German firms too, you know. And right after a couple of days, the owner from a big store that they needed the furs, he said, "Okay. The war is over. The Germans are here.

So you want to work? We'll live a normal life."

Okay. He wanted to work. So at first he send me -- I never -- I did not look like Jewish. I had blond hair and I was dressed -- you know, they didn't recognize me. The only one people that they recognize me is young kids, 12 years old. They are going back from school and they saw me on the street, so they started hitting me. But otherwise people did not know. We were right away wearing the yellow band, but I did not wear the yellow band because no one ever approached me. And I had to go to this German company to collect. And when I came in, he says, "Why don't you wear the band?" And I said, "Well, I have to identify myself?"

So then he said -- then he wanted to open -- before the war, all of a sudden the change, the silver change money disappeared. So who is taking it? The Jews. So they were running to the Jewish stores and houses. And when I came to this person's store -- and evidently later I found out he was a spy -- and he opened the cabinet full of silver money. I said, "I am not taking that." So he said, "It's not the war anymore." I said, "I don't care, so you have it." And I wouldn't take it.

Q. HE WANTED TO GIVE YOU SILVER?

A. That's right.

Q. WHY?

A. Pay -- paying me. When I went there, I went for the payment.

Q. OH, UM-HUM.

A. What he owes. So he wanted to pay me with the silver money. And I said, "Oh, no, you can't give me the silver money."

Q. SO HE KNEW YOU WERE JEWISH?

A. Oh, sure.

Q. BUT HE DIDN'T REPORT YOU FOR NOT WEARING THE STAR?

A. Oh, no, he wouldn't. He needed the work. As a matter of fact, after a while when they decided with the ghetto, so we wanted to save -- and a lot of German officers used to come to the house, they wanted to -- they send them to make fur coats.

So my brother offered them fur coats for their wives if they will transfer my parents and my sister with two children, the husband was in the army, transferred to Warsaw. So they went -- so they agreed, and he went with them and in a big bus. And they announced that they are carrying mail. And when he came back, he felt terrible. You couldn't even talk to him, he was so bitter. And he came back with them because he had to make the fur coat for them.

And then it didn't take long that they

decided that they will be -- all of us have to go to the ghetto. So we decided we saved our parents in Warsaw and my sister that has the babies. One other sister had also, also had two children, but she wanted to stay and another one wanted to stay there too.

And my brother was supposed to be in the city, working for these Germans. And he told them to give a list of all the workers that are working and they won't be touched, because if a Jew went out on the street, they grabbed him and they sent him to work. For a day or two, we did not know what is happening. And sometimes they came back and sometimes they didn't come back.

So he gave the names and the addresses and everything. And all of a sudden, I don't remember who it was but they, non-Jewish young men came over and told me, "Tonight your brother will go." And I said -- I tried to get in contact with my brother. For some reason -- I can't tell you exactly how it is because it's too long and that's just a little thing -- and I got in touch with him.

And he locked the door and went into a neighbor's house. And they came and knocked on his door. And they made him -- they knocked on his door and knocked and knocked. And he saw that the people, the neighbors, became nervous. Maybe they will come in

to them, because he is not -- so he went out. Walked out of the neighbor's house.

And they took him and all the workers. He -- my brother -- he put up with my brother-in-law also will be on this list so he will be able to work and have a normal life. Okay? No normal life for the Jews.

So they took them. But at that time, they would not know what to do with the Jews. So they took them to a little town, Purtakoph (?) and there they stayed over the weekend, a few days. And then they could go farther.

So my brother went to Warsaw to be with my parents, and my brother-in-law with his wife and two children went, stayed there, because he found a cousin. He said, "Where would you run? Here we go to the factory and we work and everything is quiet. So as long as it is quiet, stay here with us." So he stayed with them.

And I was still in the ghetto and another sister was still at the ghetto with a child and we did not know what to do. And we decided maybe we'll go to Warsaw to be with my parents. And they were smuggling people out, so we decided -- and we thought that we will be able to be smuggled out too.

But the night before the smuggle, somebody

found that they are smuggling out people. So that night they caught a whole bunch of people and they cut their heads off and took the gold from the teeth out. And it's all that you could find is parts of the people. So that was the finish for my going to Warsaw.

In the ghetto we used to get a ration for a whole week food was a loaf of bread, probably two pounds. I don't know exactly. A loaf of bread, a little bit dry coffee, a little bit flour, a little bit sugar. At one point later on, they even -- they brought in horse meat to give to people. The horses were killed so they will give the people horse meat.

Anyhow, I was working in a factory. They were making furs there. And we never thought we will live through this war. We did not think what we will do if the war will finish. We just thought, we just said to one another, "We will die. No one will live through. We will die. And that's it. Don't think -- if you don't die today, you will die tomorrow." And that's the way we lived.

We heard already what was going on in Warsaw. And they took the people and put them in, whole families together. "And you all will go to work and you all will be together, so nice. And you go to work and so take everything with, and go together."

So my brother went with the family and my

brother -- my father had seven brothers and one sister in each -- everyone had grown families and married children and they all went together, like going to work. And they got, went into cattle cars and they put -- after they start going out of the city, they put gas into the house and -- into the cars, and gassed them like that. They didn't yet have any gas chambers. And that was the end of them.

My sister that was left with her two children in Purtikof.(?) So she, one day they came in there when the husbands went to work, to the factory. And so they came in and took out the families, the women with the children, took them into one big grave. There were 500 women and children. Took them in there and killed them. My sister left a note for her husband that -- "Goodbye," and she went with the two children. He came home and did not know nothing.

Okay. What else? What else you want to know? Okay. Then the time came that they closed up the ghetto and they told us the same story; that we have to go, leave the ghetto, and we go to work and all that business. We went -- we did not go to work, we went into the cattle cars. And we were planning, we will be working. We will take everything, whatever we can.

And I remember we had left a little bit

food, so we made out of that, cooked, baked something. We made a cake out of the coffee after we drank the coffee, after the grinds of the coffee, put in a little flour and a little bit sugar, and a little material in a rag and tightened it and put it on the water. The water was boiling. And that came out a cake. We had cake and coffee.

And so we are planning what we will do at the work. We didn't -- couldn't even dream that we are going to Auschwitz. When we came to Auschwitz, when they opened the door, the doors, and we saw the barbed wires up, high up, "Oh, that's no good."

And then there were the Germans, saying "Here." "Here." "Here." "Here." "The women." "The men." "Children." "Give this one the children." "Give an old woman the child." It was horrible. We did not know what was going on at all. One woman separated -- one young woman separated from her father and she was screaming and crying. And she got -- she was swollen -- in an hour, lying. She was swollen. They beat her up.

And we did not know where we were going. We go to the famous bath. We had to shower. "Don't worry." The women were there. "Take a shower. Leave the clothes here. Everything will be waiting for you." You know what was waiting for us? A sandle. A sandle

with wood.

Q. A sandle?

A. A sandle to put on with wood. So. And that's it. Naked. Completely naked. We didn't have anything. Everything was cleaned up. And we -- they put us, the women, were putting us in line. Go straight into a room. A big room with ten or more officers were looking us over, like the -- like the animals you look over -- looked us over. Cut off all our hair. And shaved off our hair. And then they looked us over and here was still going, "Here," and "Here," and "Here," and "Here."

I was with a girl from all the years together to school and we went together. And she says -- and she had TB. And I still, up 'til today, cannot realize how they knew that she had TB. I was with her and they put her in another line. Never saw her before -- after.

And we got clothes. The clothes we got, I will explain to you. I had a men's top from pajamas with a little dress that went up to here. And that was -- that's all. And the wooden sandles.

INTERVIEWER 2: WHAT TIME OF YEAR WAS IT?

A. What time of year?

INTERVIEWER 2: WAS IT --

A. It was the fall. It was the fall. And

exactly the time, the days and the dates, and the dates and holidays -- no holidays. We did not know.

INTERVIEWER 2: I WAS WONDERING WHETHER IT WAS COLD.

A. It was cold. It was, I think, the fall. September 29, I think they -- in September, they came in. My son was -- oh. Anyhow, so there was --

Q. Did you say your son was born?

A. Yeah -- not my son. My sister's son.

Q. OH.

A. That's how I remembered the 29th of September. That I thought that they came in the first of September to Poland.

Anyhow ... And so, let's see, what -- where we going? Yeah, we came -- so we went this way and that way and this way and that way, and then they took us to the camp. And we were going to this camp where five -- four people were laying on one bunk; two this way and two this way, or more, I think. I don't remember exactly.

Because I saw in a museum that they made out of clay that four and four, eight people. I think we were four people. That I don't remember exactly. Bunk beds. And we could go down only with somebody supervising us to go to the washroom.

Anyhow, every morning we were there -- I

was there just nine days. The whole group was just nine days. They are all young people. So they -- so they, every morning the Germans came and they counted us. And then they heard that there's diarrhea was going around and I had diarrhea too. And they called, "Whoever has diarrhea should go here." And I wanted to go. I wanted to be honest. I'm scared. So a friend of mine was standing with me. She was holding me. She said, "You will stay right here." "But" I said, "I have diarrhea." So she says, "You'll make in your hands, but you will stay here." Those people, they took them and we never saw them again.

Next thing after the nine days -- we had water, on the outside there was water. We went out and we washed ourselves. That's all we could do. That was our night clothes and day clothes. And after nine days we are going out in the morning and we walked and walked and walked 'til we came to a stop. And here we were supposed -- we stayed actually a day and a night. This day and a whole night. But little did we know that across where the -- across from us, like, you know, this is the sidewalk, this is the city that the cars are going and the other sidewalk. So there were the ovens where they burn the people. We did not know it. But the, behind me -- behind us, there were, you know, building camps.

So this lady comes out and she is telling us, "Now you have to pray because if you will go here, you will never come out alive. But if you will go one way or the other, so you are going to work." And we said, "Why you tell us such things like that? What do you mean, over there fire, where they burn them?" I stayed here all the time. I couldn't believe it. I stay here all the time, I see the people going in, never coming out. But you see smoke coming out.

Okay. We survived that and we went to a Hamburg. (?) It's a German city.

Q. THAT HAPPENED AT -- WERE YOU STILL IN AUSCHWITZ?

A. No, we went out of Auschwitz. They came in the morning and they took us away from there.

Q. WHERE DID THAT HAPPEN?

A. That was in Auschwitz. The crematorium, that was in Auschwitz. But we did not know about it.

Q. OKAY.

A. But we went to Hamburg to work. And there was supposed -- so there were wooden -- there were 200 people, women. So they gave us 25 to a house that was -- an artificial house. How do you call it? I forgot.

Q. BARRACKS?

A. No. No. You know, you put together a

little house.

INTERVIEWER 2: PRE-FABRICATED?

A. Pre-fabricated. Yeah. I forgot.

So they had pre-fabricated houses and they gave us -- 25 people were in one house. There were two, later two women that came from Germany to Lodz. They sent them out from Germany to Lodz. They speak a very good English -- German. We had the second language in school was German and so they spoke very well German.

So she went -- so -- wait a minute. So what was I talking about? Wait a minute.

INTERVIEWER 2: TWO WOMEN WHO KNEW GERMAN?

A. Yes. So they were -- the lakereldest, (?) was an older person that could not go to work but could manage. And there were lots of Germans like that, that you did not send any more to go to work. So he was there and he was the lakereldest, and he gave her the orders and she gave to us the orders. Okay.

And then they arranged that in every room, there would be a steubeneldest. (?) A steubeneldest is one person that does not go out to work, but cleans up the house and helps out in the kitchen. That's what I was, a steubeneldest.

And in the morning, I got up and I got this big bread and coffee and I think a little bit

margarine. Sometimes even a little jelly. And everybody was in the meantime dressed and they were standing up, they were standing by me, and everybody was watching and I should count -- everybody was hungry -- I should count, cut exactly for everyone the right piece. You know? And everybody had that and with that, they went to work.

When they came back -- so I could go out. Wait, I will tell you. I could go out like three times from the kitchen. The back of the kitchen, I was helping peel the vegetables. And if anybody got a little soup with a few pieces of vegetable, (in a whisper) "I had a good soup today."

So me and another woman went out with the big kettles and served them when they came from work. So they had -- they got a bowl with a spoon, so we gave them the soup. I could go out in the morning -- during the day to the washroom and then in the afternoon, I also could go out twice to go to the washroom.

So I did something bad. So what happened was --

Q. WHAT DID YOU DO BAD?

A. I'll tell you. What happened was that they came in in the evening, but they came in and they ate the soup and they were crying. "The Germans -- the German people, they are treating the dogs better than

us." And they went to the garbage cans, maybe they will find something that they will be able to eat. Some girls, they were so cold and they are working in the salt mines, so they -- one girl was so cold so she decided that she will -- in my room -- she decided that she will take a sack from the salt and put that under her dress. Because there we got dresses; I forgot to tell you that. There we had the prison dresses; gray -- dark gray, gray and blue with a star and a number. Okay. So she -- so this girl had this sack from the salt on her back, under the dress. And that was bad because it was eating her skin from the salt.

And -- wait a minute. I didn't tell everything. I -- when we got the dresses, so we got a brassiere just to hold us here and a little panties. Okay. So they -- and they came and they were crying how bad it is, how hungry they are and cold. And I had -- I'm very smart. I got a good idea. And I said, "You know what? You are looking in the garbage cans, maybe you will find some string. Just a plain piece of string." So they found some string and I tied myself up here and I tied myself the panties up, you know, that I was wearing. And as I was cutting the vegetables, I was cutting slices of the vegetables and filling myself up. And then -- that's the bad thing that I did. That's sabotage.

And so when I went out to the washroom, there was always somebody that's sick that did not go to work, so was waiting for me. And I gave of it, and she put under the pillow. You know, there were straw pillows and straw mattresses. Okay, we did that -- so I did that.

The lackereldest(er?) the Jewish woman called me in once and she said, "Regina, I know what you are doing, but I won't be able to help you." So I said, "I do not expect you to help me. They are my sisters like they are your sisters. We won't get through this war anyhow. So I'll die a few days earlier. What's the big deal? It's no one to live through."

So one time the lakereldest(er) that came in this way, from the outside, and I went out from this little room that I was peeling the vegetables, filled up with that, from the other side. He would never pay attention to it -- to me, but I knew what I'm doing. So I got so scared, so I fell down and fainted. When I fainted, everything fell out.

Okay. So they take me to the riviera -- that's what we call the riviera, one room that if somebody gets sick. So it's like somebody that knows to be a doctor, whatever, was helping her to help me out. And when I was okay, so I was supposed to be

hanged. And the day that I was supposed to be hanged because I committed sabotage, so I did not go to work. And I was waiting until 5:00 o'clock, when they came home. In the morning, when they went out and they were crying and they say -- everyone was blaming the other one -- "We had to bring her the string," and all that business. Anyhow, they got orders to close the camp and tomorrow morning, the 200 people that are here are going to Bergen-Belsen. So I was saved.

We came to Bergen-Belsen and it was one big room, probably bigger than this. Much bigger than that. There were hundreds, I don't remember, I think it was like 800 people, women, in that room. We were sitting squeezed, one next to the other. If one got up to go to the washroom, so she stood. But the poles that were holding the ceiling of the, you know, from the floor to the ceiling, by those poles 'til another one got up, that they could go in.

And we were there -- and when we came there, the first thing we sat down, all 200 with together, we sat down on this floor. And I see from the outside a cousin of mine, my father's brother's daughter. And she was probably a few years older than I was, but not old. That she is walking like this, pulling her feet. And I knock on the window and I said, "Come in. What's happening here?" So she said

that some Hungarian (?) girls ran over to the truck, that they were carrying bread and they stole some bread. They did not catch them, so the whole camp couldn't eat any more -- didn't get any bread for three days. Therefore she was walking like that because she couldn't walk anymore.

And as she sits and talks to me, a girl comes in with a white apron with on her head a white cap and she is looking. She heard a transfer came in -- she is already there for two years -- a transfer came in. And she said, "Oh, this is what we'll do." And she came to look, maybe she knows somebody. And she ran over to me and starts kissing me. "Kinder. Kinder." She was going together with me to school. "You won't be here. I'll get you a good job."

And she ran out -- first she runs out and brings us a little salami and a little bread and margarine. We opened our eyes. We could not believe it really, that that's true. And she said -- and so I said, "I'll tell you something, kids, we'll have a party." So my cousin said, "Don't do that, tomorrow you won't have it." So I said, "Tomorrow I won't have it, so you won't have it either. You won't have it, I won't have it. But today we have it, we have a party." And we cut little as much as we could to divide between us and we had a party. And then she went home to --

wherever she was.

Also, every morning the Germans come and count the people. So this girl, my friend, went to the head nurse and told her that I should be a nurse. So they come and take me to go to a hospital to be a nurse. And I looked at that hospital, I thought I'm fainting because the hospital was a big room divided with blankets. And just to divide, the blankets, and here, this was open. And the sick people were laying on a blanket and that's all that the nurses did -- could do, is wash them up and give them the food that came in. That's all we could do. And that -- that's the help they got. But they didn't care about helping them. They couldn't work anymore.

So, anyhow, I was a nurse. I was sleeping in the other room, on a cot -- you know?

Q. A COT?

A. Not a cot. A -- bunk beds. Yeah.

Well, I came together with girls that we were from Lodz, you know, and kept keeping together. And we came here too. And they were in this other camp. So they -- well, actually, if we -- anybody that saw that had a dead body in her room, but I was the first one that noticed that I had a dead body in my room. And I never saw a dead person in my life. And I said -- the nurse comes in and I said, "What do I do?"

And she says, "I'll tell you right away." So she brings out the scissors and she said, "Cut off the clothes and two girls -- three girls will help you. All four will take the leidenhaus (?). Like the morgue, that's leidenhaus. And she goes.

"I will cut off the clothes? I'll go right back," I was thinking to myself. She went away, I went away. And I went to the camp where I came from. And I thought that I am safe. But the following day, when they came, they were missing one person here in the hospital.

And the nurse went to my friend and she said, "Look, I will not go for you. So if you won't bring her back, because they will come back -- and if you won't bring her back, but the few hair that she probably has still her hair on her head, so bring her back. Otherwise, you will suffer, not me." She came running and she brought me back.

And the other girls were telling, "Look, what can we do? We have to do. We will help you. We will do." And we put this body into this blanket and we were carrying her. And then the girls came that we know, but we came together with them and one girl cries, "You are like my mother and I have to be with you." I said, "What would you be with me?" And I was crying and walking and holding this, and crying. And I

said, "What would you do? Look at that. This is what you want?" She said, "I don't care what it is. Wherever you are, I have to be."

So we came back and I talked to the nurse, that, "This is my sister. We came together and don't want to be separated. So can she be here or I'll go there." So she said, "No, she will be here." So both of us were sleeping in the bunk bed. And that was going on there. That was in Bergen-Belsen.

But in Bergen-Belsen was almost by the end of the war when I came to Bergen-Belsen. It's not too long at all that I was in Bergen-Belsen. And what was happening?

One morning, we were -- yeah, at first the English came. The English found out that they had dynamited the whole camp, because they don't a -- they know that they are losing the war and therefore we went from Hungary into Bergen-Belsen. So they don't want that they should find this whole big mess.

Yeah. But before that, the leidenhaus, (?) the morgue, was filled up and people were dying. So what we had to do is take off the clothes and throw the bodies in front of the camps -- in front of the hospital. And there were mountains of bodies there. And the Germans did not want to see, that anybody should see that. And so -- but the English found out

that they are, that the whole camp is dynamited, and they have three days time. And in the -- so first of all, they shut off the water. They came in and they shut off the water. And then they came to visit the hospitals. Where my friend was, she had -- sick people had bunk beds, they could do something. Because she came two years before. And when we came, was by the end.

And so they came in and, I'll never forget, when they saw the people on the floor and we were wearing white aprons, what was going under those aprons and under those heads -- so they never saw it in their whole life. And they started crying when they heard the people calling "Waser. Waser." That's "water" in German. "Water" is "waser." And we couldn't give it to them because they stopped the water because everything was poisoned.

So they -- they stood and they cried. And then they decided that they will do a very good thing for them -- for us. So they cooked up a delicious, thick soup that we haven't seen for years. For six years almost. Five years, five and a half. Because nine months I was in Sweden after the war.

So I -- what was I talking about?

Q. SOLDIERS HAD JUST COME INTO THE AREA --

A. Yeah. And they walked out and they cooked

a delicious soup. And we ate it with such a big appetite, our stomachs could not take it. And the typhus was going around. They lived through all that and they were falling like flies. They made a mistake. They meant good.

And then they took out the Germans from -- that was Bergen-Belsen is from Berger -- whatever. There are two names -- two little cities or two names of the cities. Bergen-Belsen was the name of it. They took out from there the people that were the Germans, and took our people, whoever was still able to maybe help it a little bit, into the hospital.

At the first, when we got up one morning and the Germans were gone, and we knew the war is over and the -- but the barbed wires were -- divided the men from the women. And we ran to the men to see, well, maybe we'll find somebody. And I found a cousin, and this cousin was laying, just in a camp like we were in a camp, just laying there. And a man was having his open body and they were eating from his inside.

INTERVIEWER 2: WHAT WAS --

A. It was horrible. I took my cousin. I took my cousin back to the camp where I was, because the Germans were not there. And we put up like sandles, made a fire, and he brought some from the kitchen that was left, some potatoes. And I baked some

potatoes and this is the way we were eating.

Okay. And after this, I went to the hospital. And he was in the hospital, a sick one. And I was with the nurses. I was strong like horse. I always used to say -- excuse my expression -- I used to say, "I don't want what my parents put into me that I can survive all that."

And we went to Sweden. In Sweden I was working. I always worked. In Sweden, there was a woman dentist, so I was her secretary. She just taught me how to take care of things, and how to write them in. And so I was working with her. And there was a little hospital, if somebody didn't feel good, to take care of.

And we were in a camp. And we were sitting in the evenings and we were talking to one another, if we will go to our families. Reporters came from all over, ask us our names and our ages, and where from where we come and who we are looking for. And this is what we were doing.

I hope I'm telling everything. I don't know if I am telling everything.

Q. IT'S GREAT.

A. And it's -- yes.

So when we came to Sweden, I came with -- then my cousin came into there. I had, when I was

working in the hospital still, I had -- a little girl comes in, she was 14. How she survived, with little hair on her head. And she walks in and I look at her and she looks at me and we know we know one another. We don't know who we are. And she said, "Regina." And I said "Porcia" (?) and we hugged each other. And that was -- she was the only one left from her family. They took the whole family. The father was an invalid from the first World War and she was -- she was 14 years. At that time when I saw her, she was 14 years old. And so she was like 10 years or nine years when the whole family went to Auschwitz. And no one was survived. And since then, she was my little girl.

And in the meantime, reporters came in, if we were looking for somebody and, you know, to see somebody. Anyhow I told them that I have two brothers in America and I gave them the addresses. And she had an uncle, her father's brother, that was living in Argentina. And she preferred to go to Argentina. And so I used to write letters to him and I told him, I said, "If you want to take her, it's fine. And if not, I'll take her with me to America." So he was -- he wants her because he didn't have any children. That was his brother's child. Okay. So she was there. So after a while -- in the meantime, this is the way I contacted my brothers.

And we were starting to recognize the days, what days they are, the holidays, the holidays existing in this world. Oh, it was too bad. But, anyhow, we were nine months in Sweden. They were trying to be very, very good to us. Gave us the first clothes, real clothes that we put on. And then my brother, who passed away, tried to get -- to send papers for me. And there was one other girl that she was with me together, and she had family from her mother's side and father's side. So they were trying to get us, so we were the first ones to leave Sweden. And in Sweden they fed us, they gave us cereals with butter, with milk, with honey and sugar, with everything. They tried to build us up. When I went, I weighed 165 pounds, 160 pounds. I don't remember exactly. And my legs were rubbing when I was walking.

And so we were -- we went to the States and we said, "My God, what will happen when everybody will -- nobody will believe what happened to us. We can't talk to anybody. We can't tell them anything." Because whatever -- first of all, that everybody had a different life in the camps. Everybody was in a different place. And, I mean, it was -- so it would be hard for people to understand. And, believe-you-me, I mean even now there are people that don't believe it. And I don't blame them. By now they already -- it's

too much talk about it and too much shown about it.

But years, a few years back, that was quiet and how can you talk? People wouldn't believe it.

Q. DID YOU TRY TO TELL ANYBODY?

A. Well, my family had to know. But otherwise, I didn't talk to anybody about the war. And, you know, I met -- I came and right when I came to, maybe a few weeks later, I met my husband. And I talk my husband -- that my son was born in September. You know, when I said my baby -- my son was born or my child was born?

Q. UM-HUM.

A. So I met my husband.

INTERVIEWER 2: IN THE UNITED STATES?

A. Yes, uh-huh. In Chicago. Yes. First I came to New York and they did not let anybody out unless we -- they knew that somebody is waiting for us. So my brother announced that -- we all laugh about that -- when my brother announced that, they knew that so they told me I can go out because somebody is waiting for me. And I walk out. And he was with his sister-in-law -- with his wife and she was standing this way to look when people go out and he was watching this way. There was a man standing before him and he was almost fainting. He said, "Go out, have a cup of coffee. I give you back the place when you come, but

have your cup of coffee." This man went away. And I go to my sister-in-law and she did not recognize me. She had a picture of me. I sent a picture from Sweden. And I walk over to my brother, not knowing that this is my brother. I just walked straight over to me and I ask him, "Do you know Mr. Lasky?" And he said, "Lady, I don't have time to talk to you. I'm waiting for my sister."

Q. SO --

A. So I turned around -- I turned around and I'm thinking, who I should go -- who I should pick now to go. And then it dawned on him and he turned around and he said, "Lady. Lady, who did you ask?" And I said, "I ask of Mr. Lasky." "I am Mr. Lasky," he says. "If you are Mr. Lasky, I am your sister." When he left, I was 11 years old.

Q. YOUR HUSBAND WASN'T A SURVIVOR, WAS HE?

A. Brother -- survivor?

Q. YOUR HUSBAND.

A. Oh, my -- no. My husband was also from Europe but he came in 1939 to the United States, with the last boat that came to the United States. And he right away went into the Army. And he was in the Army for four years.

Q. DID HE HELP LIBERATE ANY OF THE CAMPS?

A. No, he was in England all the time.

Q. Did you ever go back and visit Poland?

A. No, I would never do that. I would never put my step, my foot to Poland. First of all, they were anti-semitic. You are my friend, so that's okay. But if you are not my friend, "Stinky Jew, go." Okay. And then -- so I wouldn't be able to go there to see. I had buried books and furs in the attic under the floor. I didn't care to have it. I didn't care for material things at all. Because the whole city of Lodz, to me, the city of Lodz was all with Jewish blood. And they were -- there were some good Polish people, but very a little.

As a matter of fact, I saw a movie here in the United States -- no, in Israel, but it was before -- it was before in the Holocaust. It was in the United States. So -- I will tell you how I got to Israel. So I -- it was six hours, two days playing. And there was somebody interviewed a -- there was a church and we saw the man that played the organ, and there were the people. And then when they went out, so he interviewed the people. So this woman said -- they talk about the Jews, "Oh, look, they were stingy, and the money that they had. See those houses? Belonged to them." So this interviewer said, "But now they belong to you. Now you have it." "Yeah." But the nicest thing was -- and this is what people were

talking -- the nicest thing was, when the man that played the organ came out and he said, "Look, you want to know everything? I'll tell you. A rabbi came right here and stood where you are standing and he told, 'We sinned. We killed Jesus so we have to go quietly. God is punishing us.'" That's what he said.

Q. THE RABBI REALLY SAID THAT?

A. There wasn't a rabbi that he was talking to. He tells the story that the rabbi came and told them that, "We have to be punished. We are being punished from God because we killed Jesus."

Q. THIS RECENT AUSCHWITZ SITUATION THAT AROSE, DOES THAT BRING ANYTHING UP FOR YOU?

A. The Auschwitz?

Q. YES, BUILDING THE CARMELITE MONASTERY IN AUSCHWITZ.

A. What are you talking about? I don't --

Q. A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO WHEN THEY WERE BUILDING A CARMELITE MONASTERY IN AUSCHWITZ --

A. Yeah. Didn't do a thing for me. Didn't do a thing for me. I'll never forgive them. I can't blame the people, the young people. I couldn't go to Germany. I couldn't go to Poland.

You know, in Poland, there were people that sacrificed themselves and they took in people to save. I know of people like that. But I have a

very -- I had a very good friend, that she was living across from me in a different building and her father was a shoemaker and the mother used to go out to work. And we did work together, we did homework together. We were together to school and we were very good friends. And the father said, "One day we will all go to one church. You see? It's already coming." Okay. But when I went out with her, we went to a play before Passover, so we went home a whole group. And then she says, "Let's hold together, because the Jews will take us for the matzohs."

You don't know the story, how it went?

You know?

INTERVIEWER 2: (Unintelligible)

A. That's right. That the Jews kill gentile children to have the blood for the matzoh. And that building where she lived, the next building, it was a bakery where they were making the matzohs and gentile people were working, were working there. And you just made it from, not even salt, nothing. Just flour and water. And everybody knew about it. But this is the way we lived.

I went to school and they -- we had a teacher from anatomy, she was teaching. And she said, and she was an old lady -- I'm old too, but okay, I can still keep my head up. But she was with her head going

like that, all the time. (Shaking her head) And she was teaching us that the Jews are wearing beards and they are dirty. So therefore -- there is a city Villizakof (?) in Poland, that they have salt mines. So they don't let in the Jews there to the salt mines, to the city, because they will make dirty the salt mines.

Q. THIS WAS BEFORE --

A. Before the war. Before everything. Sure. That was in school. I was learning and I was a young girl.

Q. SO YOU WENT TO SCHOOL WITH GENTILES?

A. Oh, yeah. We went together to school.

INTERVIEWER 2: WHAT DID YOU SAY TO HER?

A. What could you say?

INTERVIEWER 2: WHEN PEOPLE MADE REMARKS LIKE THAT, DID IT MAKE YOU ANGRY?

A. You could say. In America, you could say something.

You could be angry, you could be hurt, but you had to keep your mouth shut.

Q. EVEN BEFORE THE WAR, IN POLAND?

A. Yeah, sure. Especially a Jew.

Q. HOW DOES THAT EXPERIENCE AFFECT YOUR LATER LIFE IN AMERICA? BECAUSE THERE IS RACISM HERE, TOO. HOW DOES THAT AFFECT IT?

A. Well, it hurts me up to today. First of all, I never knew that they are -- that at that time I never knew Black people until I didn't come to the United States. And honestly, I couldn't believe it. When I went on the bus and I was looking at this Black people and they looked at me so gorgeous, so nice. And I came home and I told my -- I was staying at my brother's at first, and I came home and I tell to my nephews, nieces. And I said, "Why when I look at them, they are so -- I can see that they get angry at me."

So my nephew said, "Don't look at them, because they think that White people don't like they. So if you look at them, they may think that you don't like them. So you better don't -- try not to look at them like that." You know? And I couldn't understand. That I couldn't understand. And I -- it's a lot of things I couldn't believe that in America --

INTERVIEWER 2: THAT IT HAPPENED IN AMERICA?

A. Happened in America. Or kidnapping children. I have to -- I know I have to read the paper. I hate to read it. They kidnap children. The killings. Terrible. Terrible. It's so horrible I can't believe it.

Q. I WANT TO ASK YOU A COUPLE OF MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LODZ GHETTO. WERE YOU THERE PRETTY

MUCH THE WHOLE TIME IT EXISTED UNTIL IT WAS LIQUIDATED?

A. (Nodding) Not completely. I was with a group going and there were still people because constantly different groups were going.

Q. WAS IT CLOSE IN THE GHETTO THOUGH?

(Unintelligible)

A. That's right, sure.

Q. WHY DID YOU DECIDE FINALLY TO LEAVE THE GHETTO AND GO WHERE THEY WERE TOLD YOU TO GO WHEN YOU DID?

A. Because everybody had to go anyhow. So my friends -- my friend -- the best friend that I told you that she had TB? She was married and her husband was a policeman. So he said, "We'll have to go, so let's go now. What's the difference?" I remember we had a little flour left, so we made a little -- baked them, if we need something more to eat so we will have it. And that's it. And so we went down to the cattle cars. "Leave everything. Everything will be brought to you." It was brought to us.

Q. WHAT WAS THE LEADER OF THE GHETTO?

A. Rumkophski? (?)

Q. YEAH.

A. It's a shame that he is a Jew. Yeah.

Q. HE WAS --

A. He was a terrible person. A young person.

He thought that he will save his life when he'll just do everything that the Germans want. So he and his clique, not men -- he had women around him, and he and his clique will be alive. He was killed in -- they were waiting for him because there were a lot of, you know, some people came in, men and women. So some men that were husky and healthy, so they put them to work when people come in. So the first thing they ask, "Is Rumkophski in this group?" And he was -- he went in this group. It's a shame.

Q. DID HE EVER SHOW ANYTHING THAT, AS MUCH CONCERN FOR EVERYBODY? I MEAN, WASN'T IT --

A. Well, the Germans want -- they want now 1200, so I just will send them 900. And after these, they won't want any more. So the next day, when that was transported, they needed more. And this is the way he was giving them.

Q. DID IT GET WORSE AS THE GHETTO WENT ON?

A. Huh?

Q. DID IT GET WORSE IN THE GHETTO AS IT WENT ON?

A. With what?

Q. WORSE ... PROBABLY, I DON'T KNOW, LESS FOOD PROBABLY. BUT JUST --

A. Well, they had that food. They had that food. And we produced a lot. They were making money.

I was working, making a German store from all the lingerie that they took from the stores. So we made a German store. And we made -- we give them a lot. That's why we are alive, because we are still young and healthy.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN THEY TOOK ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE CAMP?

A. Ah. (Nods) The children. This same cousin that I met when I came to Bergen-Belsen and I met her, that she was hardly walking. She was married and had two children. And so the two children with the mother and father, they took away before, and then they took her. And she was the -- so she was with the children. First they took all the people, sick people, the hospitals. Children from, then the children's hospitals. And the older people's hospitals.

I remember, I knew this rabbi with the wife, had only one daughter and I passed by the street and they were sitting, waiting for the wagon to come, the daughter with her husband and a couple of children. And I didn't even want to look at them, I just walked away.

Q. WHAT MADE IT POSSIBLE TO KEEP GOING IN THE GHETTO? I MEAN, DID YOU EVER HAVE TIMES WHEN YOU HAD ANY KIND OF FUN?

A. Fun? Who thought of fun?

Q. WELL, I MEAN --

A. You only thought that you were hungry and you died tomorrow.

Q. SO THERE WAS NOTHING --

A. There was nothing. We talked, talked to the neighbors. You know, we were living three, four people in our room. Hunger. Once a week we got the food, so some people -- we all made ourselves little scales that we had -- we can eat this, just so much of the bread, that we should have for a whole week.

And there was one girl living in the same building and she couldn't care what will be tomorrow. And she was eating good the first few days. And that was it. And then she couldn't hardly walk to get the ration. And she died for hunger. So it's all that you could think was of hunger, what you eat and what you -- or if you live through the war. Who cares about the fun, no one cares.

Q. I'M SORRY. WHAT I WANTED TO KNOW WAS, WAS THERE SOMETHING TO LIGHTEN IT UP, LIKE GOOD FRIENDS OR --

A. The friends, oh, the friends we were very close. We could only talk to everybody that, this is what will be tomorrow, if not today. We still will live through a day.

Q. WHY DID YOU KEEP GOING?

A. Why?

Q. YES. AND NOT GIVE UP?

A. Well, I don't know. Evidently something that kept us going. We had to go tomorrow, tomorrow morning to work. And we have to work, otherwise they'll kill us. We will die anyhow.

Q. WHAT THINGS STAND OUT IN YOUR MIND THAT YOU SAW HAPPEN THAT YOU JUST NEVER HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FORGET?

A. What do you mean by what stand up in my mind?

Q. ARE THERE MOMENTS THAT COME BACK TO YOU WHEN YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT THE WHOLE THING --

A. I'll tell you something. There's always -- there's always. We were -- life is not good to live after a war that you lose your whole family. You always think about them and you -- it's very hard to know why are they dead and I'm alive. How could that be? And somebody would say, "Because they felt that you could still do something good." I don't know. The good thing that came out, I have a beautiful son. Not only his face, but he is a beautiful person, good person. And, I don't know, I guess that he and my husband were two people that brought me back to life.

Q. DID YOU --

A. That I wished to be alive. But I'm always

ready to die. If I'll die tomorrow, I have nothing to complain about. I had more out of life than my whole family. And, I don't know, I did not deserve that. Why my whole family is killed and I'm alive.

Oh, I'm independent. I don't like that anybody will -- I had a very bad winter this winter -- summer, this summer. I had a fracture in my back, compression fracture, and I had a fracture in my leg. But there is -- the cast is off already and in another few days, I'll take off the bandage too. And I was sick I think since April or May and constantly something else came along. And I just wished to be dead. I used to say to my son, "I hate myself." He said, "Mama, you didn't do anything bad. Why should you hate yourself?" I said, "For being alive."

Q. Have you felt that way all along?

A. Always. The best times when I had, I had a husband, a beautiful husband. He passed away in 1976. He was so good to me that you can't even ask for anybody. He's a Godsender.

And, I don't know, I was always -- I was always ready to die and he wanted to live more than anything. And he used to say -- and I said, "If I'll die tomorrow, I have nothing to complain about." And he said, "But I want to live." (Unintelligible) He died and I'm still alive. And when I said to my

husband -- my son, I said to my son, "Larry, I'll be 72 years old." So he said, "So what can I do?"

It's hard. It's very hard to live like that, to be left alive. No matter how good people are. I had -- I can say that people were very good to me. And I was saved because of the people that were so helpful. And, I don't know, maybe I don't appreciate what I had, that I -- I would be dead tomorrow, I would be just --

Q. NO, IT'S BLAMING YOURSELF. THAT'S NOT IT. IF IT'S BEEN EVER SINCE THE WAR, THAT'S NOT IT. IT'S --

A. Ever since the war, I'll tell you, everything went my way. I got a good husband, a beautiful son. And, you know, I mean, it's hard to say.

My husband was a Zionist and he was hoping to go in Poland and he was hoping to go to Israel. And one time we took a vacation and we went and he was so excited and happy. And we were planning of going to Israel after he retired. So he was 72 -- 62 years old when he passed away, so he didn't make it.

And I had a brother and I lived in Chicago. My son was in Berkeley, at the university. And I had a niece in Chicago and my brother and nieces and nephews were living in Israel. And they wanted me to come over. "What will you sit by yourself in

Chicago?" And everybody said to my son, "Now you'll have to take care of your mother." And I said, "Nobody, but nobody, will take care of your mother."

And, you know, after the funeral and after a while, after a week, he went. I said, "You go back, you have a place to live and I have to make my way. And that's all there is to it." And I never wanted to go because I did not want to be, you know, that's his responsibility over me. But therefore I went to Israel and I was there for nine years. And after then, my son, every time he had a chance, he came once a year to see me and once a year I came here to visit. And then he said, "Mom, I want to go to other places too. Wouldn't you want to come back?" So I said, "Yeah, now I go back." So just two and a half years ago, I came back.

INTERVIEWER 2: DID YOU LIKE LIVING IN ISRAEL?

A. Yeah, very much so. Besides my family, I had beautiful, beautiful friends. It's a beautiful country.

You know who gave me the most love for Israel? Mrs. Roosevelt. She used to go twice a year and I used to read it in Chicago Sun Times. And she used to write columns about Israel, what she saw and how the country is developing. It was so beautiful.

And it is beautiful there. It is. If they wouldn't have the wars with everything, so it would be very, very nice. Very good place to live in.

Q. YOU KNOW, WHEN YOU WERE TALKING EARLIER ABOUT THE, I THINK IT WAS EVEN BEFORE YOU EVEN TALKED ABOUT THE GHETTO, YOUR BROTHER TOOK YOUR PARENTS AND SISTERS TO WARSAW --

A. Yes.

Q. YOU SAID HE CAME BACK VERY BITTER. WAS HE BITTER WHEN HE WENT TO WARSAW OR DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?

A. So he went and he was glad that he set foot with the parents and the sister and the children in a safe place. But it hurted him, it hurted him when he came back and stay here, and what will happen? After that, he started thinking and that hurted him very much and he was very bitter. Couldn't even talk.

Q. WAS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ON THE RECORD?

A. I don't know.

Q. ANY LESSONS THAT YOU PARTICULARLY THINK ARE VERY --

A. Oh, I learned. I studied the Hebrew language in Israel. I did not know. And when I came to the United States, I said I have to go to school.

Q. YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT HOW YOUR HUSBAND AND YOUR SON KIND OF HELPED YOU GET TO WANT TO LIVE

AGAIN, TO RECOVER. WHAT WAS --

A. They were so good. They were so good to me. My husband did not know how to -- how good to be to me that I should be able to be -- to make me happy.

Q. WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THAT RECOVERY PROCESS, WHAT HELPED THE MOST?

A. Oh, the family. The family. Nothing else. My husband and my son.

Q. YOU WERE ABLE TO TALK ABOUT IT ALL --

A. Well, I'll tell you something. I could not -- when I became pregnant, right after I was married, I wanted to do anything not to have a child. Honestly. I'll tell you something. I went to my doctor and I cried my heart out. "Do anything you can because only the stupid Americans can have children. They don't know what can happen to their children. If it happened in Germany, it will happen here too. It can happen all over. So how can I bring -- how can I bring a child to this world?" I had a doctor -- so he promised and promised and promised and it was too late. I have a doctor that delivered the baby and he was a very, very good person. He couldn't treat better his own sister and the way he treated me. And then he said -- and then after I had the baby, he -- when you started with him you had to promise that you will breastfeed them. But when he knew who he deals with,

me, he said, "You will not breastfeed your son."

INTERVIEWER 2: WHY?

A. In lying in the hospital was -- because I'll give him bad milk because I was crying all the time. And I named my son after my father, and everytime I called his name, I start crying. And that I'll never forget. I don't know, but he was very young, he cried and I went over and called out his name and I picked him up. And when I picked him up, I started crying loud. And this child opened the eyes and look at me. And I didn't see his eyes but I saw my father's eyes. And inside of me something says, "What do you want from this child? Why do you cry?" And I right away answered to my child, I said "Honey, I'll never cry in front of you. I'm sorry." And I kissed him and I hugged him. "If I want to cry, I'll cry in the washroom, I'll cry in another room, but not in front of you."

See, you know, life is no matter how you live and no matter what you do, in the moment that you think that you feel so happy, something inside says, "What are you happy about?" This life, it's a hard life.

Q. SO IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THAT INSIDE YOU THAT JUST --

A. That's always inside.

Q. AND YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE To --

A. (Shakes head)

Q. YOU ARE TALKING. YOU HAVE TALKED A LOT ABOUT IT. DOES THAT HELP?

A. No, it doesn't matter. So, I go home -- when I talk about it, one thing I don't like that people feel sorry for me. So when I'll talk to people and people will ask -- you know how people talk, when people will ask and I'll talk about it, I'll come home, I won't cry. But I'll come home and sit down and think about it and live with it. Until my dying day, I'll never be real, real happy. You express yourself, I'm happy. I am, I love my son. I don't know what I would do without him. But -- people were very good to me -- but being alone, left. I don't have sisters. I don't have brothers. My son doesn't have a grandparents.

There was an uncle, my father's brother living in Kansas City. Over there, I found a picture of my family. One picture when I was three months old and the whole family, and another picture when I was 11 years old, before my brother left for the United States. I took those pictures and I framed them and I keep them in my house. And my son says, "This belongs to me." And I said, "Honey, one day it will be yours, but now it's mine."

How many times -- you know, there's the

one thing I will tell you. On Yom Kippur, we fast the whole day and we pray. And on Yom Kippur we light candles for the dead. So I have now 19 in my family. Before then, before I lost my husband, and so I am -- and I lost my brother, two brothers. But there were 17 people that I lost in the war. So I used to light. And I used to go home from the Synagogue at noontime and I sat down with the candles, and I still do it, I name every candle and I talk to them.

Q. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE AT ALL THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY?

A. I don't know. I really don't know.

Q. THANK YOU. THAT WAS a REALLY GREAT INTERVIEW. THANK YOU FOR COMING.

A. Thank you. Thank you for listening to me.

(End of Tape 1)