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INTERVIEW WITH SABINA PELTA

Transcribed By: Susan Ronayne
P.O. Box 35
Marlow, N.H. 03456

*Interviewed by Ruth Linden
Jul, 1984
San Francisco*

1 INTERVIEW WITH SABINA PELTA

2 Q First I just want to ask you before we get started
3 your name, just to state your name, your address,
4 where you were born and when?

5 A My name is Sabina Pelta. Before the war, I was born
6 Sefra Jurkiewitcz, and I was born in Poland, Tomaszow
7 Mazowiecki, Po-lit-za-el Street, in Lawa Pi-ent, in
8 Lawa 5. That's like a little street.

9 Q And perhaps you could just tell us some of the first
10 signs that you saw or some of the normal antisemitic
11 things that were going on at that time that you had
12 to live through?

13 A After the war or during the war?

14 Q Well, before the war.

15 A Before the war. Oh, before the war. Before the war,
16 it started, we didn't feel it so bad. I mean, we
17 started feeling it when it real started. When it
18 started, well, we had some signs that it's coming up.
19 We saw the, in 1939, the antisemitism started very
20 badly. They started chasing in the park, during the
21 daytime, during the broad light. People, jews, had
22 no right to be in the park and they started chasing
23 and hitting and whatever. But it wasn't as bad as
24 naturally when, since when the Nazis came, and then we
25

2 really started feeling it.

3 And I had a younger brother two years younger
4 than me and he was -- . We were in business and, you
5 know, we had a lot of dealings in our city where one
6 for the Germans, one for the Jews and one for the Poles.
7 We were in hardware business, building materials. All
8 kinds of hardware, whatever there is necessary for a
9 building from top to bottom or from foundation to the
10 roof.

11 And my brother, who was younger than me, we
12 didn't have -- my mother was widowed in 1930 and he
13 was very, very brave boy, very intelligent, very bright.
14 He really wanted to come -- . He saw this coming with
15 Hitler, you know, 1933 it started. Everybody saw some-
16 thing is going to happen but we didn't realize it's
17 going to happen what it really did.

18 And we had an uncle in the United States and
19 he wanted a long time ago when he was a five year old
20 child, he wanted to take, and when he was visiting our
21 city, he wanted to take him with him because he had,
22 was childless, and my father said, "No, I want to bring
23 him up as a Jew," because he saw my uncle wasn't so
24 Jewish any more after leaving the home, his parents'
25 home. "And later when he will grow up, if you want

2 him at that time, it's up to him." And my brother re-
3 minded him of this in 1939 and my uncle didn't respond
4 to it. And we were naive enough not to think -- . We
5 could have thought to go on our own expense. We didn't
6 need his help. I mean, money, we had enough. We could
7 have helped ourselves, our way, especially the boys. We
8 had two brothers younger than me. So he was left to
9 become a victim of the war and he was taken with my
10 younger brother on Rosh Hashannah, if you know what that
11 means, Rosh Hashannah, which is the Jewish New Year, in
12 1939 right after they took over. They made an alarm
13 around and the Nazis -- we had a double door, we had
14 two entrances in our house and we didn't keep ever our
15 store open during Saturday or any holiday, and especially
16 on Rosh Hashannah and they were banging in our door
17 with guns. The Poles showed where we lived and we had
18 to open the door and they said, they forced my mother to
19 go out in the store and open the door from the store,
20 and we all had to go out and then they started pulling
21 everything from the shelves and throwing on the street.
22 The Germans and the Poles were on the street and, and
23 catching anything they could till they almost emptied
24 the store .

25 And my mother, you know, Poland when a person

2 was Orthodox, she was wearing a wig and she was pulling
3 her wig, her hair, We screamed, we cried; nothing
4 helped. They did whatever they wanted till they got
5 tired and then they left.

6 And then they came. They saw I was a young
7 girl. They already started bothering me but then I was
8 lucky enough to get away for a while. Then all of a
9 sudden we got regards from my brother that he is in
10 Cracow which was a very capital city in Poland. The
11 Pope, the present Pope, comes from Cracow. And I had
12 a very big opportunity to go there because there were
13 no trains functioning, no communications, no trans-
14 portation but there came a van, a moving van, to our
15 city and one of my sisters came and asked me if we have
16 gas for that van, then I could go to Cracow to see or
17 it's true that my brother is alive. And we gave gas
18 and I was taken on that van with two other ladies. One
19 is a neighbor and one was a cousin of our neighbors.
20 Their husbands were there too.

21 And we went and we were stopped in the middle
22 of Czestochowa. That's very close from Cracow when
23 we passed Czestochowa . It's a very holy, catholic
24 city. And they ran out of gas. It was a very gigantic
25 truck and we were all stranded. It was a full truck of

2 people then. And we were trying to wave. It was the
3 middle of the night. Nobody wanted to stop. It was
4 all military cars.

5 All of a sudden, we were fortunate. One stopped
6 with a jeep. And he said, "As many as fit in the jeep,
7 please get in." And I was afraid at first to go in. I had to
8 tell him that I'm Jewish, Juden, and (inaudible) "your
9 a person, human being." So I said yes, but I have
10 still some friends, those ladies. They're also Jewish.
11 He said, "That doesn't matter. Get in." He happened
12 to be one of the nice ones. And he drove us, and when
13 we already approached Cracow we already saw the first
14 streetcar from far away. He had an accident and the
15 whole jeep went in a ditch and one fell on the top of
16 the other but it was such a miracle that nobody was
17 scratched even and the driver -- . Yes, I forgot to
18 tell one thing. They were warning him, "What are you
19 doing now with civilian people? You're on a mission."
20 He was a high-ranking officer. He said, "I am ful-
21 filling a humanitarian test." He was one of the very
22 few probably in the whole war, but he did it for us.
23 We got out from the jeep and we went with the streetcar
24 to the destination, because one of the ladies had her
25 uncle from Tomaszow in Cracow and we stayed there, and

2 we started going there to that place. It was a mili-
3 tary, like Presidium in San Francisco place, and we
4 came with suitcases packed with sandwiches, rolls,
5 with meat, with cheese, whatever we had to throw through
6 the fence. And when the prisoners -- they were called
7 prisoners -- were coming out, they all ran and grabbed
8 because they were very hungry.

9 And my brother came. I almost didn't recognize
10 him. And I gave him too and I had to come -- . And
11 when they were running for the sandwiches, the Germans
12 were shooting at them. Sometimes they fell and some-
13 times they were lucky, they escaped. And in that yard,
14 you know, that was a military outpost, were built-up
15 little hills and they made the Jews put on a tallis...
16 You know what a tallis means? That praying shawl
17 that the jews are using in the synagogue when, or at
18 home when they're praying. They made them put on those
19 praying shawls and then surround and they made fun of
20 them, then they were shooting and sometimes they made
21 them run around naked and they did whatever it pleased
22 them.

23 And we did this for ten days, but between-time,
24 somebody came and they said I can get out my brother if
25 If I will pay an amount of money but they had to send

1
2 some inspection to our cities, somebody delegated to
3 see how wealthy we are, how much money they can ask
4 from us. This was in conjunction with the Jewish, you
5 know, community there they had, you know. The Germans
6 and the Jews were supposed -- . The money that they
7 had -- Hmm?

8 Q When were you in Cracow?

9 A I was in Cracow in 1939.

10 Q When?

11 A It could have been the middle of November.

12 Q What happened to your younger brother?

13 A Oh, my younger brother I was fortunate to grab away.
14 And the older brother we couldn't get out for no money.
15 We had the help of city friends, Germans, Poles. We
16 were in big business. We were very friendly with them,
17 all the time. We had one school principal. He was a
18 German. He was the nicest man for us before the war
19 but when it came to release my brother, everybody
20 promised but nobody did anything for us till they sent
21 him away to Berlin and that's when I caught him in Cracow.
22 He was sent back already from Berlin. He was telling
23 me that they were hitting him, but he was a little
24 fortunate they didn't make him work too hard. He was
25 already sick then. Very delicate boy.

And anyway, when they proposed me about the

2 deposit, I gave them a deposit and I was waiting till
3 somebody goes to my city, Tomaszow Mazowiecki, to find
4 out how much money they will ask from.

5 In the meantime, somebody came and they said,
6 "Oh, there is a high-ranking officer. If you make
7 up something that your mother needs him at home, he
8 might release him for you. And my mother was of course
9 a widow, and I said that he's the breadgiver and I
10 went to see that officer and in ten minutes I got my
11 brother, after ten days.

12 And everybody was thinking that not he came
13 back from the concentration camp, but I. I was black
14 on my face. I just -- . What I went through in those
15 ten days I'm just telling now very briefly. It's too
16 much to tell if I want to tell all the details. It really
17 is too much to tell. It was so heartbreaking just to
18 look at those people that a person with a little sensi-
19 tivity right away felt. Whoever saw this, it was un-
20 bearable to see those things what they brought to, you
21 know, on those people, what they did with them with
22 shooting, with running, with all the worst things in
23 the world that you can think of.

24 Q (Inaudible.)

25 A Of course. If somebody was lucky they escape, but if

2 not they fell right on the spot. Of course they were
3 shot.

4 Q How old were you at this time?

5 A I was 19 myself, and he was two years younger, my
6 brother. And then -- . He could have gone from Cracow
7 when I brought him out. He had -- . Excuse me.

8 I want to say something about my neighbors, a
9 lady, her husband. When she saw him he, they cut him
10 off, a part of his beard with the face. That was the whole
11 idea. They didn't care for the beard, they cared for
12 the face more so they cut up maybe one-third of his face
13 with the beard. And you could see, this man I knew but
14 the others, you know, that I didn't know and Sha-lah,
15 I have a sister-in-law, she has the youngest brother of
16 the two and how they were begging, how they were crying,
17 how they -- . What could I do? I was of course on the
18 other side of the fence. All I could do was just throw
19 them some sandwiches. That's all I could do.

20 And I was lucky, very fortunate, that helped
21 me with my brother that I brought him out. And he could
22 have gone on the other side of the -- . The other side
23 meant to go on the Russian side from the German. It
24 was close from the, the Polish to try and go to the
25 Russians. But I wanted to prove to my mother and my

2 whole family that I really saved my brother. I want
3 to make them all happy because everybody was so worried.

4 So we were traveling from -- . It was such
5 a nightmare to go home. The way how we went home,
6 is one thousand and one nights. It was -- . That
7 pilgrimage to go home from Cracow to Tomaszow, it took
8 so much health away, so much strength. But we came home.
9 I don't want to go into the details with the trip be-
10 cause I have much more important things to tell. We
11 came home and there were already Germans looking for my
12 brother. The Poles told, you know. We had also German
13 customers. Whoever owed us some money, they wanted to
14 take advantage and they will take away my brother, then
15 they won't owe us --. They wouldn't have to pay us any-
16 way, because that was the end when the war started. You
17 couldn't expect that you would just be happy, that they
18 should leave you alone.

19 But they didn't leave us alone and I saw that
20 we had no other choice, and, which was my plan anyway
21 originally. I said no Jewish men can remain on this
22 side, which meant on the German side where they occupied
23 Poland. I said as long as they're here, what my eyes
24 saw in Cracow, it's disaster. It's the most dangerous
25 thing. And whoever I knew, I talked to and everybody

1 ran away on the Russian side, including my both bro-
2 thers. I had on the Russian side, on the White
3 Russian side, in a city called Baranovichi , I had a
4 cousin, blood cousin, who lived there, was married to
5 a local girl and had a family. And my oldest brother-
6 in-law who got married to my oldest sister who never
7 changed her last name, used to work there before the
8 war but when he married my sister he came to our city
9 and at that time, he ran away during the bombardment
10 with a bicycle with a younger brother-in-law to
11 Baranovichi . My brothers couldn't make it.
12 They had only one bicycle, both shared, and they came
13 back home but I sent them then away. When they came back
14 and my brother-in-laws brought their wives, my sisters,
15 then I sent my brothers. And I went myself too. They
16 went on a previous trip. I can't recall even that.

17
18 When I went away on the Russian side, this
19 was one night before midnight, before New Years, 1940.
20 That was December '31. 1939. That was towards 1940,
21 New Years Eve, December '39. The snows were high,
22 and we went a large group. I wanted to talk in one
23 sister of mine to go with us and she just got married
24 a few months earlier, and she came back and she
25 says, Yentle, her husband was, name was Jacob like

2 my son, his father said in 12 shirts, in a dozen shirts,
3 he had always time to run away, and he remained. He
4 didn't go.

5 So I went, and another sister I want to
6 talk in her husband who was born on the Russian terri-
7 tory in Soviet Russia. He had the whole family over
8 there. He ran away with the Yeshiva which is called
9 L Yeshiva. It's one of the biggest in New
10 York at the present time. He was 11 years old. He ran
11 away with that Yeshiva. Wait a second. My brother-in-
12 law from Russia, his name was Mi-shan-el Gervitz,
13 and he was from the city, a town called Stari Konstantynow
14 He came with the Yeshiva to our city and when he was
15 29 he married my sister. He had a title of a rabbi.
16 He was one of the most learned men. He gave a lot
17 of pride to my mother with all his speeches that
18 he was holding. The people were ending the whole
19 city. I just didn't think it -- . They had a little
20 baby. She was one and a half year old when the war
21 broke out. She had such beautiful curly hair, like a
22 little sheep. Very curly hair. Her name was -- . In
23 english you would call her Helen, Hirla. She
24 was named after my grandmother. And my brother-in-
25 law came back from Warsaw. I was engaged to my husband

2 right after my sister got married, and he went to her.
3 We were only engaged and my husband didn't want to run
4 away then. He was my fiance. I said, "I'm not going
5 to marry you if you won't go to Baranovichi," because
6 I saw what went on here and there is no room for any
7 Jewish man to remain on this side of the territory. And
8 he listened to me. He took my brother-in-law. They
9 went together.

10 My brother-in-law came to Warsaw and they
11 made him work in Warsaw on the railroad. Mi-shan-el
12 Gervitz , the Russian. And, no, looking at
13 this whole thing he said, "No. I ran away once from
14 Russia and I don't want to go back." And he came back
15 to our city and he was scared also because my sister
16 was expecting her second baby and he said it's a war,
17 and he doesn't know if we can meet again if he goes
18 away. I promised that I will bring my sister to him.
19 Nothing helped. He said, "I don't want to go back to
20 Russia." And they remained. They're all wiped out
21 now.

22 Anyway, coming back to the border when I
23 ran away with my two sisters, and my brother-in-law and
24 I also brought a young man, a cousin of my sister
25 who didn't let her husband go away and he was carrying

2 some things for my brother.

3 Q How did you travel?

4 A By train. We went with the train to Warsaw and from
5 Warsaw there was a border town which was called Mal-kien
6 and there was a river, the Ni-et. I can't -- .

7 The Ni-et ?

8 Q Ni-et.

9 A Ni-et , and we through with a little boat. It was very
10 ice cold. You know, it was the heaviest winter at
11 that time. But those things I don't want -- . It was
12 everything okay till we came on the other side and when
13 they saw all of us, they started shooting, first the Germans
14 and then the Germans let us go into the Russians and the
15 Russians put in all of us in some kind of temporary jail.
16 And mothers with small children they let out earlier on
17 the Russian side. And so I was left with one younger
18 brother-in-law who was -- his name was Sen-na Ber-nein-stein.
19 And their son was six years old. My sister went and
20 my other sister's girl. The oldest sister was seven
21 year old girl. And I was left with my brother-in-law
22 and they also had a man who carried some little things,
23 you know, for his necessities. Couldn't take everything
24 then in a knapsack. And they formed -- . They let us
25 stay a whole day and then they formed, like an army, in

2 four. They put 960 people, we were all in four. And
3 I was with my brother-in-law and the two men.

4 And we started -- . They started -- .
5 Like, they made us run all of a sudden, and they were
6 shooting in the air. All of a sudden, I don't know
7 where everybody disappeared, I was left alone in the
8 fields, and the railroad, with high snow. Just sky and
9 railroad and snow. And I couldn't move a step from
10 all this astonishment, what I lived through this ex-
11 perience crossing the border with the Germans, with the
12 Russians, with the shooting, with the running -- with
13 all this -- with the jail. And I -- . My -- . I felt
14 like I'm dead. I stopped functioning.

15 All of a sudden, two men, Polish men, came
16 up and I thought, "Now is the end of me." I still
17 believe -- . You know, Jewish people believe in 18,
18 Chai. Chai in Hebrew means 18, for life. And I was born
19 on the 18 of March and I believe that God helped, was
20 with me on that moment because those two men, the Poles,
21 were people were talking about the smugglers. They were
22 raping, they were killing and here all of a sudden, they
23 see me with two knapsacks, and they came over and they asked
24 me what I'm doing here. I said, "I can't move." I
25 was left from 960 people alone in this field. I cannot

2 move. I don't know where my brother-in-law is. I don't
3 know where the two men are." And they formed a little
4 chair from the hands, the two men, and they carried me
5 over to a house, the nearest house, a cottage there.
6 And it was very dark already then and we went in and we
7 were fed with hot soup. And then they walked me to a,
8 carried me to a train and they took me to Baranovichi
9 which we had to first pass Bialystok and then
10 Baranovichi came. Bialystok was also White Russian city
11 and before the war was Polish but at that time, became
12 Russian. And they carried me to the train and they took
13 me formally to my sister's house in Baranovichi. They
14 didn't even ask me for a train ticket. Nothing. They
15 paid everything for me. That's why I say God sent two
16 angels to me and I arrived safely, but it was -- .
17 Nobody believed what I had, that this happened. But thank
18 God, I then saw everybody and everybody came in and we
19 started a new life there.

20 I was living with my brothers like in a
21 little cage, very tiny little room from the local people.
22 They rented to us a little room, three people. You
23 know, there were two boys, my brothers, and I was the
24 sister. And then my oldest sister started to talk me
25 into get married. She says, "It's wartime and you don't

2 know." I said, "I don't want to get married without my
3 mother, if she's alive. I want her blessing." And she
4 talked me in and I finally agreed. We was smuggling to
5 survive. And this brother was sick, the older brother,
6 and I just didn't know what to do because I wanted to
7 help him.

8 Well, anyway, we made a date to get married.
9 All of a sudden -- that was Friday and Saturday night I
10 was supposed to get married. And I'm standing in a
11 little room in this house where we were boarding and
12 there was an oven and in the front of the oven -- that
13 was the heating system -- there was a whole pile of
14 lumber for to burn, you know, for the heat to heat the
15 house. And this was all happening near the railroad and
16 all of a sudden I saw a mob with children, small children.
17 It was fighting, pulling, the force was so great.
18 And here are often loading trains and they're loading
19 the children on those trains. They weren't Jewish
20 children. They were Catholic, most of the Polish were
21 Catholics. There were a lot of people, they called
22 them -- they had a special name because they ran away
23 from the Czar. And when I saw this, I lost my con-
24 scious and I fell down on the wood and I beat up my whole
25 nose. We had to postpone the wedding for a few weeks

2 later. I never fainted in my life before but this was
3 the beginning, the first experience was then and, when
4 I was left alone, and this was the second time.

5 But anyway, we came through that wedding,
6 that poor wedding and --

7 Q Was this your same fiance that you had before?

8 A Pardon?

9 Q Was it a different -- . Was this the same --

10 A The same fiance. Actually his sister was going to go
11 with me, with us too, and when she heard that the brother
12 was leaving, she said, "No, somebody has to be on duty
13 at the building." There was still two sisters left at
14 home and then one brother. None married, you know. They
15 didn't have -- . The parents passed away in (inaudible),
16 both of them. And -- .

17 I wanted to say something. I can't concentrate
18 right now.

19 Q Daddy's two sisters and a brother remained at home.

20 A They all remained at home, yes, but I wanted to say -- I
21 started something else.

22 Q (Inaudible)

23 A I got married, yes. Yes. Then all of a sudden we
24 heard, they wanted us -- we were called refugees, you
25 know, in the Russian is (refugee) , and they had

2 announcements, big announcements in the streets that
3 whoever wants to go home, which meant to go to the
4 Germans on the German side of Poland, where I left my
5 mother. I really want coming back. I really went away
6 for three days from my mother. I left her with the
7 maid at home. And she said she wouldn't let me go away
8 and I said, "I'm leaving my engagement ring with you.
9 I'm going to be back home in three days." And I left
10 my engagement ring with her. And I could never come
11 back. That was it. They closed the borders.

12 There was a city called Barysh-in-tetcz which
13 was also White Russian and there was an exchange of
14 the Polish German - Russian German citizens. Whoever
15 was in the Russian side, even if we were --

16 (End of Side 1, Tape 1)

17 -- side, Russian citizens, German citizens. So when they
18 put out those signs to come and register that we want
19 to become Russian citizens, they wanted us to register
20 and we were afraid to go and register. We did not want
21 to take Russian citizenship. But they forced us, and
22 when we did not go register, they had us on the black-
23 list.

24 In the meantime, it came up this exchange
25 business in that Barysh-in-tetcz. Whoever had \$100.00 to

2 pay them could go on the other side. But you also needed
3 a document, you know, like an ID. card. And there were
4 some very rich people, manufacturers from our city, a
5 father and a daughter that I thought the other night that
6 this was the man. He was a policeman under the Germans.
7 And this was his wife and his father-in-law and I sent
8 my regards to my mother and I asked for my ID. I left
9 it at home.

10 And, in the meantime, we were waiting and
11 waiting and just like we were here now on the gathering,
12 you could see so many, many, many, many thousands of
13 of people that came there. I wasn't considered -- . I
14 was still considered a minor if I didn't have the ID.
15 I could have gone with the ID. without the \$100.00 also,
16 but that ID. never arrived. In the meantime, we exchanged
17 rubles to Polishzlotys and we lost everything because
18 we had to go back to Baranovich, we couldn't get on
19 the train, on that exchange train and in a few days time
20 it happened on June 30th, 1940, Friday night, after
21 midnight, right after midnight, we were woken up,
22 knocked on the door like the Germans with the guns and
23 they came in, the Russians, they came in with an excuse
24 they're looking for guns in our mattresses. They wanted
25 us to get out from the beds so they had an excuse.

2 They're searching for guns, which they knew they can
3 never find the guns there. But they -- . And then
4 they gave us an order, "Dress up, and take what you can
5 in a hurry, and march out on the train that I saw the
6 little children going away. An order is an order. Here
7 they're staying with guns all around. We're surrounded
8 by them. They didn't come single. They were right
9 away arms. They went from house to house and the same
10 night they took a whole million of Polish Jews to
11 Siberia.

12 When I was already in the wagon when we're,
13 before the train started my oldest sister brought me,
14 came back from -- . She remained longer in Brest
15 because they thought they will stay there, they don't
16 want to come back to Baranovichi, not to get more known
17 to the Russians. But then all of a sudden they came
18 and took my brothers away, just like they came for us,
19 and she said she ran all over and she wanted to pay any
20 amount of money. They wouldn't give her back the
21 brothers because my husband said, "You're so much older,
22 you could have been considered a mother to them." But
23 she really was saying, she was a very devoted sister,
24 and she couldn't get them and she came back with her
25 husband, the little child, to Baranovichi. The same

2 day that she came and told us what happened, that they
3 took my brothers, and the same night they took us be-
4 cause they said over there they had to run away, they
5 were going to now surround all the families. At first
6 the took the singles and then they were going to take
7 the families. She thought she can escape by running
8 back to Baranovichi. She is not registered, so they
9 won't know about it.

10 We had to register but we didn't want to
11 sign that we wanted citizenship. And when we lost all
12 our money, we didn't have a dollar or a ruble to go to
13 Siberia. You need something. So she brought us 200 ruble
14 of my brothers' money and we were -- . I said, "Come
15 with us." I said to her husband, "Come with us." He
16 was the king of Golden Baranovichi. He was adviser for
17 all the refugees. Whoever needed some advice, they all
18 came to him. But when it came to his person, to make
19 up his mind to go voluntarily to enter over there on
20 the train, that was a different story. He was standing
21 and that picture will remain for the rest of my life,
22 my oldest brother-in-law, Josef Jurkievitch. He
23 had the same name as my older brother that was in
24 Cracow. They were named after the same grandfather.
25 As I told you, he was a cousin of mine. My older sister

2 married a real cousin. And he was crying under the
3 tree, standing like a little child. He couldn't decide
4 to go on the train just like that.

5 And my sister said Mrs. Levin, her neigh-
6 bor, who was a local resident, advised her not to
7 volunteer to enter over there. As long as they didn't
8 come for them, she shouldn't go by herself. And I had
9 a sister who was with me in the train and she already--.
10 That man, my brother-in-law who I lost with the 960
11 people, he was driven back to Poland on the German side.
12 So she was with the boy alone and she said, "Look at
13 her. She doesn't know on which wagon we're being taken.
14 She even invites her older sister." I said, "Yes. After
15 what I saw in Cracow, I can say come, let's be together."
16 They didn't listen to me. They remained. We were taken
17 to Siberia where I was, gave birth to my first baby and
18 I was hiding under the blankets, because they were
19 forcing me to go on/job, and I knew that the older
20 people were beated up with the mosquitos. They were
21 wearing masks and nets on the faces and they still got
22 inside and the people went through a lot of just, a
23 lot of pain what they went through.

24 And my husband advised me not to go because
25 my older sister right away started sending me packages

2 with food and my mother and my left-over sisters in
3 Poland, they were still helping my sister in Baranovichi.
4 In exchange, she sent us us and I was even --

5 Q What kind of place were you living in at that time?

6 A Siberia, Sverdlovsk Al-bletcz (?), it was called. It's
7 a major city but we were out between sky and water and
8 woods. Woods, jungles. Jungle woods. You know, many
9 times you couldn't even pass they were so tight, the
10 trees. And they made all the men working, and women,
11 cutting trees in the woods. My husband was a high-class
12 art tailor and he had to work in the woods, chop the
13 trees, and one day when I gave birth, my baby was old
14 two days, he didn't come home because a tree almost
15 covered him. He was almost killed. If he wouldn't just
16 bent away a little bit just like that, the head, he would
17 have been left in the woods. A lot of people got killed
18 in the woods from the trees.

19 And they took him away to a hospital. They
20 told me he was sent on better job there someplace so,
21 because they knew I was feeding, had to breast feed and
22 immediately anyway I lost my milk and I became the
23 privileged person because my husband got, came in an
24 accident, and whoever needed gas for the lamp, you
25 know, to burn for light -- we didn't have electricity

1 there. We lived -- . From my city, we were 37 people.
2 We lived all in one home, in one room, open room. Every-
3 body saw whatever somebody else did. There was lice
4 and everything, the worst things. And then when the
5 baby finally came, we already split up in four families.
6 You know, instead of 37 people from my city, I wound up
7 with some other people from different cities.
8

9 And then my husband was in the hospital, and
10 a few days later I found out and it was, I was fainting
11 and this and that. The thing is that he came back on
12 crutches and they gave him an easier job then to work on
13 bricks in a brick factory and he was all day in the water
14 with his feet and he got kidney troubles and the foot
15 wasn't put together right and he's still suffering on his
16 foot till now. They wanted to break it apart in San
17 Francisco when we arrived 1951, but he says he doesn't
18 want to go around on crutches for a whole year. They
19 told him he had to wear, carry the crutches with him,
20 walk on the crutches rather. I'm sorry.

21 Anyway, we went through a lot in that camp.
22 It was a regular concentration camp. They forced you
23 on the High Holidays to work, on Yom Kippur. My husband
24 said, if they kill him he is not going to work on Yom
25 Kippur. So they took away from his wages whatever he

2 out from -- . I'm too fast now.

3 We were for 14 months in that Sverdlovsk Al-bletcz,
4 in that camp. Many bad things happened. People were
5 beaten there, people were -- . They pulled off the
6 blankets and they forced me a few, many times. I
7 couldn't escape from work. We had to steal a little
8 potato from the fields there and for a potato you went
9 to jail if they caught you.

10 Me and a girlfriend of mine, we worked
11 together. She was my, actually my sister's sister-in-
12 law that didn't come, that couldn't get with me on the
13 other side. But he is dead anyway. The Nazis killed
14 him.

15 And we survived those 14 months in hard
16 ways and we had -- . Also, very important point. When
17 we moved in with the four families, there was one
18 couple that had two babies. One was two years old -- .
19 One was one and a half years old and, the little boy.
20 The little girl was a year older. And the father re-
21 fused to feed the children. Whatever he made, he used
22 it for himself to eat. So I could not see to put the food, the
23 soup that I prepared, I did not feed my husband first.
24 I helped, I first put two bowls of soup for the little
25 babies and then I gave my husband. And their mother

2 said, was asking me many times how long I intend to feed
3 her babies. I said, "That's none of your business. I
4 am doing what I want to do and I will feed your children
5 as long as I can."

6 And then there were other facts, some
7 other families with little older children who were from
8 my city and I heard that they were starving. I gave
9 them flour and I gave them whatever I could. I even
10 gave them a pillow which I still have till now. In
11 Poland we used to sleep on very large pillows. I didn't
12 want to take it but we were fighting and they insisted
13 that I have to keep something because I'm saving their
14 lives.

15 And we did many things, whatever we could
16 to save people. I went to the woods to pick some
17 ma-lin-as -- what is it? -- berries that --

18 Q Blueberries?

19 A Not those berries.

20 Q Strawberries?

21 A No, no, no. There were those -- not -- they were like
22 boysenberries. It's another -- Raspberries. From
23 this we made a pure juice, you know, and when a person
24 had temperature they said this was like a medicine.
25 And how I was beated up by those mosquitos going to

2 pick those--

3 Q Bitten.

4 A Bitten.

5 Q Yes.

6 A What did I say?

7 Q Beaten.

8 A No. I don't know. I'm too excited. I know how to
9 express myself better. I was bitten up. And beat up --

10 Q Bit up.

11 A Bit up with the mosquitos. And I made this juice. I
12 was so happy, the luckiest in the world. We made one
13 bottle and a half. I was lucky that I had the sugar
14 that my sister sent. And all of a sudden somebody comes
15 in, somebody has high temperature. We have to save his
16 life. And I probably didn't taste this juice at all
17 and I gave away little by little my whole juice, what
18 I made.

19 Sugar was -- . A million dollars we couldn't
20 get a pound of sugar.

21 Q (Inaudible.)

22 A Hmm?

23 Q What year was this?

24 A That was all between 1940 and 1941. We were let out
25 from this camp 14 months later on account that Hitler's

2 Nazis started to occupy again Baranovichi in Russia so
3 they formed a Polish army on the Russian territory and
4 they signed up people. On those grounds we were free
5 because they needed the people for the army.

6 And my husband was still on the crutches
7 and me with the baby and here we had to pay -- . Every-
8 body ran away from us. We were left behind and we rented
9 a wagon with horse and it was so bad. It was a wild
10 road and my husband was on the crutches so I couldn't
11 sit on the wagon. For me was no room and we were too
12 heavy for this. So I let my husband on the wagon with
13 the baby and I was following, walking, like the Jews
14 that walked out from Egypt. So I followed. My husband
15 later felt sorry for me. He started to help me out, to
16 exchange that he will walk like this.

17 Anyway, we start -- . Little by little
18 there we started seeing some of the cottages there in
19 the villages and he was a tailor with two brilliant
20 hands and little by little he worked his way for food
21 and they fed us till we came to a larger city, and he
22 started to work in a place. They didn't let us go.
23 Those were good people, the Russian local people who were
24 sentenced to Siberia. They lived there for many years.
25 They couldn't go back. But they weren't officially

2 locked in like we were in the camp because this was
3 already little bit more like, you know, little small
4 towns, villages. And all of a sudden somebody comes
5 and says, "What are you doing here? Are you staying
6 here?" We're going to Middle Asia and from there we
7 can go to America." My husband was in the middle of
8 making a suit somebody and he left them. They were
9 crying, those people. We have to go to Middle Asia,
10 follow all the other people so we can go to America too,
11 because I knew I had an uncle here. My uncle, my
12 mother's only brother who survived in the United States,
13 arrived as an 18 year old boy in 1901.

14 Anyway, we came to -- . On the way to
15 Middle Asia -- . I wish we wouldn't have left then.
16 It would have been better if we would stay another year
17 or so. But maybe we would have never found our way out
18 from Russia if we would have remained, but we would have
19 had saved our baby because the babies were falling like
20 fleas from the change of the, drastic change of the
21 climate. It was such a tremendous change, an epidemic
22 broke out and -- from the evacuation from Siberia to on
23 the way to Middle Asia. Lots of babies. One out of
24 maybe 5,000 was saved alive. The rest were all dying.
25 And I -- . She was soaking (?) from me and she was

2 already 11 months old when we came to a city, a major
3 city, in Middle Asia called An-gie-zam.

4 My husband, with our whole possessions, was
5 laying on the railroad under his head and I had to go
6 to the hospital with the baby. I still have a picture
7 from a coat that I made to go on the Russian side, with
8 fur underneath and a fur collar, and the baby had got
9 pneumonia. They took my coat for disinfection and they
10 burnt my whole fur. It was covered with cloth, but it
11 was such a beautiful coat. I couldn't forgive myself
12 as long as I stayed in Russia. And my baby, they let
13 me stay with the baby --

14 Q (Inaudible)

15 A Measles. From the measles she got pneumonia.

16 Q So the epidemic was the measles.

17 A Terrible. Terrible. It was the drastic change of the
18 climate mainly, but also from people -- . They packed
19 us into those sha-lon, they called it, sha-lon, just
20 like the Germans did with the Jews sending them to the
21 gas chambers. And one took it over from the other. We
22 were one family sitting on the other, on the top of the other,
23 with the temperatures, with everything.

24 Anyway, I came to that hospital in An-gie-zam.
25 My husband was robbed from everything. He was so deep

2 asleep. He was so tired, and with grief taken over by
3 the baby's sickness and everything. He came to the
4 hospital and told me that everything, we lost everything.
5 He wanted to sell -- . His brother sent him some suits,
6 his own suits, and weren't -- . Don't sell it today,
7 is no customer for it. It's too expensive. Anyway, he
8 slept the other night and they took away everything. So
9 I even have some dollars sewn into the clothes, but
10 everything was taken. We were left with nothing. And
11 the baby died in the hospital two days later. We
12 buried her and we lost our world. We -- .

13 They took us and sent us to a kol-choltz.
14 That was a commune where they work in the fields and
15 they made us carry the cotton, they grew cotton, and
16 there was so much disease there in the fields. Then I
17 started smuggling and then we went to the town. We
18 ran away. I was chased a few times in the fields. It
19 was very dangerous. And my husband -- . We were lost
20 because we lost the baby. We had no mood to do anything.
21 You know, just coming out from Siberia and the whole
22 past that was connected with it, all these tragedies.
23 And my husband started to work little by little and
24 they fed him because the local people -- . He mainly
25 worked for the top people of Stalin. And when I came

2 in, they tried to give me too servant. One day I came
3 in, there was a Ukranian, Russian Ukranian woman whose
4 husband was also from the high-ranking people. She
5 asked me my religion. When I said Jewish, then they
6 start beating me. I was cut out immediately. And
7 my husband started getting half portions. And he was
8 so mad why I had to say who I am, what I am.

9 And -- . I don't want to tell this whole
10 story here. It's too much because otherwise I would
11 have to sit too much --

12 Q Yes.

13 A -- on this. I want to say mainly then later what
14 happened. We were smuggling back and forth and I was
15 taken off the --

16 Q And what were you smuggling?

17 A Smuggling to survive. Smuggling salt --

18 Q Salt.

19 A -- smuggling what you eat in the morning. Eggs with --
20 what is it that you eat in the morning?

21 Q (Inaudible)

22 A No, what is served here with eggs, what do you eat
23 them --

24 Q Oh, bread you mean?

25 A What do you eat them early in the morning?

2 Q Bacon?

3 A Bacon.

4 Q Bacon.

5 A We were smuggling bacon. We were smuggling salt. We
6 were smuggling matches, which you couldn't get for
7 no money. From one city to the other, it was like
8 from one world to the next. You know, those things
9 for living. Nothing -- . We weren't smuggling
10 diamonds and we weren't smuggling dollars. Just
11 necessities, just a person needs, you know. Sometimes
12 even flour. Whatever we could get hold of, you know,
13 that we knew the other city doesn't have, we transported
14 there.

15 But when we were on the train, we had no
16 document. They took me off a few times from the train
17 and every time, God helped me. They took away -- .
18 I lost a lot of money every time but my life was saved.
19 I don't know, somehow I got out. I managed to get out.
20 I'm telling you, I was in many dangers and every time
21 something came up that, an angel was right next to me
22 and my life was saved.

23 Why do I say so? Because I got acquainted
24 with a man on those trips who was from Warsaw . He
25 was a family man. His wife with the two children were

2 left in Warsaw, and he was also trying to make a living.
3 And once he came over to us and said that -- he was
4 living there with some family, single people, were
5 sisters and brothers. He said that they're looking for
6 him. His name was Grossman. And I said, "Mr. Grossman,
7 please stay with us. We will take care of you. Don't
8 go back because if they catch you, you're through."
9 And he was staying with us and I fed him for maybe ten
10 days or two weeks. And he couldn't sit still, he had
11 to be active, and he went back and they caught him
12 and in one month he was dead. In the jail. I don't
13 know whether they beat him with the guns or whatever.
14 In one month he was dead. I think it was less than a
15 month.

16 Q In the Russian jail?

17 A Of course in -- . This was in An-gie-zam. Gel-i-bad-
18 An-gie-zam. Anyway, I stopped doing it. But we
19 went -- . I wanted to find my sister. I had this
20 sister was in a different place. And I found a young
21 boy who was from my city and I gave him a picture and
22 I signed the picture that I am alive, please come
23 here, let's be together; the sister that was on the
24 Russian side. And she came with her boy and with her
25 sister-in-law, she kept them together, and we were all

2 living together. And then when -- . I will jump through
3 very fast. We went through plenty. We went through so
4 much. We went through many days, people said that we're
5 going to have a pogrom. The invalids came back from the
6 fronts, the Russians Ukranians. They said, "We have to
7 slaughter the Jews." And Stalin was trying to slow it
8 down because he had a lot of Jewish people then in his
9 surrounding, in the government. And we were saved.

10 Many, many things were happening. You know,
11 smaller incidents, but the main pogroms were slashed out
12 like, you know. They put them in jail, whoever they
13 could get hold of, and over there, you know, in Russia,
14 how it is. A child tells, is mad at the parents, he
15 goes and tells the (inaudible) there and right away the
16 parent is in jail and he never sees the freedom. And
17 that goes vice versa, a parent can tell on the child and
18 that's the way it goes. If you're bitter of anybody, you
19 go and just say a word and that's all they need, and
20 they forget about your freedom forever, although the
21 whole Russia is one jail.

22 When the war ended, was coming almost to an end,
23 and I gave birth to my son January 1st, 1945. My son
24 was the second. The first baby was dead. My son was
25 born. The first one was a girl. And we heard that

2 people are going home, that the war is coming to an end.
3 We were very anxious to go home and we started paying.
4 You know, we wanted to go home with our own documents
5 so we wouldn't have to be shipped on those trainloads,
6 you know, like you ship lumber or whatever, or cement,
7 or what have you. So we gave a deposit for those docu-
8 ments . It was called com-man-der-ofka. It was
9 supposed -- . Like (inaudible) , com-man-der-ofka.
10 It was a document that you could go on a train. It was
11 still illegal if they caught you with it.

12 (End of Side 2, Tape 2)

13 -- and it will never be an end, but I call it for this
14 purpose. Where were I?

15 Q You had the second baby.

16 A Yeah. I started -- . We gave a deposit for the docu-
17 ment to be able to travel, go back home we called it,
18 go back home. Because we tried to avoid to go home with
19 the train with the general repatriation, that's what
20 they call, because we heard on the news, which were no
21 newspapers but we heard from soldiers that came back
22 and things like that, that they're bombing the trains
23 who come. You know, the Poles. The Poles, not the
24 Germans. They're bombing the trains of the returnees,
25 of the repatriates. And I said I already lost one baby,

2 and I'm not going to risk another , take another risk,
3 and we're going home by a passenger train no matter how big
4 the risk is.

5 And all of a sudden, my sister-in-law whose
6 husband was with the Polish army -- . He left, he went
7 to Iran and he went to Africa, South Africa or I --

8 Q Tanganyika.

9 A Tanganyika. And my husband wanted also, but some people
10 had to convert. They just formally converted from
11 the Jewish religion to Catholic to be able to get into
12 the Polish army to leave Russia. Because it was men
13 that they're going to fight together with the Russians
14 against Nazis. That's why they formed over there the
15 government, the exiled government. It was called the
16 An-dis Army. Let's see. And they were also connected
17 with England. They all went later to England. My
18 youngest brother was also there taken. I didn't know
19 at that time. He was separated right in the beginning
20 with my brother, from my brother, when they were ar-
21 rested in Barysh-in-tetcz.

22 It's too limited. You know, you have to really
23 concentrate to be orderly, to connect the two things in
24 the right time. Anyway, my sister-in-law wanted to get
25 together with her husband because he was with the

2 Polish army. And she was bragging too much, and while
3 she went on the train and she bought herself she thought
4 some nice things to meet with her husband. And there
5 were a few other Jewish families who also were on the
6 train and they were all taken off from the train and
7 put in jail. Somebody -- . You know, there is always
8 somebody that tells against, talks against. There is
9 just one word; that's all you need, and the whole train
10 was taken off. There were jewelers, original jewelers
11 from Poland, rich people, and they were told about. And
12 they were all taken off and my sister-in-law was one year
13 in jail and till it became an amnestia, you know, amnesty.

14 Q Amnesty.

15 A So that's how she got out. And in the meantime, I gave -- .
16 We cancelled this, our first plan. We didn't want to go
17 because we saw it's too risky. So we tried again the
18 next time and we succeeded. It was actually, when my
19 son was born they told me -- . The nurses came in, they
20 congratulated me. They said, "Oh, your son brought
21 luck in the war and the front, excellent, they're taking
22 city by city, Lodz is already in our hands."
23 Lodz is a major city in Poland. Wasn't very far
24 from my city. So we figured, well, we will try to go
25 home. We wanted to -- . I want to show my mother my

1 baby and everything, and we were so anxious to go.

2
3 In the meantime, we stopped on the way when we
4 finally decided to go -- . We took another family. We
5 went together. They had two children little older than
6 mine. Mine was only six months old. And we said we
7 have to stop in Baranovichi to find out what happened
8 with my older sister and her husband and her two babies.
9 And when we came to Baranovichi there were rubbles.
10 The whole city was rubbles. Very few cottages were
11 left, very few. My cousin was wiped out. There was
12 nobody left. And I found some, very few Jewish people
13 there and somebody came and told me that they know what
14 happened to my sister. My sister, my older sister, was
15 shot on the sidewalk. She was holding the little baby,
16 newborn. After we were taken to Siberia she gave birth
17 to a little baby. And her other child, a little girl,
18 her name was -- like Cecelia you call in German, in
19 Russian -- and they were all three shot and my brother-
20 in-law went with the partisans, never came back either.
21 A handsome man. Such handsome-looking man.

22 Anyway, we stopped in that Baranovichi and we
23 had no money. We gave away all our money for a little
24 document for, to be able to get on the train. And my
25 husband sat down, because with his hands, wherever we

1
2 went, he could find a little piece of bread because they
3 were all dying for him. All Stalin's people came from
4 Moscow to my husband. One sent the other. They brought
5 you know, the cloth, the most expensive cloth. You
6 know how far it was from Moscow to come to us? Like to
7 go from here to, more than to Alaska. Very far distance.
8 Anyway, they all did it because it didn't phase them.
9 They weren't taken off from trains like us.

10 And he once had typhus, beginning of typhus,
11 and he had to get up from bed and take the measurements.
12 They wouldn't leave him alone, 'cause he had already
13 made his reputation. Anyway, that's what he did on the
14 way home to Poland. We considered it a free Poland at
15 that time in 1945. And they gave him a few cheeses.
16 That was a town where they manufactured cheeses like
17 the Danish cheese; Danish cheese, Swiss cheese. It was
18 excellent cheese and with this, those cheeses, we paid
19 key money and lodge. We rented an apartment when we
20 came there. But until we rented that apartment, we
21 went through plenty. We slept on the floors all over.
22 We went home to my husband's hometown and everybody was
23 wiped out. Everybody. Everybody. And we slept over
24 there. He left the building and he was scared to sleep
25 there in his own building. Polocks lived there.

2 Everybody took over the Jew's. Wherever there was
3 something Jewish, they took over everything.

4 And then we went to my city and I found the same
5 greetings. No one alive. I couldn't get into our
6 apartment. I thought maybe I can find at least some
7 family pictures; something. You had no access. It was
8 covered with boards. They cleaned out buildings, I
9 mean from the people, and covered with boards and you
10 had no access to get in. And they wanted me to stay in
11 the same city. I said I'm not going to walk on the
12 bloody sidewalks where all my dear ones perished.

13 So we went to live in Lodz for one year, and
14 I went three times a week with shots for my heart. I
15 thought that I'm not going to survive. Three times a
16 week I had to go to the doctor. And then I was trying
17 through the Red Cross to find out about my brother, and
18 I found my younger brother in England and he was work-
19 ing in the coal mines. He wanted to help me with his
20 poorness and I wanted to help him with his poorness.

21 Anyway, I got hold of my uncle in the United
22 States and they sent affidavits, I found out, just be-
23 fore we left Russia. Right after we left Russia, our
24 affidavits arrived there. So we asked for another one.
25 They sent us another one.

2 Going back to Russia, talking now about my uncle I re-
3 minded myself something. While we were in Russia, I
4 tried to -- . My uncle, I knew that he was in San
5 Francisco and on one occasion he sent us \$200.00. The
6 telegrams that we sent to him, just for people to trans-
7 late it to English cost us more than \$500.00 in Russian
8 rubles. But we wanted to let him know that we're here
9 so we didn't spare anything, any effort, and we also
10 wanted to be able to find my brothers and I was sending
11 telegrams left and right to Iran, the Polish Red Cross,
12 and all over, till I found my younger brother in England.
13 For the 200 rubles -- dollars, excuse me -- we could
14 buy two pounds of butter or 20 kilogram potatoes. My
15 husband says he does not want to accept dollars. We
16 don't need it for 20 kilograms. He was making money on
17 this tailoring. But we were forced to pick up the
18 \$200.00, otherwise we would be put in jail for not
19 accepting the American dollars. They needed the dollars.
20 So we accepted it. We had no choice.

21 Anyway, I'm telling here a very brief story. I
22 came home. We didn't find anybody and then we were
23 afraid to sleep in our rooms, in our houses. I had to
24 take in a family which I went through a lot of suffering,
25 if I didn't suffer enough in Russia. It was like in the

2 beginning where we were the 37 people together and then
3 later the four families weren't so bad 'cause we came
4 down a little bit. In the beginning I didn't even want
5 to know how to sign my name in Russian. After a year,
6 I see we're still here, I have to -- . Wherever I
7 went, I had to sign my name so I started signing in
8 Russian till I learned the Russian, I picked up Russian
9 like I would be born there. I still speak very well
10 Russian. I forgot how to write.

11 I sent beautiful, many, many letters to Stalin,
12 to Ka-don-o-vitch, to send me my brothers to Siberia
13 there to unite us. One day I was called -- and I'm
14 going back -- I was called into an office with good news
15 that they found my brother. This was my older brother,
16 not the one that is alive. When I heard his name, I
17 became so sensitive I fainted again, but I got the bad
18 news, the sad news, that they wouldn't let him come here.
19 My brother perished in Kon-ya-sassar . It was a man
20 from my city that came to America and he told me that
21 he saw when my brother died in that camp where he was
22 taken from rest with us.

23 But then later when we came to that Lodz,
24 we stayed there one year. There were many pogroms. My
25 husband went back and forth to his town, you know,

2 because they left -- . They worked all their lives.
3 This was his father's, his parents' property, and he
4 knew that his brother has hidden a lot of -- . He had
5 found the janitor. The woman told him that the brother
6 had built into the walls a lot of jewelry and this and
7 that and he was afraid because there were living a man,
8 another tailor, a Pole, and he was scared that he will
9 be killed by taking this out, and maybe it might be gone
10 too. And he was calling for some people. He wanted
11 to split in half -- . Whatever he will find, he said,
12 "I will split in half." But everybody was afraid to take
13 a chance and he never did take it out. And he sold his
14 share for pennies because nobody wanted to pay anything
15 for a building. They knew we have to run away. We
16 cannot remain in Poland. Everybody was running on the
17 German side and my husband says, "No, we live through
18 now the Germans in Russia, we are not going to go on the
19 German side. We will go to Sweden, to Stockholm."
20 That's where my daughter was born.

21 We were suffering in Sweden a lot. An apartment
22 was just like the middle of the war. Bread. For a
23 little piece of bread people -- . There is not an
24 inch of Russia where a Polish Jew wouldn't be buried.
25 From hunger, from disease, from anything that you -- that

2 a person cannot imagine. There is not an inch of ter-
3 ritory there. People died like fleas. Like before the
4 babies, so later it happened to the grownups. Grownups
5 and children. Whole families sometimes were wiped out
6 because of the diseases. There was -- . Well, it was
7 war, that's true. There was nothing to eat, there was
8 nothing -- . If the Americans wouldn't have come, sent
9 the blankets and all those little help that they started
10 sending to Russia, Russia would be wiped off the earth.
11 And I mean it. If the Americans wouldn't come to help
12 fight against the Nazis, Russia would be wiped out.
13 There was absolutely hardly anything left in Russia.
14 I'm not talking only about food. I mean everything,
15 everything, everything. I had Polish zyloty that I told
16 you that we were left when we exchanged, I wanted to
17 go from Poland -- from the Russian side on the Polish
18 side. I had to burn -- . My husband had to make a
19 fire in the middle of the night. We were cooking, Middle
20 Asia, on the outside, not inside. He made so nobody
21 would see. He had to burn the Polish zyloty because
22 we were questioned many times that, they were searching
23 us when we were traveling, smuggling. When they found
24 the Polish zyloty they said, "Pols-ki-pani." That means
25 like capitalist, Polish capitalist. And we were scared,

2 you know, and we burned up like maybe millions of Polish
3 zylotys which we exchanged from the rubles which went to
4 nothing when we were sent to Siberia.

5 So this is a little bit of the story, and I
6 thank you very much.

7 Q Well, I want to thank you. I always don't know what to
8 say at the end of these interviews, but just to thank
9 you so much for sharing your story with us.

10 A We lost a great family. This I have to say because I'm
11 sorry, I'm ashamed, that I didn't mention. I only
12 mentioned about my mother and my sisters who were killed.
13 But my mother had three sisters, two in Poland, one in
14 Belgium. Everybody was wiped out with their families,
15 with young children. And my father had also a large
16 family, cousins and uncles and aunts. Everybody was
17 wiped out, by the thousands. We had large families.

18 I will never forget, my daughter was a little
19 girl in San Francisco when her cousin was married. My
20 sister is a few years older. Her son by the first
21 husband got married and my daughter said -- . She was
22 so jealous to see that the bride had so many aunts and
23 uncles and cousins. I remember that she spoke -- do
24 you remember? -- to a Mrs. Blum? Ben's aunt. Ben's
25 bride, you know, who became his wife. You were so

2 jealous that she had so many aunts and uncles and a
3 grandmother and grandfather. She never knew what a grand-
4 mother and grandfather was, and my son either. So I
5 remember that she said to that Mrs. Blum at the wedding,
6 "If my mother would have her sisters and her brothers,
7 and my daddy would have the sisters and brothers, we
8 would be a great family too."

9 Q Thank you very much.

10 A Our maid said this to me. She was with us maybe for
11 seven or eight years. She was Jewish. She said to me
12 it will come a time -- she was a religious, a political
13 leader -- when one person will look for the other. Now
14 we feel that way because we have nobody. Everybody,
15 just strangers, we're embracing everybody because every-
16 body becomes automatically a brother, a sister.

17 Last night I was in the elevator-- it's another
18 sensation -- at the hotel. We're staying in the ninth
19 floor. My husband was already in the room. And I came
20 up by myself. Oh, we came back from that big thing last
21 night. You know, we were in the field. My daughter was
22 looking for her lost coat. She didn't come home to-
23 gether with us. And there was a couple in the elevator,
24 very beautiful looking couple. I noticed them coming,
25 arriving to the hotel. We came Friday; they came maybe

2 Sunday or Monday, and I noticed them carrying in the
3 suitcases. And here was another girl, was also-- beside that
4 young lady in the elevator, and she walks out on her
5 floor and she says, "Shalom." So the lady says, "Oh,
6 you see, she must be Jewish. She said 'Shalom.'" And
7 then I started asking, "Where from are you?" She says,
8 "Oh, I can't find -- . I am from such city. I can't
9 find anybody. I didn't find till now anybody." And
10 she tells me her town. I said, "You know something?
11 My husband is from this city. He was born there, and
12 his whole family perished there." And her husband said,
13 "After 11:00 o'clock we are/ ^{going} to go in now? We have to
14 leave in the morning." She said, "No, no, no. Let me
15 go up for a few moments. I want to talk to her husband."
16 Believe you me, there was a reunion. Such a beautiful
17 looking lady, you know. And she says she is one of 12
18 children left from her family, and she told me she is
19 the only one of 12. And how they were trying -- no, I
20 mean her parents were trying to escape from Lodz
21 because they later when she was a little child, they
22 moved away from the city, from my husband. But the
23 whole, all the relatives including grandparents were
24 still living through the war, till they were wiped out
25 in that same city. And they came to that city to survive

2 because the Germans wanted to, the Jews out of Lodz.
3 They wanted only Germans. They named it Lichtenstadt.
4 They renamed the city. It is still now Lodz again.
5 but during the Germans, they renamed it to Lichtenstadt
6 instead of Lodz . It was a very large industrial
7 city.

8 And in that city, my mother had such a great
9 family.

10 Q (Inaudible.)

11 A Well, as I said, it's very hard to describe. We were
12 threatened many times. My husband was threatened that
13 if he won't sign the papers off his name from the property
14 that they will kill him. But there were many, many,
15 many facts that they did kill. They weren't only
16 threatened, they were killed. My husband tried to stay
17 away from that city any more and that's all.

18 But, I mean, it's just too numerous. There's
19 so many. I can, quietly when I'm at home, I can -- .
20 If you would come. I will come back. I started my
21 son Baden (?), the one that I -- . He is now 37 years
22 old. He is a doctor. He says, "Mama, I want to know my
23 roots from the family." That was before -- . What was
24 his name, the black man that wrote this Roots.

25 Q It's Alex Haley.

2 Q Haley. That was before this movie came out. And he,
3 for maybe five years he kept on nagging. And I started
4 once --. I started writing. I have maybe, I don't know,
5 25 pages. But I got very sick, you know, with -- . I
6 had almost like a nervous breakdown I had. I got high
7 blood pressure. We went to Palm Springs and we had to
8 cut our trip short, and when we flew back to San Fran-
9 cisco I didn't even realize I am on a plane. I went
10 through -- . That was the last ten years. I went
11 through a lot of troubles.

12 You know, it comes back to you. I have a younger
13 brother. He's not also very healthy. He is retired
14 since he was maybe 45. He is now --

15 Q The one that was in England?

16 A My only brother left. He is now 60, he turned. But he
17 is, he is not feeling okay and he cannot work. And some
18 of my friends who are from my city, you know, I feel
19 really embarrassed because my sister told the truth. I
20 would never tell those people, but she told them that
21 he is not so well. One lives in Chicago, one in
22 Baltimore and Philadelphia. They were all -- . We were
23 all sitting here at the table yesterday and I brought
24 him over, my brother, because we couldn't find ourselves
25 for four days. We live in the same city, in San

2 Francisco. We all live on account of my uncle. I told
3 you, I had an uncle was very wealthy, childless. And
4 one friend from Chicago takes me on the side. She says,
5 "Well, how is Itzik?" We call him Itzik, my brother,
6 because my sister told him he came on a few occasions
7 to San Francisco for his vacation. And I feel bad to
8 talk about it but I say, "Well, he is okay. From situ-
9 ation where he was before, he is now better."

10 But his wife only works. She is from Vilna.
11 Her name is Shul-ah Gor-ev-itch from home. And the
12 reason why I couldn't find him is because her friends
13 were looking for her and she was with them in all those
14 concentration camps. You know, Dachau, whatever. I
15 can't even repeat now. She wasn't in Treblinka. She
16 was taken by the Swedish -- . You know, from the King's
17 family. Ber-na-dot. He brought out Jews, refugees,
18 from Germany to Sweden, to Stockholm.

19 Q Raul Wallenberg.

20 A Not Wallenberg. Wallenberg was not from the King's
21 family. Ber-na-dot was from the King's family. He
22 was like a prince, you know. He was like a first --
23 they call him first --. No, Ber-na-dot is not --.
24 Wallenberg is somebody else. He was with the consulate.
25 He was also from a high-ranking family, yes, but he

2 he was officially in the King's family, Ber-na-dot, and
3 he brought my sister-in-law and many thousands of
4 refugees out right after they took over. You know, after
5 German became free, and they took them, they brought
6 them to Sweden, to Stockholm.

7 That's when my brother -- . We brought my
8 brother from England, from London to Sweden, to Stockholm.
9 That's where he met my sister-in-law. They got married.
10 But he is not a very well-feeling person.

11 Q (Inaudible.)

12 A They have only one daughter now. And my sister-in-law also
13 lost a tremendous large family in Vilna. She has lots
14 of pictures. I don't. I have some pictures, very few,
15 that I managed to bring with me when I ran away. What
16 can you take? One picture I got to the camp, to
17 (----?-----) from that little baby girl that my sister
18 had that had this Russian father that went back from
19 Warsaw -- I told you. I wanted him -- . I said, "You
20 have everybody. People are sleeping on the street,
21 people are sleeping in schools, in synagogues and you
22 don't have to sleep in a street or in a synagogue. You
23 have your parents in the Russian territory. You have
24 your sisters and brothers." They had big positions
25 there. But he said, "No, I don't want to go back. I

2 ran away once; I don't want to go back to them." He
3 was 11 years old when he ran away. Very learned man,
4 very learned. He would be in a top position, if he
5 would have lived, with the La-ba-vi-cha Yeshiva, my
6 goodness. He would be one of the great men; the great-
7 est.

8 Q What was his name last name?

9 A Gervitch, Mi-shan-el. I said this in the beginning.
10 Mi-shan-el Gervitch. His city was Stari Konstantynow.

11 Q And he was married to who?

12 A To my second -- the next to the oldest. My sister's
13 name was Liv-cha-lya who was married to Mi-shan-el
14 Gervitch.

15 Q And what about your third sister?

16 A My third sister, I told you, she was as beautiful as
17 Elizabeth Taylor and she got married the same war -- the
18 same year/before the war broke out in 1939 in February,
19 in January. In February we were engaged. And she says,
20 "You want me to leave all those things?" She takes me
21 into her apartment. It wasn't even everything unpacked
22 yet. Everything was brand new. You know, in Poland was,
23 that was in a family when a girl got married, you have
24 to give --

25 Q A dowry?

2 -- a dowry and you gave the most beautiful clothes and
3 all kinds of linens, the most beautiful handmade, em-
4 broidered and all kinds of -- . She specifically got a
5 lot of beautiful things. And she ran into a very rich
6 family.

7 Q Which -- . What was her name?

8 A Rossia. Rose was her name.

9 Q What was her last name?

10 A Her last name was Bitterman. You know, one thing. She
11 reminded me. When my sister was caught by the Germans
12 to be transported away from home, her husband could
13 have been saved.

14 Q Bitterman?

15 A Bitterman. Jacob Bitterman. He has an older brother
16 living in Canada. He told me this. We attended a few
17 years ago in Canada, Toronto, a wedding from also my
18 sister's ex-brother-in-law. His daughter got married.
19 And this -- . My brother-in-law's brother was there,
20 invited with his wife. It's also not his first wife. Everybody
21 is wiped out, the first wife, with the children. Beauti-
22 ful people. And he tells me, "You know what happened?
23 My brother could have been alive but he saw that Rossia,
24 Rose, was taken and he said, 'Whatever will happen to
25 my wife, it will happen to me.'" He went with her.

2 He was also in this trade, a tailor, but they were very
3 wealthy people.

4 And his brother, an older brother which is older
5 maybe ten or twelve years, he was only saved because he
6 was a tailor. They had shops. They had to work --

7 (End of Side 1, Tape 2.)

8 This is important. My oldest sister --

9 Q (Inaudible.)

10 A My family name was, my birth name, was Sefra Jurkievitz,
11 born in Su-ley-uv. When I was three years old, my
12 father died, Baran-a Jurkievitz. Jurkievitz in
13 English, and my mother who was born in Tomaszow Mazo-
14 wiecki --

15 Q (Inaudible.)

16 A My mother's name was Esther Sarah. Jurkievitz was
17 marriage name. Her maiden name was Herschberg. And
18 they moved back to Tomaszow Mazowiecki with five children,
19 five daughters, where my grandparents lived, and then
20 later they died there. And my family consisted of seven
21 children. We were five sisters and two brothers. I
22 was the youngest of five sisters and my oldest sister
23 was Schina Freida. My next sister was Liv-cha-lya -- .
24 Excuse me. I will go back with my oldest sister. My
25 oldest sister, Schina Freida, married a first cousin

2 who was also Jurkievitz, Jurkievitz, and his name
3 was Josek, Josek Jurkievitz. His father and my father
4 were brothers. He had five more brothers and two
5 sisters. They all perished.

6 Q (Inaudible.)

7 A Their children, I cannot tell because it's too many.

8 Q No, no, no, no. (Inaudible.)

9 A My oldest sister was killed in Baranovichi when the
10 Nazis occupied, re-occupied Russia. She was killed with
11 the baby born after I was taken to Siberia. She was
12 killed with the -- . The baby was Bar-chala named after
13 my father, and the older daughter was Chesh-ka. They
14 were all Jurkievitz, Jurkievitz.

15 Then the next sister, who was Liv-cha-lya
16 Jurkievitz, maiden name; her married name was Gervitch.
17 Her husband was Mi-shan-el Gervitch. He ran away from
18 Russian when he was 11 years old with the Lu-ba-vi-cha
19 Yeshiva and when they were shipped to Germany to be
20 gassed, gas chambers, they had one child, as far as I
21 know and I don't think they had more. Her name was
22 Chi-la and by that time she was around three years old.

23 And then there was the other sister, Rose.
24 Rifka Rachael, was maiden name Jurkievitz. Married
25 name was Bitterman. Her husband's name was Jacob

2 Bitterman. They were married in January 1939 and my
3 brother-in-law, I was told, could have been saved if he
4 wouldn't have gone with my sister out of Lodz ; didn't
5 want to leave my sister alone. They had no children.
6 As a matter of fact, my brother-in-law criticized me
7 when I told him that I'm expecting the baby. He says, "During
8 the war, we don't have any babies." That was his
9 opinion. And I told even everybody there in the camp
10 where we were, a lot of people made lots of fun of it
11 but it was true too. He was -- . In a way he was right.

12 Then also I have to add that my middle sister,
13 who was Rifka Rachael Bitterman, she was as beautiful
14 as Elizabeth Taylor, because everybody knows how beauti-
15 ful Elizabeth Taylor is and I always say it, and it was
16 true. I have some pictures.

17 And I had another sister. She is alive here .
18 Hannah Tal-ba Jurkievitz. Jurkievitz was maiden name,
19 last name, and by marriage she was Ber-nein-ska. She
20 has one son who survived. She is also here. She sur-
21 vived. He is now 50 years old, and he was 7 years old
22 when we were taken -- no, 6 years old -- when we were
23 taken to Siberia. Now he has a family of four children.

24 And then, that's me, Sefra Jurkievitz, and I
25 have two sons. Two -- . I'm sorry. I have two

2 children, one son and one daughter. My son was born
3 in San-er-kand, Jacob, Jacov Dov. Jacov Bair Pelta,
4 and he was born 1945, January 1st, when almost the war
5 came to an end. All the nurses congratulated me that
6 he brought luck to this world, that the the war is almost
7 coming to an end. And now he -- . I also have a
8 daughter, Esther Sarah Pelta. Maiden name Pelta and
9 last name Pilch. She got married to Harold Pilch. Her
10 husband is a graduate of Volt-hall School of Law. He
11 is an attorney. And my son, Jacob Pelta, is a graduate
12 from U.C. Riverside, U.C. Davis and New York Medical
13 College in New York, and now he is in his private prac-
14 tice as a doctor. He was also studying in Maryland,
15 Bethesda Maryland, three years doing research. And
16 they have children now. My daughter has two daughters,
17 Jessica Laurie and Rebecca Tova. Their age is now four
18 and a half and seven and a half. My son has two sons,
19 Mordecai David Pelta and Ari Rieza Pelta and Hannarah
20 Guitella Pelta. They all live in Los Angeles, in Beverly
21 Hills.

22 I also forgot to tell about my husband's family
23 that he had. They were six children--we were seven. They were
24 three sisters and three brothers. My husband has an
25 older brother who emigrated from Massachusetts. He

2 resettled to Israel with his wife. His name is Isaac
3 Pelta and his wife's name is Sarah Pelta. They have no
4 children. They live in Tel Aviv in Israel.

5 And his oldest sister Golda Sa-vis-ka by marriage
6 name and maiden name Pelta, She perished with two boys.
7 One I remember -- . You want to believe me? I don't
8 remember even the childrens' name. Right now I'm too
9 excited; I can't recall. One was Moniac. The older
10 one was Moniac, the older boy.

11 Q How old was he?

12 A When the war broke out, he was maybe 5 or 6 years old.
13 The younger one was maybe two years younger. I don't
14 remember even the younger boy's name. I'm too excited.
15 And -- . What did I want to say? Oh, he had a brother
16 also who perished, my husband, David Pelta.

17 When -- . I want to go back. When my sister
18 was shot by the Germans, my oldest sister Freida, Schina
19 Freida, she was 34 years old. She was killed with two
20 children, one baby on the hand and one -- on the arm, and
21 one by the hand on the ground. One was maybe a year
22 and a half old and the other one must have been nine
23 by that time. I don't know exactly when they shot her,
24 you know, the date but I know when we came back 1945,
25 it must have been at least two or two and a half years

2 that that this happened, this tragedy. And I said --

3 Q You never spoke about your brothers, the exact names of
4 your brothers.

5 A Didn't I say?

6 Q No.

7 A Oh, I didn't. I'm sorry. I had two younger brothers,
8 one was Josef, Josca Jurkievitz and he perished in
9 Kon-ya-ah-sassar. Camp, in a Russian camp where he
10 was sent. He must have been at that time 18 years old
11 and he was sent to hard labor just -- . They just felt
12 like taking him from the house and they sent him away
13 to the labor camp.

14 And my younger brother, Itzik Schmucl Jurkievitz,
15 he is surviving, and he was in the Polish army. He was
16 in England. He was working in the coal mines. He was
17 16 years old when the Russians sent him away to a
18 camp, which I don't even remember the name of the camp,
19 my older brother's camp. No, I think they were both
20 in Kon-ya-ah-sassar but they were both separated. From
21 the first moment they were arrested, they separated
22 them both. One didn't know from the other. Now I
23 remember. They were maybe 12 or 14 kilometers apart,
24 somebody told me. The one that I later found from my
25 city, a man, and he told me that he saw when my brother

2 died, Josef.

3 Q (Inaudible)

4 A They were not married at that time. Now my brother Itzik
5 Schmucl lives in San Francisco. He has a wife Sheila.
6 Itzik Schmucl Jurkievitz. His wife is Sheila Gurevicz.
7 She's from Vilna. They have one daughter, married now,
8 Beverly Jurkievitz. She got married to Steven Lund and
9 they both live in Los Angeles. She is a public relations.
10 She works for the, a little bit for the movie industry.
11 This is her father that is not feeling well. This is
12 her father.

13 Q Why don't you -- . Why don't you just say Daddy's sisters,
14 younger sisters?

15 A Oh. I was talking -- . Because you stopped me with the
16 boys, then I forget. I'm now very easy to forget. I just,
17 just one of those things.

18 My husband Leon Pelta had three sisters. The
19 oldest one was older than him. She was Golda. I spoke
20 about Golda Sa-vit-ski, by marriage name. Her maiden
21 name was Pelta.

22 Q What was her husband's name?

23 A Her husband I believe is in the United States, the first--
24 that was the only husband, I mean.

25 Q What was his first name?

2 A Also Jacob, Sa-vit-ski. I understand that he lived in
3 Pasadena, California. And the younger sister was Lya
4 Pelta. She was engaged. She was going to be married,
5 and the war interrupted everything. And then there was
6 the younger sister, Monya. She paired me together with
7 my husband. She was was in love with me. And she was
8 shot because she was trying to save her sister with the
9 two boys, so she was shot. She was sent to prison and
10 then they shoot her, shot her. Monya Pelta. And she was,
11 when the war broke out, she was maybe, oh, 22 years old.
12 And that's it. She's not here. They had no children.
13 Only one sister had, the older sister, had the two boys
14 and the rest didn't manage even to get married. The
15 brother, David, I understand was married with some
16 girlfriend of Monya during the wartime. I think her
17 name was Regina. But, he is not here. He was a handsome
18 little man. It's unbelievable.

19 Q I think that's enough.

20 A That's enough.

21 (Conclusion of Side 2, Tape 2.)
22
23
24
25