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1 INTERVIEW WITH: Blanka Drexler
INTERVIEWER: ~~UNKNOWN~~ Sarah Rosenthal
2 DATE: ~~Unknown~~ 1984
PLACE: ~~Unknown~~ San Francisco
3 TRANSCRIBER: Sandra L. Wallenfelsz

4
5 BLANKA DREXLER: My name is Blanka Drexler. My name is Blanka Drexler. I was
6 born in Poland in October 3rd, 1925.

7 INTERVIEWER: Okay. And when was--you are not getting me at all? Okay. Test-
8 ing. Testing. Testing. Are you getting Blanka?

9 SECOND INTERVIEWER: Yes, I am--

10 INTERVIEWER: Okay. Okay. Testing. Testing. Testing. Getting me? Are you
11 getting me?

12 SECOND INTERVIEWER: Yeah, there.

13 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, there. Okay, I'll talk louder.

14 SECOND INTERVIEWER: Now we got you.

15 INTERVIEWER: Okay. Okay. So, I mean obviously the first place we would want
16 to start is when you first--what the first signs of danger to Jews that you
17 saw were and when that was.

18 BLANKA DREXLER: It--the Second World War started for us in 1939, in Septem-
19 ber, but somehow since 1936 the signals were there, and a few people that you
20 knew got out of Poland. Also, the relatives came from Germany and told us
21 firsthand the horror story, what happened there; but, yet the same we didn't
22 believe it. We didn't want to believe. I was very young. I didn't have very
23 much to say about the family firm, but just the same I was very conscious of
24 the stories that I heard, overheard. And my parents were well-to-do. My
25 father was a well-known attorney and well-read and well-educated, but just
26 the same he didn't take it all that seriously. He was falsely impressed
27 with the German culture and the--and he--as his education was all taken in
28 German and a degree from a German law school, he absolutetly didn't believe

1 it. He absolutely discarded all the danger signs and felt somehow that some-
2 where if you followed the rules and if we followed the laws and naturally
3 escape the main danger. To escape with our lives. As far as personal belong-
4 ings, he was willing to part with them only to save the family.

5 INTERVIEWER: So, he didn't want to leave?

6 BLANKA DREXLER: No. And in 1939 just as the Germans were occupying the western
7 part of Poland, the eastern part where I came from was occupied by the Soviet
8 armies.

9 INTERVIEWER: Uh, huh.

10 BLANKA DREXLER: And that was two years of respite we had to really prepare
11 ourselves what was coming.

12 INTERVIEWER: So the Soviets left you alone?

13 BLANKA DREXLER: The Soviets nationalized all our possessions and took away
14 everythings, but after that they left us pretty much alone to our own devices.
15 My father lost his practice and everything else to go with, but he was able to
16 get a position with the Forestry as an accountant as he knew accounting as
17 well, and somehow we were managing.

18 INTERVIEWER: And you were--he was hoping that the storm would blow over?

19 BLANKA DREXLER: He was hoping that the Soviets will stay--and under the Red
20 Troops as bad as it was, because we were definitely not a Communist sympathizer,
21 and--but yet the same, we survived. They took away our house. We had to move
22 to another place; but just the same, the family was still together and that
23 was the main objective, and--

24 INTERVIEWER: Who was in your family?

25 BLANKA DREXLER: My sister and I and our parents; and, you know, uncles and
26 aunts, extended family. Everybody was still more or less together.

27 INTERVIEWER: Uh, huh. So then what happened?

28 BLANKA DREXLER: And then in 1941, in June, then the Pact just--Stalin and

1 Hitler made a Peace Pact not to take each over, and that, you know, the Germans
2 just didn't honor. That they marched in and the Soviets were completely unpre-
3 pared. They just, you know, fell like flies. It was--it was a sight, really
4 that, you know--I don't know. It was--the Second World War was in progress
5 and everybody saw how the Germans mean business. They meant to dominate
6 Europe and possibly the world. And the Soviets just, you know--

7 INTERVIEWER: When the Germans marched in, what was it like the first time you
8 saw them? What was that, just where were you?

9 BLANKA DREXLER: I was at home. I mean in the apartment that we had. It
10 wasn't our regular home but, you know, a small apartment with both my parents
11 and we kind of, you know--my father went back to his original plan--survive.
12 Get the--keep the family together, and all that.

13 INTERVIEWER: And your mom? What was your mom's position in all that?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: My mother wasn't a strong woman. She completely left it to
15 her husband as the custom of the day was. We are talking 45 years ago, you know.
16 The husband made all the decisions and there was no if/ors about it.

17 INTERVIEWER: Sure, yeah. So, the Germans marched in and there you were in
18 your apartment.

19 BLANKA DREXLER: And there we were in our apartment, and we were just--my
20 father had a plan to go to Romania. And a cousin of his and his family came
21 over, and we were on our way, and we came back. We had a chance to escape
22 just as the Soviets, you know, and the whole thing. We also had a chance to
23 escape to Russia because him being the District Attorney. The Russian--the
24 Soviet District Attorney was a friend of my father. They conversed in English
25 and French. He was a well-educated man. He came in front of our house and
26 with a big jeep, you know, covered truck. And he said to him in Russian--we
27 all spoke Russian--"Please," you know, "come with me. I'll send this truck with
28 whatever you can load on it, I'll send to my mother near Moscow and she will

1 help you. I am an officer in the Army. I don't know, I cannot go with you, but
2 I will give the driver the name of my mother and he'll go as far as possible."
3 But, I don't know, it was such a good idea because the Germans were bombing
4 and my father being a calculating man, he said, "If we have to die, we die in
5 our own house, not somewhere on the way without help."

6 INTERVIEWER: True, true.

7 BLANKA DREXLER: And then, you know, we had to face it. The Germans didn't take
8 very long for them to get organizaed as the Germans are known to be very metic-
9 ulous and very planning. I was going to say cunning.

10 INTERVIEWER: What was the first event or time when the Germans affected your
11 life? When they started inflicting on your life?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: That was right away. Three weeks after they marched in, they
13 kind of started organizing the Jewish Council, you know. They didn't start with
14 the ghetto, and they promised the Ukrainians (inaudible). You know where I lived,
15 that's Ukraine now. It is not Poland. And so they started getting the upper
16 hand; and, of course, it was an important day for the Ukranians when one of the
17 Jewish fellows--Greenbaum or Greenburg or something like that--he killed a
18 Ukrainian rebel in Paris on that day. I don't know if you are familiar with it.
19 I mean, that's all history. And that day they gave the Ukrainian police, who
20 was just newly formed--militia I would call it--names of prominent people,
21 prominent Jews, in the city to pick them up and hold them for ransom. So, they
22 came to my parents' apartment and they took both my parents and that's the
23 last time I see them. The Jewish community paid the ransom but all those people
24 were never seen or heard from again.

25 INTERVIEWER: How old were you?

26 BLANKA DREXLER: That was July 5th in 1941.

27 INTERVIEWER: So, you were how old when that happened?

28 BLANKA DREXLER: I was 14--15. Yeah, I was 15, and my sister was 9. So, here

1 I was, you know, sitting with her. She just so happened--she caught pneumonia
2 with all the commotion. When the Germans came in there was no medication
3 and this and that, and so she was in bed with pneumonia. I didn't know what
4 to do even.

5 INTERVIEWER: Did you believe that your parents would return?

6 BLANKA DREXLER: No. I look at my mother's face and I tell you something,
7 something went "snap" just like that. Everybody said, "Don't worry, honey.
8 Don't worry." You know, the neighbors and even my relatives said, "Oh, they
9 be back before you look around. They'll be back." But I was very, very
10 pessimistic and I made plans according. So, I went and took wherever I knew
11 they had money or gold hidden, I took it. You know, hoarded it. All what I
12 would find in our apartment. I went to my uncle, my mother's brother took
13 us in. They had a larger apartment. He was a dentist and, you know, he was
14 working for the Germans right away; and somehow we stayed with them for a
15 little while. And we never--we didn't go back to the apartment. It was just
16 too painful; and, you know, it wasn't our home.

17 INTERVIEWER: Right.

18 BLANKA DREXLER: It was, I would say, you know, something like you would see
19 in this country a one-bedroom apartment. Make shift.

20 INTERVIEWER: So, you moved in with your uncle's family?

21 BLANKA DREXLER: I moved in with my uncle's family, and he--they owned a glass
22 and mirror factory. And the Germans took it over, you know. The Soviets
23 nationalized so they were not the owners anymore when the Germans came in,
24 but they got the German, you know, Treuhänder they call it--somebody that
25 manages it for the German Reich.

26 INTERVIEWER: I see.

27 BLANKA DREXLER: So, this fellow came in and he became--uh, I would say he
28 was a human being to us.

1 INTERVIEWER: He was German?

2 BLANKA DREXLER: He was German. He was Austrian and from Vienna, and he was
3 very--I mean he was helpful. He wasn't--he didn't antagonize us and he helped
4 all he could to make the transition a little easier. We knew that he was the
5 boss and my uncle--and my uncles are not anymore, but just the same he treated
6 them better than the other Jews.

7 INTERVIEWER: Were you working in the factory?

8 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. And then I got--in order to be able to have a ration
9 card you had to work if you were over 14 as a Jew.

10 INTERVIEWER: So, you worked in the factory?

11 BLANKA DREXLER: So I worked in the factory. I didn't work very hard. He
12 was nice to me. I gave him a lot of stuff that I didn't have to, but you
13 know, he could have taken it anyhow.

14 INTERVIEWER: What kind of stuff?

15 BLANKA DREXLER: I gave him four pots of my mother's and I gave him some,
16 you know, some stuff that I have now--my nice porcelain--that he would have
17 gotten in the end anyhow.

18 INTERVIEWER: What was your thinking in giving it to him?

19 BLANKA DREXLER: Because he gave me the papers. He gave me the papers for my
20 sister. He gave me the papers for myself. We didn't--we actually worked.

21 INTERVIEWER: I see. So, you were showing gratitude.

22 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes. I was showing appreciation, which he extended, you know.
23 He extended the courtesy first.

24 INTERVIEWER: Right.

25 BLANKA DREXLER: So, I was, you know, reciprocating.

26 INTERVIEWER: Now, before you had moved in had you been going to school back
27 when--

28 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes.

1 INTERVIEWER: --back when your parents were with you?

2 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes, yes. I was in high school. Yes.

3 INTERVIEWER: So, that all stopped when the Germans came?

4 BLANKA DREXLER: That all stopped when the Germans came. The Jews were not
5 suppose to go to school. The school was closed for us.

6 INTERVIEWER: But the Soviets had still let you go to school?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. I was--that's where I learned Russian really fluently,
8 because I went for two years and all the subjects were taught in Russian, and
9 so you had to learn just like that.

10 INTERVIEWER: Very fast, yeah. So, so at this point you were working in the
11 factory under the German?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah.

13 INTERVIEWER: And, and how long did that last?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: That lasted, uh, a year and a half, about.

15 INTERVIEWER: And your job was to do what? Well, you hardly worked, I guess.

16 BLANKA DREXLER: I hardly worked. We cleaned the mirrors, you know, little
17 mirrors for inlays was something. You know, was really--now that I look back,
18 was really busy work.

19 INTERVIEWER: And your sister, what was she doing?

20 BLANKA DREXLER: My sister was not doing, she was staying home. There was an
21 old grandmother--my aunt's mother--and, she, she stayed home. She was five,
22 five and a half years younger than I. So, she really was under--outside so
23 to say, you know.

24 INTERVIEWER: So, that lasted a year and a half and then what happened?

25 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. We had to move to the ghetto in the meantime.

26 INTERVIEWER: Okay. And the ghetto was part of the city where--

27 BLANKA DREXLER: A part of the city where--

28 INTERVIEWER: --you had grown up?

1 BLANKA DREXLER: --I grew up, but that was--how would I--like something. Not
2 quite like Tenderloin. Outside, you know, like Third Street, way out in the
3 boondocks.

4 INTERVIEWER: Was it walled in or was it just--

5 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes.

6 INTERVIEWER: It was walled in?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: It was all walled in.

8 INTERVIEWER: And the Germans--

9 BLANKA DREXLER: And the Jews had to build the wall.

10 INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible)

11 BLANKA DREXLER: No, we had--I could come to work. That's why the work was so
12 important, because every morning we gathered at the wall, each factory each
13 and our foremans. And it was something like the military, like boot camp, and
14 we march together from the ghetto gate. They checked our papers, you know,
15 each and every time, and we got out. But that was a life line because we
16 brought the food. We smuggled the food back and we sold our goods, you know,
17 materials or shoes or whatever outside where we were working. People came
18 in like flies--all was--everything was (inaudible) whatever you done, you know.
19 Just to survive you'd do anything.

20 INTERVIEWER: So what, what were, um, conditions like in the ghetto?

21 BLANKA DREXLER: Conditions were bad. The Germans were--the first installment
22 was intimidation. Before the real hunger and the typhus and the, you know,
23 taking the Jews out in the train, first the intimidation, you know. The wall
24 and the strick rules worked very well. And also the Jewish Councils were not
25 helpful for the Jews. They were helpful to the Germans.

26 INTERVIEWER: Did you have any contact with the Jewish Council at all?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Um, not per se. Not personally, but my uncle did, you know.
28 He became the head of the family.

1 INTERVIEWER: Okay. Okay. Had he--did he know personally any of those members
2 on it?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: Oh, yes. You know, that was his generation that was--

4 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah.

5 BLANKA DREXLER: --in charge. I had no--I knew some children of those people,
6 but I wouldn't know them.

7 INTERVIEWER: So, from what you picked up, was the Jewish Council--did they just
8 sell out to the Germans to save their own skins or were they trying to balance
9 helping, you know, balance helping the Jews following the Germans orders, or
10 what was your perception of what was--

11 BLANKA DREXLER: Some of them were trying to smooth things out between the
12 Germans and the Jews. But, you know, human nature what it is under those
13 circumstances I think most of them were just buying another day for them and
14 their families.

15 INTERVIEWER: So, you lived--were the quarters cramped that you lived in or--

16 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes. Oh, very much so.

17 INTERVIEWER: How did you--you were living with your whole extended family at
18 that point?

19 BLANKA DREXLER: No, you know, part of the time.

20 INTERVIEWER: Was--were--did most of your family, was it, most of your family
21 still within the general area at that point?

22 BLANKA DREXLER: Most--a lot of them were gone, you know, pretty soon because
23 some of them were older, you know, some aunts of my mother. You know, my
24 mother and my father were young people at that time in their early forties,
25 but, you know--their brothers, they came from small families, but previous
26 generation, they just went like that, you know. My grandparents were gone
27 already, you know. But people of my grandparents' generation they were not
28 there and the young men were taken away.

1 INTERVIEWER: To do labor?

2 BLANKA DREXLER: To do labor. To do forced labor on the front, and that took
3 a big portion because my cousins were all gone. Just happened that I only had
4 boy cousins about five or six of them were gone off to (inaudible) because they
5 were just a little bit older than me, 17, 18. All taken into forced labor,
6 so they were gone.

7 INTERVIEWER: How did you, um, how did you--you said you had a ration card.
8 How did that work?

9 BLANKA DREXLER: We got rations in the ghetto--bread, and you know just basics.
10 Not enough to die of starvation but not enough to survive. So everybody sold
11 stuff and exchanged supplements. Those who couldn't just died of starvation the
12 first year.

13 INTERVIEWER: So, were you losing weight? Were you--

14 BLANKA DREXLER: No. Suprisingly, no. I was very, very resourceful and I
15 knew a lot of people. I had a lot of friends, gentile friends; and my parents
16 had a lot of acquaintances and clients and I was very fortunate. Most of them
17 were very, very helpful under the, you know, under the bad circumstances. They
18 really risked their lives to help. So I didn't--you know, through the whole
19 war I don't know if I was starving maybe two, three times. Through four years
20 I think always somebody came through and helped me when I thought all the
21 bridges are burned. So, I really am looking forward to that part of the inter-
22 view because I want--a few people I know are still alive and I think they should
23 be honored and mentioned. And, you know, I do help them now.

24 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah. Wow. Was there anybody at, at this point when you
25 were living in the ghetto who you would like to describe, who was helping you
26 out and, and how that worked--how they helped you?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah, by the (inaudible) I just told you. They sold--they
28 took the stuff from me, they took whatever china, something very small, some

1 silver, or something. I brought it in my boots and they would take it out and
2 sell it. And I feel now, you know, that I'm older and I understand they they
3 really tried to get the best price. They was neighbors and clients of my
4 father's that, you know, felt that they should help. If my father and mother
5 should be alive, they always kept asking if they came back.

6 INTERVIEWER: And these were all gentiles; were they also--

7 BLANKA DREXLER: All gentiles.

8 INTERVIEWER: --outside the ghetto?

9 BLANKA DREXLER: All outside the ghetto. They came to the factory because they
10 knew where the factory was. That was my grandfather's factory.

11 INTERVIEWER: All right.

12 BLANKA DREXLER: So they knew where to find me. And they did help one by one.
13 I would say I was in contact with maybe ten people. It was enough for that.

14 INTERVIEWER: So, you were actually providing food for a lot more people back
15 in the ghetto.

16 BLANKA DREXLER: Than just myself, right.

17 INTERVIEWER: Beyond your family as well?

18 BLANKA DREXLER: Not really.

19 INTERVIEWER: I see.

20 BLANKA DREXLER: It was just hard, you know.

21 INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

22 BLANKA DREXLER: We had, um, we were seven people in two rooms. So, you know,
23 that's about all you could do.

24 INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So, you were 15 living in the ghetto?

25 BLANKA DREXLER: By that time, 16.

26 INTERVIEWER: Sixteen. And you could--

27 BLANKA DREXLER: See, if I would have been 16 on the day they came for my
28 parents, they would have taken. Just so happened, you know, I was--I didn't

1 have no papers. Who carried passports? I had only my last report card from
2 school. That was the papers that I had and they did believe me somehow and
3 said, "Okay, she stays."

4 INTERVIEWER: So, you were there a year and a half and you were with your sister
5 and some of your relatives living in small quarters in the ghetto?

6 BLANKA DREXLER: Correct.

7 INTERVIEWER: And walking every day in a line out to work, all day. When did
8 you smuggle? After work somehow along the way?

9 BLANKA DREXLER: No. Along--when I went--it was the only time I could leave the
10 ghetto is going to work.

11 INTERVIEWER: So you did it--

12 BLANKA DREXLER: So, I was a fat little girl, awful round, awful fat little
13 girl.

14 INTERVIEWER: (Laughter)

15 BLANKA DREXLER: You know, I even had materials, you know, that was--in those
16 days important everybody had custom made suits, everything was custom. So,
17 I would have, you know, my parents bought already suits for me, you know.
18 English (inaudible) for suits for next year. So, I had this stuff. So, that
19 was really in demand, you know.

20 INTERVIEWER: So, you were able to dole it out bit by bit?

21 BLANKA DREXLER: Bit by bit and bring it; and then she took it and then she
22 brought back sometimes money. Her name was Mrs. (inaudible), that's the lady
23 that helped me, mainly helped me. I said the money is--means nothing to me
24 because I can't buy anything. Only food or medication because my sister was
25 sick a lot, so she brought me medication because our doctors didn't get enough.
26 And so I mean not even aspirin. People were dying of typhus so who looked at
27 somebody with a cold.

28 INTERVIEWER: Before we move on to the next thing, is there anything else that

1 you want to tell us about, about ghetto life? Any event that stands out in
2 your mind?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes. I put the blame for some of the happenings on the Jewish
4 militia. I would like to mention that I know some--I knew somebody, but he's
5 not alive, so doesn't matter who it is. But it really stands in my mind, there
6 was a young fellow whom I knew from school, who went out with one of my girl-
7 friends. They were very well-to-do and he knew where his money is, so he took
8 out the mother and the father. They were hidden during the--what did they call
9 it, you know--they were making the city free of Jews. So, he--everybody was
10 going to go anyhow who didn't hide. It wasn't, you know,--I'm not blaming it
11 completely on him, but I know he sneaked them out and took them out and--

12 INTERVIEWER: And they were the parents of his girlfriend?

13 BLANKA DREXLER: Of his girlfriend. And that stood in my mind and gives me the
14 biggest creeps because he was a school mate of mine.

15 INTERVIEWER: And he exposed them to the Germans, in other words?

16 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah, but also they had a quota like here traffic policemen
17 have a quota of tickets. They had a quota to bring, but I don't know what was
18 really his motive. I don't want to--but that stood in my mind. Because I
19 had the paper that I was working for German Army, so they didn't touch me that
20 time, you know; but later on, that was all immaterial. But I did see it with my
21 own eyes, and that stands out in my mind. And I knew Germans that were helpful.

22 INTERVIEWER: Did you know any other Jews who you lost respect for during that
23 period who you had known?

24 BLANKA DREXLER: Well, our leaders, so called Juden-rad, the Jewish Council.
25 Some of them really, you know, I seen, you know, call in front of Germans, you
26 know; really, actually, practically just make-do anything just to make another
27 day and that. Well, I don't know how you would react to this situation. I'm
28 not punishing them or putting them for posterity the wrong doers, but some of

1 them could have acted a little differently. It might not have made any differ-
2 ence. As a young girl, you know, it made my skin crawl.

3 INTERVIEWER: I can see.

4 BLANKA DREXLER: You can see.

5 INTERVIEWER: But, but you didn't, at least at this point, you weren't yet put
6 into a position where you had, you had an ethical dilemma about having to survive
7 at the cost of your ethics. Did that happen at all?

8 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes, that happened because I had a chance. I wasn't looking
9 typically Semitic, and I had a chance to go out of the ghetto, and my sister,
10 who was like me but she was much darker, and--and it was a bit of a dilemma
11 because I did leave her for a little while in the ghetto and I went out.

12 INTERVIEWER: So, can you tell me about that? How you left and who took you in?

13 BLANKA DREXLER: I was trying to get papers to be sent to Germany as a Pole
14 or Ukrainian to work in the defense factory to escape from the whole Jewish
15 environment, and I was already in contact with the people that took--sent my
16 sister to, away to her nursemaid. So, everything was working. I wasn't
17 willing to go to the nurse's house because I thought I would escape the other
18 way.

19 INTERVIEWER: And the nursemaid was a gentile?

20 BLANKA DREXLER? Of course.

21 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

22 BLANKA DREXLER: That's the people I'm still--I mean she died in the meantime,
23 but her husband still alive and come to their place.

24 INTERVIEWER: Okay, okay.

25 BLANKA DREXLER: And she was my sister. Like I said, she wouldn't go the route
26 I chose to go. It was much more dangerous, but I felt a little bit like a
27 fighter, not to just give in; and the people, too, that were helping me--
28 "That's the only route for you--you survive. Don't speak Jewish, and we'll

1 get in contact with somebody. We'll locate you good papers that you be able
2 to go and register," you know, because some Poles volunteered to go to them,
3 to the defense factories. So, I was set in contact with a person who was also
4 a friend of my father's, and I was in a monastery for about two months and
5 he taught me all the fundamentals of the faith. And a friend, a school mate
6 died of ours, died and he gave me her papers, so they were original papers.
7 He buried her without registering to save me. So, you see, you know, I feel
8 that you know that this is the big start.

9 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

10 BLANKA DREXLER: This, I feel is the story that I want to tell for posterity.
11 Not everybody turned their back on the Jews.

12 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah.

13 BLANKA DREXLER: Very few percentage wise, because most did; but I happened to
14 be lucky to encounter people--remember, I'm sure my father--and thanks to them,
15 but there's no comparison. They risked their lives. He didn't.

16 INTERVIEWER: Was the priest the person at the monastery--he was risking his
17 life?

18 BLANKA DREXLER: Of course.

19 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

20 BLANKA DREXLER: And how. If everybody would find that I was a Jew--he would
21 say, "You are my best pupil." And when I had to prepare my girls for the first
22 communion, I sweat and they sweat, and you remember things like that.

23 INTERVIEWER: So, you made a very good gentile?

24 BLANKA DREXLER: Oh yes, oh yes. I still remember the prayers. Still remem-
25 ber them.

26 INTERVIEWER: So, you studied very diligently for two months?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes. Because my life depended on it. If your life depends
28 on it, you do a lot of things, as we all know.

1 SECOND INTERVIEWER: Did they think you were going to convert?

2 BLANKA DREXLER: No, no. There was just complete--just to save my life. The
3 whole action was geared to go, to saving life. They had some other kids.
4 They had a whole bunch of little kids, smaller than I.

5 INTERVIEWER: So--

6 BLANKA DREXLER: Maybe they thought, I don't know; but there was no effort to
7 take them away.

8 INTERVIEWER: Was it perfectly obvious to everybody in the monastery what was
9 going on?

10 BLANKA DREXLER: No.

11 INTERVIEWER: No. How--so only the priest?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: Only the priest. I came only in contact with one priest.
13 They had an orphanage some place in the country, like on a farm or something;
14 and I suspect it was never spoke of that some Jewish kids--some people knew
15 this priest--gave them even little tiny kids, you know, that they couldn't take.
16 I know one girl--this is not the same--that lives in Israel, that survived like
17 that.

18 INTERVIEWER: By being raised--

19 BLANKA DREXLER: By being raised in an orphanage.

20 INTERVIEWER: I see.

21 BLANKA DREXLER: Her brother--no, when the war was over, her brother came for
22 her, and they gave him willingly. No strings attached.

23 INTERVIEWER: So, what happened after two months?

24 BLANKA DREXLER: And after two months I went to register for work and in
25 Germany, and I was approaching the head of the line. The registrar was a
26 secretary of my father's Ukrainian office, so that was a big fiasco. I
27 escaped with my life. I'm sure he would have exposed me.

28 INTERVIEWER: What happened?

1 BLANKA DREXLER: I saw him from, you know, as I was approaching the table. He
2 didn't notice. He didn't recognize me, but in the meantime was already four
3 years went by--two years Soviets--

4 INTERVIEWER: Do you need a pillow or anything?

5 BLANKA DREXLER: No.

6 INTERVIEWER: Okay, okay. So you--how did you escape? You just ran?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: I just walked out slowly away from the line and I felt that's
8 not the--to go through too many people know me. It is my hometown. So, I
9 started traveling a little bit, you know. I stayed with a woman for a little
10 while that gave me--sold the bowls for me, but somehow it wasn't working.
11 I escaped--it was too many close calls. One time a guy came over claiming he
12 knows me. who I am; and I was just playing dumb, "I have papers. I'll take
13 you to the Gestapo. Don't you--

14 INTERVIEWER: Oh, he was Jewish?

15 BLANKA DREXLER: No, no.

16 INTERVIEWER: Who was he? Was he somebody you had known from the town?

17 BLANKA DREXLER: I suppose. Since it was a big city, Warsaw, a big city.
18 It's almost as big as San Francisco, about 600,000 inhabitants. Was only
19 163,000 Jews, so who knows. He just played it by ear, and gave him 500 (in-
20 audible) which was roughly about a \$100. It was a fortune, and he just dis-
21 appeared. But, you know, I didn't have that many 500 phot-es on me. A few
22 more times like that, plus your knife, give up. I was playing big. I said,
23 "What do you think? I'll call a German over. I'll show you who is Jew."

24 INTERVIEWER: Who were you staying with at that point?

25 BLANKA DREXLER: At some people I knew, Polish people. They knew I am a Jew.

26 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah.

27 BLANKA DREXLER: I also stayed with people that knew me, but how long can you
28 walk the street and do this and do--and I was--you can't get work, and you, you

1 know, just wasn't working out to be, so I went to the--I wrote the people.
2 They already had my sister, the nursemaid, you know, the governess, and her
3 husband; and they had two little tiny children. The girl was, was just new
4 born, maybe five-six months old, and the boy was about four years old. He is
5 a grandfather now. I just had a picture from the little boy. His first grand-
6 child. He's about 15 years, no not even that much. Fourteen years younger
7 than I am; and he's--his oldest child, the daughter, got married and just had
8 a little girl. So--

9 INTERVIEWER: That was the children of the nursemaid's?

10 BLANKA DREXLER: Of the nursemaid, yes.

11 INTERVIEWER: She was in Rod-ham?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: No. She was back in a little town that we used to live at one
13 point, and her husband was working for the Forestry Department. He was the
14 caretaker of the horses. So, they had a big house; and mind you, of all places
15 across the street from the Gestapo. And he had hidden Jews in that house, and
16 not for money. Some people--by the time I came to him, I had hardly any money
17 left, and they took me in; and they said "Don't worry about it." I said, "How
18 are you going to feed us?" He says, "Don't worry. I have a little money and
19 I will raise chickens and rabbits and what have you, and nobody will starve."
20 And he was (inaudible) like they were in my house under the circumstances,
21 the tables would be turned; and I think this is a big, you know, story that
22 should be known because most of the people, most of the gentiles that hid
23 Jews, you know, at the--even a year or so--their nerves were shattered. Every-
24 body's, you know. Just like with the child when you don't make a living and
25 it's hot outside, you know, you get real nervous. My sister was there for al-
26 most two years. I was there for nine months and never did we have a loud word.
27 Never. They was all loving and so patient and so understanding, you know.
28 Your own parents would be that.

1 INTERVIEWER: And they had two kids of their own?

2 BLANKA DREXLER: They had the kids. We were hidden. The kids never saw us.

3 INTERVIEWER: How did they--that work?

4 BLANKA DREXLER: He built, he built something like a wall closet, I would say,
5 you know. We didn't know about wall closets. Everybody had just commodes and
6 stuff, and, you know, armoire, and--but another fellow that was with him, he
7 was studying engineering and he give him the idea, and he built--it was two
8 exits. One to the attic. It was a ranch house--like one to the attic and one
9 was in to the--the room was a little trap door like I build now for my dog to
10 go in and out; but the trap door there was closed on the inside. And it was a
11 big bath, but against this wall, so when we went out in the middle of the
12 night, we got out one by one to wash. We had to crawl under the bath and then
13 come out and then go out the bath. Don't ask. It's ten people, I would say
14 roughly, in about ten feet by four feet and--

15 INTERVIEWER: And you and your sister was there for two years?

16 BLANKA DREXLER: My sister was two years there. I was there for nine months.
17 Most of the Jewish people were there for over a year. When they made the little
18 city, that wasn't involved, the little city; and when the city became Juden-
19 ride, free of Jews, those people were in contact with them all the time. They
20 just waited as long as they could not to go in because they knew it was like
21 being buried alive.

22 INTERVIEWER: So, you were crowded in there with other young people?

23 BLANKA DREXLER: All ages.

24 INTERVIEWER: All ages?

25 BLANKA DREXLER: All ages; we had them all. Everybody survived, all them sur-
26 vived. Some people died in the meantime from old age, because we had two people
27 like my grandparents generation, not related, but just the same, you know, they
28 were in their 60's then and it is 40 years ago, so you know they did of just

1 old age.

2 INTERVIEWER: So, you could never--was your speaking and making noise con-
3 stricted? Did you have to--

4 BLANKA DREXLER: Very, very constricted. We read a lot because we had light.
5 I mean, he was an agel, both of them. She's not here anymore.

6 INTERVIEWER: And you only came out at night to go to the bathroom?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: At night? No, we could go to the bathroom. They had this
8 little portable thing in the attic, but it was very dangerous, you know, day-
9 time. And washing up was only at night, you know. Those people worked day and
10 night because--the whole night. By the time you get ten people processed.
11 She was cooking at night in a big pot. How could you cook? They were two
12 people with two tiny kids. They didn't need those big pots. She baked bread
13 at night.

14 INTERVIEWER: Because she obviously--

15 BLANKA DREXLER: Obviously she wouldn't buy bread. She couldn't buy--

16 INTERVIEWER: Sure. No, I was saying, sure that--

17 BLANKA DREXLER: No.

18 INTERVIEWER: No, no. Not at all.

19 BLANKA DREXLER: So, anyhow, that's how we survived and I tell you something.
20 She was so good to me, this woman. My mother was very good to her. She was,
21 she was an orphan and my mother took her in to service and taught her manners
22 and she became almost like a governess and she became scrubbing maid. She
23 started as a--she came from a little country, you know, from a--she didn't know
24 anything; and she was an orphan and nobody really took care of her. My mother
25 was her everything. Whatever she knew, she--she was obliged to my mother; and
26 then she married the fellow, and he was working on the railroad in the office.
27 It was a terrific step up, you know. I mean, just considering the circumstances
28 and now it doesn't mean nothing. And she remembered all that, and she really,

1 you know, she paid with her--she put her life on the line, too. She felt she
2 had to repay. Well, she done it from the goodness of her heart. She was very
3 religious but it wasn't, you know. the religion wasn't worn on the shoulder.
4 Just go to the church and kneel, you know. She lived it. Then I found that
5 out, that most of the rescuers were very religious. I haven't heard of anybody
6 being an atheist or communist, you know. She had good old morals and Judea-
7 Christianity did get served, and the rest I'd like to stress this point because
8 I, myself am not very religious, but as I'm getting older, I get back into the
9 fold. I am not against the religion, organized religion. Sometimes, you know,
10 it is always difficult when you're young. You feel the people don't know any-
11 thing, but at that time I was that, younger. They didn't think people over 30
12 just don't count. That's been changed.

13 INTERVIEWER: I wonder why?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: I don't--

15 INTERVIEWER: So, you were--I want to know a little bit more about--I meant it
16 is phenomenal that you were living right across the street from the Gestapo.
17 Did the Gestapo ever, ever suspect anything, anything funny business going on?
18 Did--

19 BLANKA DREXLER: No.

20 INTERVIEWER: Did they ever see any little people coming out at night time or
21 were--

22 BLANKA DREXLER: No, we were--this was such a logistic operation that I tell
23 you something, some of our (inaudible) the way we done really never, never.
24 They were two years long, just in the house across the street, and never, never
25 was any, any suspect. One time, I tell you now, that this about it. The little
26 boy at that time was--he said to a neighbor who was a chauffeur for the head
27 of the Forestry Department. Might you know, our man was in charge of the horses,
28 and this guy lived nextdoor, and he had the cars. And the little boy said--

1 he was a friend, a neighbor. We all knew him. And he said, the little boy
2 said to him, "I don't know. We breed horses. Everything is fine. Daddy keeps
3 them clean. We comb and brush, but those rats. Rats, we have, for Christ
4 sakes."

5 INTERVIEWER: Those what?

6 BLANKA DREXLER: Those rats. "We have rats," he said. "Some kind of scratch-
7 ing is going," and this neighbor suspected something along the way, but he
8 was a good friend. He tell us years and years later, not right after the war,
9 that he--

10 INTERVIEWER: That he knew?

11 BLANKA DREXLER: That he suspected we are there, but he knew, he suspected my
12 parents, and after that because he knew how good my mother (END OF SIDE 1 OF
13 TAPE) That was the style, you know. So I just trusted the human. I can't--
14 I felt, you know. You ask me questions, but I tell you--but I really--the
15 important part is the motives of the people and the gentleness and the selfless-
16 ness, and--no, just complete, out of the goodness of heart, not financial or
17 any other gains.

18 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that's fine.

19 BLANKA DREXLER: Okay.

20 INTERVIEWER: Um, so, so you were there nine months and you were crowded into
21 this little room with all these people, and what happened next? I want them to--
22 I want to backup and just make sure how you'd gotten--I know you went from the
23 ghetto to the monastery, and you were in the monastery for two months. Then
24 were you hopping around a lot before you made it--

25 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah.

26 INTERVIEWER: --back, and were you out of the town and other places?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Other places.

28 INTERVIEWER: Trying to escape?

1 BLANKA DREXLER: Trying to escape. Trying to get a foothold somewhere.

2 INTERVIEWER: And trying to actually get to Germany and any, anything?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: Anything where I could stay. I thought maybe in the mountains.

4 We used to go for vacation in the Carpathian Mountains. I didn't know anybody

5 in there, but I thought maybe, you know, I get a foothold and start working in

6 some household or something, but nothing materialized.

7 INTERVIEWER: How long were in that state of having left the monastery and try-

8 ing to establish yourself or get something?

9 BLANKA DREXLER: I think about five months and then I had all those people try

10 to blackmail.

11 INTERVIEWER: So you were staying with different people that you knew on the

12 brink of being turned in a number of times, and then you wrote to the nurse-

13 maid?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah, yeah.

15 INTERVIEWER: And you said, "Things are bad, can I come to you?" And--

16 BLANKA DREXLER: She said, "If you have no way out, just come. Don't worry

17 about," and I took the train.

18 INTERVIEWER: And were you living--now since you had after, after the monastery

19 living now as a Pole. Were you carrying around your Polish papers, and if any-

20 body--were you ever approached, "Are you a Jew or a Pole?" Were you ever asked

21 to show your papers a lot?

22 BLANKA DREXLER: I wouldn't say a lot, you know. One time just to say, and

23 another person that was really for sure, he didn't intend to be good to me, but

24 he was. I was buying vegetables in the Polish open-air market--like Farmers'

25 Market--and I was trying to get, get back into the ghetto. I went to a little--

26 there was a little church there. I went to the church because I just felt

27 that somebody following me; and two little boys not eight, nine years. Soon

28 as I walked out of church, you know, in the--and he says, the little fellow,

1 "That gal is Jewish," to one another. So, I made like I, you know, I didn't
2 want to go back into church. I just walked out and, you know, sure enough
3 they got on my tail until they brought Ukrainain militia man, and said, "This
4 girl is Jewish. You better check her out."

5 INTERVIEWER: How did they know? Did they know you, or were they just kind of
6 telling from something? Smelled it, smelled it somehow?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: They somehow, they got it and I really didn't look--I was
8 dressed as a typical Polish girl, and I carried on where I had the accent. I
9 never spoke other language, much like I speak English here, most of Jewish
10 people speak English. Children, they don't know any other, you know. And there
11 was--the militia man said to me, asked me for the papers, and I gave him the
12 papers. I had the real papers, but just the same, you know, and those guys
13 'round his tail. He took me. "You guys leave it up to me. I'll get to the
14 bottom of this. Just get lost." And he walked me to the militia station, and
15 I thought, "Oh, that's going to be hard;" and he say, you know, "I forgot my
16 cigarettes. I'm going to go upstairs and get my cigarettts." Well, I'm asking
17 you, did he expect to find me waiting on those steps? He never found me. He
18 knew he's not going to find me, you know. So there's another guy I'm sure. I
19 mean, he was an officer of the militia.

20 INTERVIEWER: So, you just marched briskly away. How did you--

21 BLANKA DREXLER: No. He told me to sit on the steps to wait for him. As soon
22 as I saw him I ran and I didn't care if they would torture me, I would say.

23 INTERVIEWER: Sure, sure.

24 BLANKA DREXLER: You know, I was doomed. Anyhow, if they shot me in the back,
25 the better.

26 INTERVIEWER: Right. So, you just ran? Period.

27 BLANKA DREXLER: I ran like the dickens. I had, also, poison me, cyanide.

28 INTERVIEWER: Cyanide, that's right.

1 BLANKA DREXLER: And my aunt was a dentist, and she gave me--

2 INTERVIEWER: And you were prepared to take it?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: I was prepared to take it. I would never let myself be

4 captured into the camps, and by then I was 16. No, I made the decision.

5 INTERVIEWER: You knew about the camps?

6 BLANKA DREXLER: I wasn't going.

7 INTERVIEWER: Did everybody know about the camps at this point?

8 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. That was 1943, but people still went. My school mates,

9 friends went. They still believed because, "You're going to the resettlement

10 camps. We don't need any more in Germany. We have enough of those Jews from

11 the western countries." They said, "You're going to the resettling. You're

12 going to help on the front. You are going to live." And I didn't buy that.

13 INTERVIEWER: So, you knew definitely a lot of people who took that route?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. I--you know, know what else they done? At the railway

15 station they gave a pound of bread and a jar of jam. That brought a lot of

16 people in.

17 INTERVIEWER: People were so hungry?

18 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. I don't blame them. I don't blame them. I'm not pass-

19 ing judgment, just saying that I didn't believe it; and some people like my,

20 you know, few other people didn't believe it. Mostly young people, young people.

21 Their spirit still survived; and older people who have family and children,

22 their spirit was broken. What can they do with the little kids? What are they

23 going to do? I'm saying myself, you know, if it would be ten years later, if

24 I would be ten years older, I don't know if I would go through all this.

25 INTERVIEWER: But you had youth on your side?

26 BLANKA DREXLER: Youth. Young and stupid. Not really. No fear, you know.

27 The best soldiers are 19 year olds.

28 INTERVIEWER: So, you didn't walk around with your heart jumping all the time?

1 You just lived, and this was how you lived was now, and you did the next thing,
2 and you did the next thing, and you did the next thing?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: Keep smiling.

4 INTERVIEW: Keep smiling, was it. You said you were going to go back into the
5 ghetto. Was that an ordinary thing for a Polish person to be doing, going into
6 the ghetto?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: No. A lot of Polish girls went into the ghetto. Some of them
8 had friends. The intermarriage was even like here, but there was still some, so
9 you had relatives you know, that were Jewish. And, you know, a Jewish grand-
10 mother that you wanted to help.

11 INTERVIEWER: I see.

12 BLANKA DREXLER: A lot of the families that married out of faith just, you know,
13 broke ties. Most of them, even husbands and wives.

14 INTERVIEWER: But to be a Pole--

15 BLANKA DREXLER: You go to the ghetto. The children were Jewish even if one of
16 the party was--for the third generation they got them back. If the gentile
17 partner said, "I declare myself single. I don't want to know you. You go your
18 separate way." Fine for the gentile party, yet see on the other hand I knew
19 this, too, and I knew some that were third generation and still helped the
20 Jewish.

21 INTERVIEWER: You saw everything, yeah. So what happened then (inaudible)?

22 BLANKA DREXLER: Well, then the Soviets came back. They liberated with us, and
23 mind you, with my luck they came back and then the front--and the the front
24 turned again. The Germans came back. So, you know, I think that's not a
25 laughing matter. A lot of Jews died then again, because they went out from the
26 hiding places, and it was known that they are here and couldn't go back. The
27 same thing happened to me. I could not go back and endanger them the second
28 time. I could--after I had been, and shook hands and kissed my school mates

1 and knew I am alive and some of them had a funny approach, strange approach.
2 I don't know. "They killed everybody, how come you still here?" I think some
3 was asked innocently, but I think some of it was asked to hurt. And I just
4 climbed on the tank, and I went with the Soviets yet almost all the way back
5 to Kiev, and I stayed. This was--I worked there on the railroad station as
6 supply in the supply store.

7 INTERVIEWER: How long were you there?

8 BLANKA DREXLER: I guess six, eight months until our city was liberated again,
9 because that was in the winter, 1944. Oh, it was terrible, terrible; and it
10 wasn't until August '44 that my hometown was liberated.

11 INTERVIEWER: So, did your sister make it through?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: My sister made it through all those things, and she died in
13 1969. She was, she was 36 years old. Died of cancer.

14 INTERVIEWER: But she made it through all that stuff?

15 BLANKA DREXLER: She made it through the whole thing, and then we were together.
16 After that we were together.

17 INTERVIEWER: So, when you went back, was--did you stay there? I was thinking
18 ahead. After you went to Russia--

19 BLANKA DREXLER: And then I came back, then I came to--I didn't come to the
20 nursemaid's house. She lived in a small town. I visited her, but I stayed
21 in my hometown. I went to the house, and I tried to find somebody which I
22 didn't find anyone.

23 INTERVIEWER: Just you and your sister?

24 BLANKA DREXLER: Just me and my sister. I found a few young girls that were
25 given to gentiles and some of them had nobody. What am I going to do? I had
26 my own, so I think to this day they are children of this people. I know of
27 two.

28 INTERVIEWER: Relatives of yours?

1 BLANKA DREXLER: No. Just my parents' friends children.

2 INTERVIEWER: I see. The Jewish children that had been raised as gentiles?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: Raised as gentiles. They don't know anything else, you know,
4 and after 20 years will be disrupting life. So, you know, there are no rela-
5 tives. When there are relatives then--a mother, father--you know. But when
6 there are no relatives, just, you know, disrupting their lives and not offering
7 them anything in return.

8 INTERVIEWER: So, when you went back, was it still the same situation of some
9 Jews were helpful, some Jews weren't; some Poles were helpful, some Poles
10 weren't. There were no--

11 BLANKA DREXLER: Clean.

12 INTERVIEWER: --clean divisions?

13 BLANKA DREXLER: No. Never is in life, but in the situation like we talking,
14 even more that's--I don't know what else you want to know.

15 INTERVIEWER: Well, what happened?

16 BLANKA DREXLER: This is the main story I want to tell.

17 INTERVIEWER: Well, what happened? How long did you stay there?

18 BLANKA DREXLER: I stayed, I think, until 1945; and then I went to western
19 Poland because our part of the country became annexed to the Soviet Union. It
20 is part of the Soviet Union, not only satellite, but Poland is Russia. No
21 ifs and buts. I didn't want to stay there, and we are suppose to as Polish
22 citizens had the right to immigrate. I know it was legal for us to leave Soviet
23 Russia. We didn't have anything anyhow. I mean, but our possessions, and they
24 didn't give us any education or anything. There was no time. It was 1945.

25 INTERVIEWER: So, you went to western Poland?

26 BLANKA DREXLER: I went to Krakow, if you know, another big city.

27 INTERVIEWER: With your sister?

28 BLANKA DREXLER: With my sister, and now some friends, you know. A whole bunch

1 of us just looking for (inaudible). No, not really. Things were hard. It was
2 hard time right after the war. Nobody had anything.

3 INTERVIEWER: Sure, sure. So, so how did you eventually come to the United
4 States?

5 BLANKA DREXLER: Then I went to--forgot to tell. It is not important that I
6 was in the partisans for awhile.

7 INTERVIEWER: You were? See.

8 BLANKA DREXLER: See, when the Soviets went back on our way to deeper Russia,
9 on our way east, I hitched with some people that were partisan--all the time,
10 all through the two years that Germans were occupying and they were right near
11 the small towns in the forest. They spend two years in the forest without help.
12 Without any warm food or anything, and most of them survived. And we had--the
13 head of the group to this very day I don't know his name. He was secretive,
14 didn't want to tell. He was a Jewish fellow, and he was in Israel with Yad-va-
15 sham, was his--just his number was mentioned. His name was never revealed. He
16 named himself Birobidzhän. Birobidzhän was a little republic that the Soviets
17 gave the Jews in, in the Siberia for them to settle. They said, "Never mind
18 Zionist. We don't need Zionist. You can have your own country right here."
19 So he, he took this, you know, number I mean just during the war; and it's
20 mentioned, you know, they have a map on the wall in Jerusalem. All the partisan
21 units, and all the camps, you know, not this light. It's separate. I don't
22 know if any of you were--and on the ground there's lights, perpetual lights for
23 the big camps, and how many died there; and on the wall there's some pictures
24 that look like trains. Those, those are--I don't know whether he took all those
25 photographs, but whatever. But from the Germans Max has--I'll show you. Max
26 has a German book the American soldiers found and made into a booklet. I hope
27 it's here. On the walls are, you know size of this wall. It is all the parti-
28 san units and how many were there in each unit.

1 INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible)

2 BLANKA DREXLER: No. First of all, I said, you know, that I'm gonna go and
3 steal some chickens. That was my first assignment, because nobody had anything
4 to eat for days because the front was going back and forth. Mind you, I don't
5 want--you are a Jewish girl. I don't know how much you are familiar with the
6 Kosher Laws. You are not suppose to eat the chicken, only when the kosher
7 slaughter performs, kills it in a certain way; and some of the girls after being
8 two years in the forest, still believed in this. So, I said, "I take the whole
9 sin on me. I am the one that all the sin--" I went into the sight and just
10 turned their heads. And you know, I just done that.

11 INTERVIEWER: You just tok them from a farm?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: Oh, yeah. I just stopped--

13 INTERVIEWER: I get really interested in the logistics. That's why I asked
14 these questions, like, "You went to a farm?" Okay?

15 BLANKA DREXLER: Com se, com saw. But anyhow--

16 INTERVIEWER: So, you backed the partisans?

17 BLANKA DREXLER: The partisans, and they they saw I'm so adapt in doing.
18 So, they let me mind trains, railroad trains. I done that only once.

19 INTERVIEWER: Scarey?

20 BLANKA DREXLER: Very scarey. I am, you know, I'm not a big hero, and--but I
21 wasn't exactly a scaredicat, either, but that was terrible. The trains were
22 going, you know, to the eastern front, you know, to steal--I mean send the
23 ammunitions and stuff for the German soldiers. We blew them up. They went all
24 over the kingdom.

25 INTERVIEWER: Was your sister in the partisans, because she wasn't as strong
26 as you?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: No. She--I mean she was with me. There were a few kids, but
28 I didn't ask them to do anything. That was the highlights, because then I, you

1 know, I moved on. As the things--we'll be walking in the dark and it's snowing
2 and it's cold in February in Russia. Really the general frost, the general
3 winter showed his might. My God, what am I going to prepare? What am I going
4 to do? Somebody was carrying her for awhile because she could not walk because
5 the snow was melting toward the end, and the dirt--very rich soil, and you walk
6 in and you get stuck. We didn't have proper shoes to begin with.

7 INTERVIEWER: What did you have? Clogs, or did you have reunnners?

8 BLANKA DREXLER: No I had my ski boots. The nursemaid, you know, she had some
9 clothes from us, old clothes. And you know, mother gave--she gave me all my
10 mother's scarves and just happened my mother's old ski boots. That's what I
11 had, the old ski boots. I wore it all until I came to Poland, until I came to
12 Krakow, the ski boots. They were the only leather shoes I had through the
13 years, and you know, a guy--the same man that was offering my father to take
14 him to his mother's--he comes there, too, you know--and how you call it "slides",
15 you know. Sleds. A horse, you know, but a horse, two horses, and sleds and
16 fur--like, and he looks in my face--and I was like something with the dirt and
17 the sweat--and he says to me, "We're going back, but we'll--" You know, we're
18 going backwards right now, but this is a strategic point. "It is a pity that
19 you guys have to suffer so much, because you can't afford to stay behind." He
20 says, "Come on, come on my sleds. Bring your little sister." He remembered
21 my father, and he took us, and that's how I got the job in the railroad station.
22 I was a queen there. I gave out all the foods for the officers going to the
23 front. I was not hungry.

24 INTERVIEWER: That was in Krakow? Where were you?

25 BLANKA DREKLER: No, that was in Kiev, Slu-vad-ya was next. This was a very
26 strategic railroad command point. All the supplies were going through there.

27 INTERVIEWER: So, did you--so you had been in the direction of Krakow, right?
28 Had you been going in that direction?

1 BLANKA DREXLER: No. That was going back, first. But once our cities got lib-
2 erated, then I was going west. At that point I was going east, as far away from
3 the German front as I could.

4 INTERVIEWER: Okay.

5 BLANKA DREXLER: You see, that was my chance to get away. My, my friends didn't
6 want to, and I was given another chance. I said, "I'm not stopping until I fall
7 down. Until the war ends, I'm going east."

8 INTERVIEWER: So, that was that little period right after the first--

9 BLANKA DREXLER: Right after the first liberation. I decided no matter what I
10 had to go east.

11 INTERVIEWER: Okay, okay.

12 BLANKA DREXLER: Okay. Now, what else you want to know? Then I was in Krakow.
13 I got together with some people that were going to smuggle all of us into
14 Palestine at that time, but then I--last minute I decided somehow I help them.
15 They were called--they called themselves Bree-haw. I don't know if you are
16 familar. You know what I'm talking about?

17 INTERVIEWER: Maybe, just briefly in a sentence, you could explain what that means
18 for the tape?

19 BLANKA DREXLER: They were looking for younger people that were like the children
20 that were left with gentiles and they were good material for Israel army. I
21 mean, to be very, you know--because the older people had already lived--anybody
22 over 30 already lived, has their mind made up. The life style is certain one
23 that they not willing to give up and they wanted to start a completely new gen-
24 eration, and that was the point of exsistance. They was the exsistance of Bree-
25 haw, was just--

26 INTERVIEWER: I see. So you are--they were also hoping that you would come?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. See, my sister would be fine for them, and she did land
28 up in Israel eventually. She became so taken with the idea that a couple years

1 later she did go. She joined the army and she fought. Yeah, she fought in the
2 liberation war for a year.

3 INTERVIEWER: She was a fighter?

4 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. She was a Zionist, and her daughter is now the same way,
5 you know. She left a little girl. She was seven years old when she died and
6 this girl was raised and born in Montreal, and now she's out in the kibutz in
7 Da-nay-ga, and she's married and she's doing the same thing. She's a teacher
8 on the kibutz and she believes in the kibutz system just like her mother did.

9 INTERVIEWER: A chip off the old block, as they say?

10 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah.

11 INTERVIEWER: So, you put--you didn't go to Israel?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: Never went.

13 INTERVIEWER: What did you do?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: I--see, I was already taught that, that proves the point. I
15 already tasted the good life and didn't want to go into the army and fight.

16 INTERVIEWER: You had already seen war.

17 BLANKA DREXLER: Fine. But all those people, most of my friends went back
18 and a lot of them fell. I know of at least ten who fell in the road from Tel
19 Aviv to Jerusalem, you know that road. If you ever go to Israel, look at the
20 old, burned out tanks, and, you know, jeeps. They burned with the tanks; they
21 wouldn't move. The Arabs were on--the Jordanian armies were on the hills, and
22 they were in the valley going through between Latrun and Jerusalem one by one.
23 It is a monument now, so you know, and then went--they just came out from the
24 camps. They didn't know anything. They, the commandos were in Hebrew. They
25 didn't understand. A lot of them got killed because they didn't understand what
26 the officers were saying. They didn't know it was--there was no arms. Little
27 arms that they bought in Czechoslovakia, smuggled in. Nothing. A lot of them
28 didn't have no arms, didn't understand what was said to them.

1 INTERVIEWER: Do you, do you feel that it was--do you feel any sense of irre-
2 sponsibility on the part of the Bree-haw people who were taking young people
3 without giving them training?

4 BLANKA DREXLER: They--understand the circumstances. They done all they could.
5 My sister went to a camp in Germany to train the best they could.

6 INTERVIEWER: Given the circumstances?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: Given the circumstances. They didn't have no training. Where
8 they going to take the people from?

9 INTERVIEWER: Sure, sure. (Inaudible)

10 BLANKA DREXLER: Absolutely no. It's not the same level as the Juden-ride.
11 Absolutely not. They are way above. They were selflessly giving of themselves.

12 INTERVIEWER: So, you stayed in Krakow how long?

13 BLANKA DREXLER: Oh, for about a year, then I went here and there while travel-
14 ing.

15 INTERVIEWER: So, how did you get to the United States?

16 BLANKA DREXLER: And then I went to--then when Silesia was liberated from the
17 Germans, and they gave us this part. I mean, not "us", they gave the Poles--
18 consider myself at that time still a Pole. After all that, they give the Polish
19 citizens that part of Germany in exchange for the part they annexed into the
20 Soviet Union. So, you know me, I was there, one of the first ones; and, you
21 know, of all people, I loved bread. I've always loved bread. Bread is my main-
22 stay. Always is, still is. That's why I look the way I look. And I took, you
23 know, I liberated the baker, like they liberated us.

24 INTERVIEWER: I need it--maybe that it should be selfevident to me at this
25 point, but what was your motive for going to Silesia. Again, you were going--
26 searching for a home; searching for a place where you would live?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah, it was. Everybody I knew was looking for relatives. I
28 was already past this point because I went home and nobody there.

1 INTERVIEWER: You knew--

2 BLANKA DREXLER: I knew they all gone, so I figure out, "We'll settle. We can't

3 go home." You know, you can't go home. This we couldn't, absolutely, so I

4 said, "Let's go. Let's get settled. You can go back to school and maybe I

5 will, too; and we'll see what happens."

6 INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay. So, you did go there?

7 BLANKA DREXLER: We went there to Ger-lick, which is a very nice city on the

8 River Nice. Very nice German city, I would say about 50-60,000 inhabitants;

9 and, you know, we just played God for awhile. Why not? The Germans walked on

10 the, you know, off the sidewalk when we walked on the sidewalk. We just played--

11 the shoe was on the other foot, but we were--never really abused them. The

12 only thing, I walked in and I said to them, I said, "Now I'm." I speak German

13 quite well. "Now, I am the boss. All the receipts are mine. You do all the

14 work; I take all the monies. How's that, yes?"

15 INTERVIEWER: Oh.

16 BLANKA DREXLER: That felt good.

17 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

18 BLANKA DREXLER: Not that I want the money--

19 INTERVIEWER: Or not that you wanted to necessarily--

20 BLANKA DREXLER: Not that I even wanted to own a bakery either, but you know

21 that, that moment--

22 INTERVIEWER: You needed that; yeah?

23 BLANKA DREXLER: And from then I walked in and looked for an apartment. The

24 nicest apartment just happened I found out later, was the whole floor of a nice

25 apartment house that was an apartment of the head of the--like Social Security,

26 you know. We have no Social Security in Germany, was even then socialized

27 medicine, you know. Only in this country--I'm not going to criticize. Any-

28 how, he was the head of that department, a big shot. They had a beautiful

1 apartment, so I kicked the door in, and I walked in there. Was nobody there,
2 so, so that was easy. They fled.

3 INTERVIEWER: And that was you and your sister then lived in that apartment.

4 BLANKA DREXLER: We lived--you imagine about four bedrooms, at least. Beautiful.
5 When I tell you I seen several nice houses before and since, too. I'm still
6 very impressed. You know it's like a penthouse above. Balconies all around.
7 We were on the top floor and view of the city and modern kitchen, even by
8 today's standards.

9 INTERVIEWER. Gee. So, you stayed there how long?

10 BLANKA DREXLER: I would say about a year until, you know, it all became old
11 hat.

12 INTERVIEWER: You were such a traveler by then.

13 BLANKA DREXLER: Well, I was looking for some--for somebody, you know. I was
14 restless. Not really. It's not like traveling today through Europe. It's
15 entirely different.

16 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

17 BLANKA DREXLER: Homeless and restless. So then--

18 INTERVIEWER: So, you were searching?

19 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. And went to Germany by myself. She stayed behind. And
20 you know, then on downhill all the way from then on it's just regular stuff.

21 INTERVIEWER: Well, how did you, did you get--what happened between Germany
22 and America? How did you get finally--

23 BLANKA DREXLER: We moved away from there, from Poland. He didn't want to stay
24 in Poland. I was going to stay in Poland for a little while because I really
25 had it made, and people--

26 INTERVIEWER: Who's "he"? You said, "he".

27 BLANKA DREXLER: My husband.

28 INTERVIEWER: You met him--

1 BLANKA DREXLER: I met him in Germany, in Munich. He was liberated from the
2 camps just then. He had a family. He still has two brothers and a sister which
3 was, which was unheard of. Which was--

4 INTERVIEWER: That everybody survived?

5 BLANKA DREXLER: But 14 camps. All the camps you want to know. Yes, yes (in-
6 audible) I don't think so. He gets too emotional. He is, you know, just a
7 regular, you know, experience where he was taken away from his family and just
8 gone to the camp. He is ten years older than I am, so he was an adult already
9 then; and he got in to the camps. He's not like me. I can laugh; he cannot.
10 He went to Yad-va-shen in Israel. He was sick for a week.

11 INTERVIEWER: Would you--

12 BLANKA DREXLER: So, you know, I'd rather not. He's 68 now, you know.

13 INTERVIEWER: That makes sense. It's too painful.

14 BLANKA DREXLER: It's too painful. Not that he doesn't have a story to tell.

15 INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible) Well, we can talk about it after the interview is
16 over.

17 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes, fine.

18 INTERVIEWER: So, you and he decided together to come to America.

19 BLANKA DREXLER: No. We decided to go to Israel. We decided, because part of--
20 my sister was fighting in the war, and his youngest brother was fighting in the
21 Israeli Navy. And then they started writing--and then his sister also went to
22 Israel--but they wrote, "Let's--don't you dare come." Because by then they
23 all lived in tent cities. After all that you have to live in tent cities where
24 you are not comfortable? Where the boy, and you know, and all that. We just,
25 you know, talkd about it. He still wanted to go. It was my idea that--I already
26 paid my dues.

27 INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So then, if not Israel, then it was going to be the United
28 States?

1 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. Yeah. Then we registered for United States, because as
2 the boy was getting into kindergarten, we decided we not going to send him to
3 a German school.

4 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

5 BLANKA DREXLER: So, he thought we should send him to Switzerland. Send him.
6 We live--he's going on 4 years old, in Switzerland by himself, you know, just
7 didn't work. And then anyhow, Switzerland is not the answer. You have to give
8 him a home and we decided to go to the United States. We came--he was already
9 five-and-a-half by the time all the papers came.

10 INTERVIEWER: Are you getting tired?

11 BLANKA DREXLER: No, I am fine.

12 INTERVIEWER: You are okay. If you start feeling--I know it is exhausting to
13 tell us so much.

14 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah, it is difficult. It's not easy.

15 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah, it's--

16 BLANKA DREXLER: Not easy, and you know, I'm not--I'm trying not to be too
17 personal. There's a million stories to each step of the way, so--

18 INTERVIEWER: Well, tell as much--tell as much as, at any point if there's
19 things you want us to know.

20 BLANKA DREXLER: You know, things that happen--all the survivors. I don't feel
21 that you need, but the point that I brought up are pretty unique because not
22 too many--I don't think you got that many stories like that because most of the
23 people like me, they didn't survive. They didn't--too weak. They were pampered
24 as children and they just couldn't take all those hardships. See, too, just to
25 mention, you know, you couldn't call him my boyfriend then because we were school-
26 mates; maybe a year older or something. And his father was a pharmacist, and
27 he knew a lot of people. And when they started taking the boys to forced
28 labor, they took him in to the farm to mind the cows. So this is good. Other

1 people were sent to the front to dig ditches, and he was minding the cows. That
2 was beneath his dignity so he took poison. Now, you know, just to give you an
3 example how--and I know my aunt took poison.

4 INTERVIEWER: Well, what do you attribute your ability to keep fighting and keep
5 living?

6 BLANKA DREXLER: I want to survive. I wanted to see what it's going to be like
7 when the war ends. So, the--I worked (inaudible). I don't know, it's just very
8 strong selfpreservation.

9 INTERVIEWER: Did your parents--do you feel like your parents--you mentioned that
10 you felt that when people were spoiled that that, that made them less able to
11 keep--did that contrast with your parents? Did you feel like your parents,
12 even though they were fairly well-off, did a job of not spoiling you, or do you
13 attribute anything to the values that they taught you about life?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. They taught me--my father especially taught me a lot of
15 values and a lot of different aspects of life. He was a very open-minded person
16 and a very, very good parent. In those days nobody spent so much time with the
17 kids. It wasn't done. The kids were seen but not heard, and he took a habit
18 of sitting with me. I was his favorite, anyhow; and explaining and waiting for
19 questions and I think that really helped me a lot because per se I was pampered,
20 but yet I was instilled, like you know, certain values, certain traits, certain
21 way to adopting to situations.

22 INTERVIEWER: It sounds, also, like he treated you like an adult.

23 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes.

24 INTERVIEWER: And you acted, even at age 15, you acted as an adult. Okay. I
25 want to take care of myself. I am going to find a way to get out. I'm
26 going to get papers. It wasn't like a child.

27 BLANKA DREXLER: No. He deserves a lot of credit, especially. My mother, you
28 know, she, she was too complacent, you know. Now that I see it, at that time it

1 wasn't even said. It wasn't even thought, but now that I look back, well whe
2 just complied with the mores of the time.

3 INTERVIEWER: So, when you came to the United States to get back to that part,
4 where did you go? Did you go to--

5 BLANKA DREXLER: We came Joint Jewish-American Distribution Committee, I think
6 that's what the words stood for. They paid for our passage which we didn't have
7 to repay. That's good. Well, they didn't expect to be repaid, and very, very
8 helpful, you know. This ladies--Jewish Women's Council--they do a great job.

9 INTERVIEWER: So, did they place you somewhere in the United States?

10 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes. No. No, they got us over and somebody waited at the
11 port when we came on the boat, and they installed us in a hotel room. It was
12 Christmas Eve in New York City, but they still--but very, very accommodating.
13 He has some relatives. My husband has some relatives which stayed for the
14 holidays with the relatives, but that was immaterial because we had the hotel
15 room and dinner waiting in the hotel and what have you. Really nice.

16 INTERVIEWER? And how did you--

17 BLANKA DREXLER: They do a great job.

18 INTERVIEWER: Oh, boy. Boy, that must have felt so great.

19 BLANKA DREXLER: Somebody's there waiting for you, for God's--

20 INTERVIEWER: In a strange, huge country.

21 BLANKA DREXLER: And his cousin by marriage, he waited for the whole day because
22 our ship was very stormy Atlantic in December, so he waited the whole day. He
23 was here only about six months. Not that he had anything, but just the same.

24 INTERVIEWER: You deserved it.

25 BLANKA DREXLER: Well, he went to the same thing. He took us home to his
26 family for the holidays.

27 INTERVIEWER: So, how did you--did you come right away to California?

28 BLANKA DREXLER: No. We stayed in New York and we had a choice of New Brunswick

1 or Los Angeles. So, Los Angeles it was, and--

2 INTERVIEWER: How did you make your decision?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: (Inaudible)

4 INTERVIEWER: Okay, Los Angeles?

5 BLANKA DREXLER: He, you know--they, as young as, you know--so much younger I

6 was very young. Even so for a young married woman, I was very young.

7 INTERVIEWER: How old were you then at that point?

8 BLANKA DREXLER: Twenty-six, yeah; and I know--don't ask nobody. Even some

9 people who know me to this day say I am sometime somebody as, "I have to talk

10 to my husband. I can't make dicision. 'Like hell you talk to him, you go to

11 another room and come back to the phone.' Okay. He says we're going."

12 INTERVIEWER: I believe that. So, you went to los Angeles?

13 BLANKA DREXLER: So we went to Los Angeles. I looked different.

14 INTERVIEWER: With a five-year-old child, right?

15 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. I already had the one boy from Germany, and we accom-

16 modate ourselves quite nicely. I like Los Angeles at that point, I like Los

17 Angeles very well.

18 INTERVIEWER: How did you establish yourselves?

19 BLANKA DREXLER: You know, they were--the Jewish, what was the Federation or

20 what other organization. Again they waited for us on the train in the Union

21 Station; helped you find a house. Installed is in a hotel and helped us find

22 apartment, jobs.

23 INTERVIEWER: Did you go to work?

24 BLANKA DREXLER: Nursery school. You know, kindergarten, what was it was.

25 INTERVIEWER: The whole business?

26 BLANKA DREXLER: The whole business. I should say, not the, you know--we re-

27 paid them, you know. I donate to this day, but this not the point. They were

28 there when we needed them, and you know, people--oh, again, the people were

1 nice. They didn't make you feel like you were poor or you were receiving some-
2 thing, you know, a hand-out. Very nice.

3 INTERVIEWER: Very poor, too?

4 BLANKA DREXLER: He had a lot of stuff because he worked in Germany. I helped.
5 We had some money, not much but I was completely destitute; and I had some
6 clothing, some summer clothes. I didn't think we were going to Los Angeles. I
7 packed all the summer clothes, and you know, my stuff didn't come yet. I--
8 just suitcase with winter clothes for New York, so they, they saw the way I
9 was dressed and I was going to buy something and she said--I don't remember, a
10 \$100--"You buy for yourselves and for the boy some summer clothes," because in
11 January in Los Angeles--

12 INTERVIEWER: What jobs did you get?

13 BLANKA DREXLER: Oh, just menial jobs to begin with, but that was okay, you
14 know. We didn't mind. Didn't take long. We didn't, you know--we stayed for a
15 little while.

16 INTERVIEWER: Oh, you weren't in Los Angeles to stay?

17 BLANKA DREXLER: Oh, no. We--no--we--menial jobs. Then he went into business
18 for himself, and I was working.

19 INTERVIEWER: I see. So did you raise your child--you had the other child
20 then?

21 BLANKA DREXLER: In Los Angeles.

22 INTERVIEWER: A boy, a girl?

23 BLANKA DREXLER: A boy.

24 INTERVIEWER: A boy.

25 BLANKA DREXLER: I have two boys.

26 INTERVIEWER: And how long did you live in L. A.?

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Five-and-a-half years.

28 INTERVIEWER: Then you moved up here?

1 BLANKA DREXLER: Then we moved up here.

2 INTERVIEWER: Why?

3 BLANKA DREXLER: Not very willingly. I didn't Like San Francisco.

4 INTERVIEWER: Oh, you wanted to stay?

5 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah, I liked it in Los Angeles. I tell you something, we all
6 came at the same time with a whole group of people, and the kids were friends,
7 and the parents were friends, and--

8 INTERVIEWER: Community?

9 BLANKA DREXLER: And they come, and I still stay in contact with some of the
10 people. They came to my son's wedding and so forth.

11 INTERVIEWER: Did you move for your husband's business?

12 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah.

13 INTERVIEWER: I see.

14 BLANKA DREXLER: I came--

15 INTERVIEWER: What's he do?

16 BLANKA DREXLER: At that time he was in meat business. Now we have a coffee
17 shop.

18 INTERVIEWER: Right. You gave me the number.

19 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. I gave you the number. You called today.

20 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

21 BLANKA DREXLER: If I'm not home--if I'm working, then you know there's some-
22 body there all the time. If I'm not there, they take a message.

23 INTERVIEWER: I see. So, you said at the very beginning, at some point, you
24 wanted to get back to how you're still in touch with people and who are still
25 in touch with, and I wanted to ask you a little bit. I know it's (interruption
26 door bell rings).

27 BLANKA DREXLER: Who is it? I can't, I'm entertaining--contact with the man
28 that we spend the night. I don't keep kosher, I never did.

1 INTERVIEWER: That's why you could do the chickens with the partisans. Okay, now
2 you've done the chickens, now you can do the mines.

3 BLANKA DREXLER: And you know, it's went--instilled in me.

4 INTERVIEWER: What kind of background did you come from?

5 BLANKA DREXLER: Assimilated.

6 INTERVIEWER: Your parents (inaudible)

7 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. They were brought up religiously. My grandparents and
8 my mother, they were both--that was the art of the day. That--

9 INTERVIEWER: That they were religious, but that was--

10 BLANKA DREXLER: My mother was religious. Deep-down she was religious. It had
11 to tear her when she saw, you know, that we don't feel--but my father was very
12 advanced. Very well-educated. Besides this he felt, you know, he felt we need
13 a lot of reform. There was no reform movement in Poland. If he would be--
14 faced reformed Judaism, I am sure he would embrace it because that would be to
15 his thinking. But, you know, he went to synagogue to please my mother because
16 he didn't--he says, "They talk a lot of nonsense and the politics, who's going to
17 be the next rabbi, which leaves me cold." You know, that--

18 INTERVIEWER: To tell us any, any, any realization or that you come to, you
19 know, in the years that you've been in America and that you've been thinking
20 about it?

21 BLANKA DREXLER: I think that what I hear now, you know, what I hear and experi-
22 ence now, how people have nervous breakdowns, young people--one of my nephews
23 committed suicide this year, 21 years old, brilliant fellow, you know. It's
24 epidemic. He was very smart. I don't know, the load too much in school or the
25 pressure, what have you; and considering the pressure we were under at that age,
26 I--you know, I'm really amazed, I'm amazed that the survivors now days are
27 already in their 50's and 60's, they don't run amuck on the street, you know.
28 What you are comparing to the pressure that the average person has--

1 INTERVIEWER: You went through so much and you are still around and kicking.

2 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah, that's--

3 INTERVIEWER: And you're--there are people who didn't go through so much?

4 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. That's my closing thing. And you know, they can't take

5 nothing. Even my own son, my youngest son is very sensitive, and any little

6 hardship, any little adversity, that young man is falling apart at the seams.

7 He's a strong, physical boy, he has a good education, he has a master's degree

8 in business, not that he's distitute, you know. Really his problems are mini-

9 mal, but he blows them out of proportion. His wife said, "Your mother said it

10 all, 'You blow it out of proportion.'" I don't know, they--we didn't--they

11 didn't inherit the strongness. What do I want to say? The older one, why

12 nothing shakes him.

13 INTERVIEWER: Tough cookie?

14 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. He's been in the service; he's been in Vietnam; he--

15 and he know, I know sometimes things are tough for him, always smiling. "I'm

16 making money at this. I can handle this, but Mom don't worry." He--everybody

17 tells--the little ones, "Don't worry, Grandma, everything is going to work out."

18 INTERVIEWER: That's good. They'll be all right.

19 BLANKA DREXLER: They really a strong family and very good family unit in spite

20 of some things that we observed with--no, that's off the record. I have a

21 wonderful family. My daughter-in-law is a wonderful girl, and she raises the

22 kids very good. Good people.

23 INTERVIEWER: You're proud of that?

24 BLANKA DREXLER: Yes. And there are some things I am not proud of, not pleased

25 with, I would say, but on the whole there, you know, she's a mench.

26 INTERVIEWER: Whether she wants to be or not, she's a mench.

27 BLANKA DREXLER: She wants to. She knows, how she knows.

28 INTERVIEWER: That's great, that's great. That must make you feel so happy.

1 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. That's what I say. I go--it's a visit. I take the
2 BART. I go, don't bother nobody, and I spend a few days with them, you know. I
3 feel at home. I know that I can do anything; take off my shoes, put on a house
4 dress and roam with the kids. She says, "Mother, house is yours." I have the
5 run of the house.

6 INTERVIEWER: Great.

7 BLANKA DREXLER: Not too many daughter-in-laws are like that.

8 INTERVIEWER: That's true. That's very true.

9 BLANKA DREXLER: Another days, make an appointment, wait, and this. This,
10 "Whenever you have time, if I'm not home, I'll find you in the backyard." You
11 know, sometimes she has to run errand to do with the kids. We don't do, you
12 know--I said, "Okay. I'm not outside, you know, go into the family room. Make
13 myself busy." She says, "Fine. I'll leave the garage open and you just walk
14 in."

15 INTERVIEWER: That's great.

16 BLANKA DREXLER: I just want to say this, off the record, too, how she's now
17 she has no family, it's different.

18 INTERVIEWER: Should I stop?

19 BLANKA DREXLER: Yeah. Okay. That's it. This is it.
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