

Interview with TONIA ROTHKOPF BLAIR

Holocaust Media Project

Date: Place:

Interviewer: Larry Hershman

Transcriber: A.N. Frost

Q) ...interviewing (first name) (last name).

A) Maybe you can say (maiden name), in case somebody ever heard that name. I couldn't find anybody here -- that would know me.

Q) Okay. You're from Lodz?

A) Lodz, Poland, yes.

Q) You grew up there. What things happened that you first became aware of what was happening to the Jews?

A) Well, just the -- from 1937, the anti-Semitism in Poland grew very obvious. It was always there, but from then on, with the influence of Germany, the Poles got a little more arrogant (half-laugh) than they were. I'm talking about certain Poles, of course, the ones that we hear about; I'm sure there were some nice human beings, but they either didn't speak up or we didn't know about them (slight laugh), about their existence.

 They started boycotting Jewish stores. I was a child, but I was aware of it. And the Germans who lived in Poland, there was a big German community, immediately started wearing swastikas; and they took upon themselves to stand in front of Jewish stores and not allow any Christians to go in there. And there were already, you know, beatings-up, and you wouldn't go out at night, you wouldn't walk if you didn't have to go out. And especially Polish holidays, it was almost murderous to go out.

And then the fatal day in September. -- Yes, before that my father -- we had some Christian friends -- he was a philosopher, he was a Bundist. I don't know if you are aware of that: they were the intellectuals; what they wanted to have is to have the Jewish tradition, speak Yiddish, but they were not religious in the sense of organized religion, and they wanted to be full-fledged citizens of Poland, that was their aim. Before the war they were meeting in our house and discussing the war, the Blitzkrieg, and -- Blitz, you know what that means? quick, like a thunder! (slight laugh) I was a child and they thought I was asleep, but I heard them talking about horrible atrocities; but nobody believed in it -- humanly -- it was inhuman to believe that anything like this could happen. I remember talk about the cutting of women's breasts and -- doing such things; I mean... And then they were also talking that the world would not allow that, that the world would stop it, and... And then that -- then that -- terrible day happened, in... September. Yes...word of mouth. We didn't have a radio. One thing that did strike me at the time: people who had a radio had it on the window sill, it was blasting anybody who could hear. And they from the radio learned that the Russians offered to help Poland; but I heard the Polish people / 3 syll unclear / were saying: "No Polish soldier can be walking next to a Bolshevik!" And that was it.

Then in September the -- horrible day arrived, and...There was not much resistance --there was bombing -- because I was from Lodz. Warsaw got the brunt of the whole -- big bombing, but we got some. It was terrible.

Q) How old were you then?

A) I was exa-- I'm a September child (slight laugh). I was not 14 yet, but -- because on the 18 September I was 14 years old.

The bombing was terrible; but our house was -- somehow it was not touched. Then it was quiet for a while, like before a terrible storm. And then one day they arrived on motorcycles. We all stood on the -- ran to the street to watch them, the Germans, the Nazis, on motorcycles, and then the foot soldiers and the whole thing. And of course I'm sorry to say it's a terribly exciting thing, you know? like -- something was happening. And sure enough, within a very short time they had the proclamations all over the streets that the Jews had to move into the ghetto, and there were raids on Jewish houses, and -- constantly /and they'd meet you with??/ a curfew; we couldn't walk after a certain time.

It was my dream always to be a nurse; I must admit, from a romantic point of view I always thought it was nice, in a white uniform -- but I love to help people. And all the nurses, the full-fledged ones, went to the front. One of our friends, my mother's friend's daughter, was a nurse -- she was older, six years older, and she went to the front. One night there was a knock on our door and she arrived. She was absolutely naked, just a blanket over her, and the blanket was full of bullet holes. She just came back from the front. So she stayed with us, because her house was farther away. And then I became again inspired to become a nurse, and -- so she, you know, told me that I could be, because they had so many lost children, children found in burned-out homes... For some reason children survived more than the

parents at the time because they were smaller, and when they were bombing they somehow -- were tinier, to be damaged. So I went over to a place -- against my family! oh, a nurse was like -- a horrible thing to be in those days. But they couldn't discourage me. I went over to what they called a foundling home for children. And I lied about my age, they knew I lied about my age, we all played a game; but they accepted me, because they needed people desperately, just to watch those children and take care of them. And because I worked for them I couldn't come home, only on my one day off -- once a week I had a day off, I could come home. Meanwhile I was there all week long. I remember my sister came to visit me once, and still tried to discourage me from (slight laugh) being a nurse, but it was too late! And the one day I came home. It was in March 1940, and there was a terrible quietness in the house. We lived with Christians, there were Jews and Christians living at home. And when I came in I knew there was something terrible, because there was no noise, no -- no human -- no -- no voices; and whatever Christians there were, they were hiding behind, or... And I walked into where we lived, to our apartment; and there was a seal on the door like a quarantine, like if you had the plague -- that's what they do when people have the plague, a big seal. It said JUDEN -- Jews live here; there was a skull in -- that thing...

And then (sighing) -- then I was alone, and I was wandering the streets. And I went back to the place where I worked -- I lived there too; some people thought I was one of the children! (slight laugh) And they...(sighs) Then I heard -- the rumors were going around,

and -- I heard it -- that those people who -- there were raids at night, the Germans just arrived, came into a building, shot up into the air, and gave the Jews about three minutes -- "Alle Juden 'raus!" that was just -- "alle Juden 'raus!" And I heard that those people, that they were -- raided on -- they were concentrated in one area, and a certain day about a week later they were all going to be marched and -- to the trains to be shipped out. So I tried to be in that area where they would be marching.

/machine off & on again/

...No, that's okay. And then -- and while I was waiting there, there were many, many people on the side, there were some Jews, some Christians, watching, you know, like a parade, and here they were coming, all of a sudden I saw them coming, five in a row, always five in a row, with ^{cz--?} /sounds like 'chernas'/ on both sides, bayonets on their -- on their rifles, and looked terribly, terribly scary. And then all of a sudden I saw my family; it was just -- it was just terrible; and it was just incredible what -- they were holding their hands, you know, and people -- leave so -- quickly; there -- was my father, and my mother, and my sister and my brother...and I could see my father was doing something like that with his hand, like -- to say: Don't approach me, or there was something in his eyes, something terrible in my mother's eyes, like: Don't approach me -- but I wanted to be -- with them. But there were also lots of what they call /Volksdeutsche/, Germans who lived in Poland, they became, you know, good Nazis immediately, had uniforms... There was one boy that I knew, I used to play with him,

he was my sister's age, about 16, and he, you know, looked so big in the uniform, also powerful. But then I saw him, and... (sighs) I don't know, I -- till today I just don't know; I even talked to a psychiatrist /or: to psychiatrists?/ about it: I just don't know exactly what happened, and I -- I think he kicked me away from the mass of people who were going; because the next thing, I found myself being thrown against the wall of a building that was a sidewalk, and I was bleeding from my head and I was -- like -- on the -- and then they passed, my parents passed, and -- I never joined them; and that's terrible to live with, for the rest of my life. And that's the last time I saw them, and that image is forever, especially my mother's -- eyes, my father, and -- and they just -- just the-- sadness and -- and anxiety in their eyes is just -- it's -- it's incredible to -- /away/. So I don't know exactly what happened. And I -- so I -- I -- I have the feeling that he pushed me away from there, because he knew where they were going. So I never -- never saw them again (sighing)...

Q) Did you ever find out where they --

A) Yeah; the thing is that -- then I was in the ghetto, and the ghetto was -- on the surface looked like a -- people -- there were schools for children, but there were people constantly dying, some dead people (=in the?) kept the home so that the family could get their rations, and -- the sick ones were kept away from the street so they were not caught by the Germans to be deported and shipped out. And they -- I did hear from them, we got letters, I got letters from them, written by my sister, by my mother. And the last letter, it was a postcard I got, it was in 1942;

and it was the most horrible thing, because it was written in pencil, and it was all erased: I could not make anything out, nothing -- except it said the address where they were, it said Mszana Dolna -- and that's what stuck in my head. And that's the last, and I never, never knew what happened to them till two years ago, when I went back to Poland. I mean, I had an inkling what happened to them, that they -- because if people survived they eventually found each other because of the different organizations, Jewish, or the Red Cross, you know. But I went back to Poland. Not willingly (half-laugh) -- for different circumstances -- and we took -- I took the pilgrimage, like the pilgrimage back to the dead, and I went -- I said I will not go to Auschwitz, but I went to Auschwitz. I said I won't go to Treblinka, and I went to Treblinka, and then I went to -- find out what happened at Mszana Dolna.

And just to make it... (sighing) was a terrible experience. And -- August 19, 1942, there were Jews living there: there were eight hundred and eighty-one Jews. And the Po-- the Germans, the Nazis -- the Germans, I don't know how to call them -- with the help of the Polish -- hoodlums -- now the Poles call them hoodlums, but... --surrounded them all on a hill, it's a very beautiful part of Poland, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains -- on a hill they surrounded them, and they took out a few able-bodied men. All the rest -- mothers, children, men, women, whatever -- eight hundred eighty-one -- for twenty-four hours they were standing on that hill while the Poles dug the graves; and they shot them all and threw them in the grave. And now there is a little monument there; I have a picture with me of it. So -- the only thing that

came out is that the truth makes you free. I was afraid of the truth before, because there was always just a little -- maybe idea, a little hope, something burning, maybe, you know? I didn't know, and I was afraid of that. But it -- it -- it is good to know; at least when people ask me, "Where are your parents?" I can say, "They're in Mszana Dolna." And there is a monument, a little monument, and I left the flowers there, and then -- I made friends with one Polish lady and she puts fresh flowers on it now and then, so I have something like to know I can go back, and I know where they are. But -- I remained in the ghetto all the time, till 1944, August; and then they deported everybody from the ghetto -- except the sick, they left them alone, you know, to die, just with nobody. I was a nurse, incidentally, trained as a nurse, in the ghetto. And then I was shipped to Auschwitz. And Auschwitz...I wasn't there long enough; I -- if I were, I wouldn't be here (slight laugh) to talk. I was a few weeks, and then they -- I went through the left and right line, at first I didn't know which one was what, but then I realized that on one side there were people that looked just a little better than the one on the other side, and they kept us there for 24 hours. It was -- keep you naked, you know? and we huddled together for a whole night. It was very cold...

Q) They had taken you -- they had taken you by train?

A) From Lodz -- oh, the train, they're so symbolic, train, train, train -- to Auschwitz. And they -- I have my picture of Auschwitz, it's my -- little -- alma mater or whatever (slight laugh), I carry around. And then I was in Ausch-- then they -- completely separate you, you know, men from women; children taken away -- at the time I was so ignorant, I

didn't know what they were doing. Of course I was young, and I also was very involved in the hospital: I lived in the hospital and worked in the hospital, and saw terrible, terrible things. But they -- they separate you, from the children and from the men...Shall we stop now?

/machine off; end of recording/

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Tonia Rotkopt Blair

2 INTERVIEWER:

3 DATE:

4 PLACE:

5 TRANSCRIBER: Lee McNutt

6

7 INTERVIEWER: You'd been in the ghetto. This is
8 Tonia Blair--

9 TONIA: Rotkopt.

10 INTERVIEWER: Rotkopt.

11 TONIA: Rotkopt Blair. Rotkopt is important because
12 Blair means nothing-- I mean, means something, but Rotkopt
13 means that I am-- my previous--

14 INTERVIEWER: You probably told the interviewer about
15 the ghetto--

16 TONIA: The ghetto.

17 INTERVIEWER: --and then you went into Auschwitz.
18 When did you--

19 TONIA: I didn't go into Auschwitz, Sweetheart, I
20 was shipped out. Everybody was shipped out from the ghetto
21 and they left--

22 INTERVIEWER: Which-- Lodz?

23 TONIA: Lodz ghetto. And they left all the people,
24 and they left all the people, the sick. I was a nurse so I'm
25 aware. I lived in the hospital and I was-- so they left all

1 the sick people without attendants.

2 (UNIDENTIFIED VOICE CALLING TO INTERVIEWER)

3 INTERVIEWER: Yes?

4 TONIA: You must be tired too. I imagine, yeah.

5 INTERVIEWER: Tired.

6 TONIA: I hate to take up your time.

7 INTERVIEWER: No, no, no, don't--

8 TONIA: Since they are after me (inaudible) certain
9 things. And maybe it's important to (inaudible)

10 INTERVIEWER: Quite important. So you were deported--

11 TONIA: So--

12 INTERVIEWER: What then?

13 TONIA: So they-- they put all the people one
14 concentration camp and every day they took thousands, whatever
15 they were left over, whoever could walk, and we went into the
16 train, the infamous train, the infamous trains, and in cattle
17 cars, I was squeezed in. But still we were people. If we
18 could possibly manage with people that we knew, like I was
19 with my girlfriend, who I'm sorry to say committed suicide
20 after the war.

21 And we arrived in Auschwitz and I stood on
22 somebody's back in the train. We used to park there in the
23 wagon, and I looked out and we smelled like a-- we-- you
24 know, a burning-- we couldn't imagine that it was burning
25 flesh, but we said-- we saw chimneys, We thought it was a

1 factory because they told us we were going to work. And they--
2 that was Auschwitz. Then they-- then we all went out of the--
3 were piled out of the train and they immediately separated the
4 men and the women, and then some woman had children and they
5 were all waiting there to be horded somewhere else. And they
6 took all the women with the children another place, and we
7 didn't know, had no idea, because I was not the underground, I
8 didn't know.

9 INTERVIEWER: How old were you?

10 TONIA: At that time I was 18. And they, then
11 whatever we were, they horded us one other place and then that
12 was the most incredible thing because it was like a madhouse.
13 It was-- they pushed us, they shoved us, and they tore our
14 clothes off and we were all naked. Can you imagine that's
15 the worst thing that should happen, like you're-- you're
16 unclothed, you're-- in front of everybody. And then they
17 shaved-- some woman shaving our hair, completely. So I
18 could not recognize my girlfriend, and I was shouting for her
19 but she was right next to me.

20 And then we were in Auschwitz. Well, that was--
21 that was a horror. That was undescrivable. I was there a
22 short time, about four weeks, maybe. And we had to stand
23 (uphill) every day, for hours, in the morning. I keep saying
24 (uphill--) that's the general word on roll call. Roll call.
25 In our own urine and excrement, and we couldn't do anything

1 except fives. We only once a day went to the bathroom. And
2 once a day food was brought but I never got any food because
3 you had to be really aggressive. You had no place-- to eat,
4 you had your hands, you-- there was soup and you, with your
5 hands, you know, you-- but I never got to it. But I-- so
6 imagine how you can live without food.

7 And I was with many people, and I actually
8 despised them for eating. You know, who could eat? I mean,
9 I am the person that stops eating when something happens.
10 You know, I suppose if I had/^{been there} long enough I would eventually
11 have to eat because the instinct of survival.

12 And there were all barbed wire around us. And
13 the barracks, there were just bare floor in the barracks and
14 they have like hooks like for cattle. I don't understand why
15 they made those hooks, if they were there already or whatever.
16 And they-- we-- we did recieve one kind of a-- I had a
17 dress, just one dress. And there was no-- never got food,
18 you were terribly thirsty. One day I was so terribly thirsty
19 I just couldn't bear it and there was a bucket, and I just
20 put my head, like an animal, into the bucket and started
21 drinking. And it was disinfectant water that they-- there
22 was something that they were washing with. And I-- I thought
23 I would die, but I obviously didn't.

24 And that's how we-- there was one terrible
25 thing happened because one of our-- I was a nurse and a few

1 people were nurses too, women that we knew each other, and
2 there was our director of nursing, a woman older at the time,
3 she was maybe 40, so she was older, and she was completely
4 out. I mean, she couldn't-- and she had to stand on the
5 roll call otherwise they-- they would just shot her, right--
6 right-- shot people. And she couldn't stand so we propped
7 her up. I don't know how we ever did it. We put her in the
8 midst and we propped her up with our leg or with an elbow
9 so she could stand; she would appear like she's standing.
10 Eventually she was shot because she just collapsed. Yeah,
11 she--

12 INTERVIEWER: She was shot that day?

13 TONIA: Yeah-- no, not that day. In a few more--
14 I was around four weeks.

15 INTERVIEWER: Did you see people shot?

16 TONIA: Oh, I saw people beaten, people shot, people
17 couldn't stand up, people who broke down, people who asked
18 for something--

19 INTERVIEWER: You saw them shot?

20 TONIA: Yeah. I saw people shot right there or
21 whipped. Because when they come to the roll call-- a Nazi
22 came and hit a whip, and he whipped you right across the legs.
23 And they--

24 INTERVIEWER: Were the women guards as brutal as
25 the men?

1 TONIA: They were the men-- it seems to me the
2 women were worse. Not necessarily in Auschwitz. Auschwitz
3 was like a nightmare, it's just-- I don't know if you ever
4 saw the film by Polanski, the-- Macbeth? No, no, not Macbeth--
5 what was that film? Where they have the witches? Macbeth?
6 Did you ever see that? Out of Auschwitz. Out of Auschwitz.
7 He was in Auschwitz, you know that. Polanski.

8 INTERVIEWER: Yes, that's right.

9 TONIA: I said to my-- I was out shouting in the
10 movie. I said, "That's Auschwitz, Auschwitz," because that's
11 where he got-- they were naked, remember, the witches were
12 naked? But they had hair though, we didn't have hair. That's
13 the only thing that was different. And they were-- in the
14 movie-- I didn't know anything about him, and I didn't want
15 to see it, I thought it was unimportant, his films, like
16 (Rosemary's)Baby, but I see now after reading about it in
17 (inaudible), every film has something from his own-- the way
18 I write my things for-- I'm a Columbia student-- every time
19 I write anything about history, about anthropology, I always
20 have something from my background. It doesn't necessarily
21 say "me", but there is something from that. And then--

22 INTERVIEWER: What were you feeling those four weeks?
23 What did you feel like?

24 TONIA: I had the-- I thought I was in a madhouse.
25 I-- I just couldn't understand. I would like at the people,

1 I was like an observer, like it wasn't me. And I couldn't
2 understand how they could go on and fight for the food when
3 the food arrived in a big kettles like-- they used to be--
4 not kettles but--

5 INTERVIEWER: Cauldrons?

6 TONIA: Cauldrons-- not cauldrons, they were--
7 milk was delivered, I remember, in a big tall kind of tin,
8 tall things, and was so heavy to carry. Once they told-- they
9 /me to carry the food from the kitchen, I couldn't. It was
10 very heavy. But when it arrived everybody attacked it
11 ei-i-i-i, you know, just like the witches with the cauldrons?
12 I observed them, I say, I wonder how people can eat under
13 those circumstances. How they even hungry. But I-- so I
14 cannot speak for people who there a long time because they're
15 another kind of thing. Maybe if I was there a long time I
16 wouldn't be here, because it took lots of assertiveness and
17 aggressiveness to survive. I'm not against it, it's just that
18 the delicate, the sensitive didn't make it.

19 INTERVIEWER: How did you survive then if you
20 weren't aggressive?

21 TONIA: I suppose it's pure-- I was young and I
22 hadn't lost that much weight yet, it's just pure-- I just
23 had enough, maybe flesh on me to make it. And then one day
24 we're all lying there, just like you saw in maybe the movies,
25 just lying on the floor. We couldn't move. And somebody, a

1 Nazi or a kapo, I suppose they do to the-- you know, the
2 kapos, they were-- came in and say we should all get out,
3 and we couldn't move but we somehow crawled out. And they
4 took us to a giant, giant field that was in Southern Poland.
5 It was September and it was very-- it was very cold at night.
6 It was like it went down to 20 maybe. In the daytime it was
7 very hot because the sun was shining. And they-- they took
8 us all in the field and then it was this famous-- I didn't
9 know at the time, but Mengele.

10 And they lined us up. Always lines, always
11 lined up, always five. And he was pointing to one side or
12 another, and when it came to me he examined me-- I had no
13 hair-- and he was wondering about my ear. And he was
14 deliberating what to do about that. Because if you had a little
15 pimple or something, or you had scabies or something, you
16 went to the other-- whatever the other side was.

17 And I found myself on one side and then-- then
18 we all pile up naked, completely naked on the field, and
19 there was two piles far away from each other. One pile and
20 the other pile. And then-- did you see (Hiroshima-Mon-Amour)
21 it always--

22 INTERVIEWER: No.

23 TONIA: It always keeps coming back to me because
24 they showed naked bodies.

25 So we were so cold so we just laid like, like a

1 one big sculpture of boides, all night long. And they-- and
2 during the night there were guards all around, but during the
3 night people from the other side crawled in to our side because
4 they realize that-- our side was like young, and they--
5 do you want to go now?

6 INTERVIEWER: I'm waiting until you finish this
7 sentence.

8 TONIA: Okay. And the people crawled from the
9 other side, they realized that we were the, quote, "good"
10 side, and some people made it and some people were shot and they
11 never made it, you know, to our side. And the next day--

12 INTERVIEWER: Wait for the next day.

13 TONIA: Yeah.

14 INTERVIEWER: Wait one minute.

15 You were going to say something about the
16 next day? Do you remember-- the day after selection, maybe?

17 TONIA: Oh. My girlfriend wasn't with me, the real
18 girl-- the true girlfriend. We were separated. We were--
19 she was shipped out before me. We were separated and that
20 was another tragedy because we just had each other, so we
21 were not together anymore.

22 But the-- okay, if we spend about 24 hours
23 or 48 hours, I really have no track date, the group I was
24 in, the women, they-- they had us go to a place and
25 I had
they gave us each a dress/ a Polish peasant dress, and it

1 was rough. Just a dress and a pair of wooden shoes. And they
2 gave us a little package-- no, no, no, they gave us a piece
3 of bread-- a package (inaudible)-- a piece of bread. It
4 was good bread. To us it was like a-- and then they had us
5 out to train, to cattle trains again.

6 And they had us in the cattle train and they
7 were all squeezed in, the women, we didn't know where we were
8 going, and there was a soldier, one soldier sitting with us.
9 Imagine. I felt sorry for him that he had to be there, it was
10 such a-- we weren't washed or anything, and we had no hair
11 and we looked so ugly.

12 Well anyway, particularly he was sitting and
13 when during the ride the doors of the cattle train were open
14 a little bit, and he was sitting, and dangling his feet down
15 but when he-- we stopped a lot, it was taking like a long
16 time, I don't know how many days we're going. And he locked
17 us in completely so if a bomb, if something happened, we'd
18 just be, you know, exploding. But we had to go to the toilet,
19 so there was a bucket. And there was also one girl, she was,
20 I'm sorry to say, (inaudible) very unattractive, and he told
21 her to go away, to sit somewhere else, away from him. He
22 couldn't-- but he told me to come sit next to him. I'm
23 ashamed to tell you that.

24 But what really happened, so we used the bucket
25 to pee-pee, still had pee-pees, I don't know why but the body

1 does it. And other things. And now and then we had to get
2 rid of this bucket. So when the train was in motion he told
3 me to throw it out, so I did, and the thing fell on him.
4 You know, like I thought he was going to kill me. But he
5 looked at me. I thought he was going to really kill me but
6 he didn't. I don't know why.

7 Well, in any event we arrived in-- all those
8 things I know now-- I saw the sign, it was Freiberg, Saxonia,
9 that's in Germany. And a piece of a coal from the train fell
10 into my eye and started getting infected. And at that time,
11 you know, they separated us and they took us, well, it's-- it's
12 lots of things. They immediately ask if anybody speaks
13 German and they picked up the girls who were-- have flesh.
14 My girlfriend-- my girlfriend was with me-- I'm just now
15 confused. And she spoke German because she was six years old
16 and she had high school, that's very, like the equivalent of
17 college here, and I nudged her but she-- anybody with
18 sensitivities couldn't respond to a Nazi, you know, announce-
19 ment. But some were picked out and they became our kapos, so
20 whatever, because the Germans said that one Jew would kill
21 another, you know, they had intermediaries.

22 And they headed us into some place that
23 happened to be um-- factory of a airplane factory. And from
24 then on I never saw my girlfriend again because they-- she
25 was separated from me completely.

1 We were working day shifts and one time we're
2 coming back and there was another group of women walking,
3 they were night shift, and there was my girlfriend. We
4 couldn't talk or anything, just like-- so we/^{just}saw each other
5 once in passing, so I knew she was there too, that she was
6 okay at least so far.

7 And we were there (inaudible) 'til about April,
8 1945, working in Freiberg in this. And I experienced, I
9 didn't know at the time but I learned recently--

10 INTERVIEWER: What was the job?

11 TONIA: In a airplane factory, and I was doing the
12 tailend of the plane and we're working with Germans-- Germans
13 not Nazis, civilians who were doing the big work but we were
14 their helpers. And all kinds of things happened there too.
15 I don't know if you can get into that. But for example, I
16 was picked, I was lucky in a way to work with one man-- he's
17 a master, I had to call him master. He was a German and he,
18 he was doing the big work and he was-- and I was (inaudible)
19 I don't know, soft nails, and all these things that go
20 together, and I had small hands to be able to go into cracks
21 and putting (inaudible) and help him.

22 And they-- at one point, we were always
23 thirsty because there was lots of aluminum in the air and we
24 were always thirsty. We never get any water. But they were--
25 they were building some kind of big thing, like a street whole

1 block, the factory of planes and noise and, you know, and
2 those electric hammers and things. They were building some-
3 thing and I knew there was water, and there were Belgian
4 prisoners there too, Belgian, French, you recognize the French,
5 (walking) they were working freely but they had numbers on them. And
6 I went with the (inaudible) cup, they gave us a cup, so you
7 always carried the cup with you, and a spoon, you know, that
8 was like you're without that you couldn't live.

9 (outer)
10 And one point I went out to that other area
11 without any permission, because if you--toilet, you couldn't
12 go or anything, you had to have permission, and I went out
13 and I got-- there was a faucet and I got water and I drank
14 it, and I came back to my place. I thought I would die because
15 the unterscharfuhrer was right there. He was a, like a
16 picture out of Mein Kampf. He had gold teeth, he was tall,
17 he was crooked smile, and in uniform. He was standing right
18 in front of me. And he had shoes with soles so thick you
19 couldn't hear him coming. And he (had) berating me in--
20 in German, something like, you know, I know Yiddish-- good
21 thing you are-- you want to get sick, you want to drink water
22 from the faucet, you want this-- you sabotaging.

23 Anyway, the next thing I knew, he-- I used to
24 say before if a Nazi ever touched me I would commit suicide.
25 And we were working on the fourth floor and he swatted me like
that, and he had this ring with the skull head on it. I

1 thought my teeth fell out. But I touched them, they weren't,
2 but just blood came out. And I was lucky that he didn't take
3 my number. I-- he just took care of me right on the day,
4 because if he took number and I had to go later on he would
5 beat me. I don't think he could kill me because as they all
6 did everything by law, you know, the not killing.

7 And then I didn't know what to do. I was
8 so embarrassed, it was the most embarrassing thing that
9 happened to me because I was beaten up there. And I remember
10 telling people that I would commit suicide, and there was the
11 window, but I didn't commit suicide. And I still feel awful
12 about it; I didn't keep my word. That I didn't jump out the
13 window, you know.

14 INTERVIEWER: Why didn't you?

15 TONIA: I don't know.

16 INTERVIEWER: I'm so glad you didn't.

17 TONIA: I don't know--

18 INTERVIEWER: What were you thinking about then?

19 TONIA: No, I don't know, I suppose I was scared.

20 I can't explain it because I am kind of a-- they called me a
21 pessimist and things like that. But, I don't know why I
22 didn't. I swallowed my terrible pride and I-- I didn't do it.

23 And then they-- one night we were all in the
24 rooms and we were about 10 or 12 in the rooms, sleeping on
25 double bunks, two to a bunk. And they were infested with bed

1 bugs-- as another torture. It sounds ridiculous but that's
2 another torture, we could never sleep. We were constantly
3 bitten by the bed bugs. And we got up in the morning, we
4 were all bloody, and they smell awful when you squeeze a
5 bed bug. It has a horrible smell.

6 But one night, it was incredible, we heard like
7 boom, boom, boom. Boom, boom, boom, and I only learned
8 recently that we experienced the bombing of-- of Dresden. We
9 were about 30 miles from Dresden. It was the most incredible
10 night. All the Germans went away into the-- how they all
11 were petrified, they always went into the air raid, the
12 shelters, and they left us alone. We were locked in, left us
13 alone, and we hoped and we (inaudible) that we would be bombed
14 that we hoped that at least something was happening, we hoped
15 that they would bomb us, that we would finish up with those.

16 Meanwhile, it was a fantastic night because we
17 watched out through the windows and we saw those fantastic
18 lights. I don't know, I never knew why they was so-- it's
19 like fireworks, you know, like a fantastic firework job.

20 I learned recently from a Polish underground
21 officer that that was bombing of Dresden that I experienced.
22 And because of that I was in that film in Canada, they shipped
23 me to Canada, and that was a few years ago that they made this
24 little thing about my experiences.

25 And the other thing happened was-- there's

1 always a little-- I suppose there's always life, when there's
2 still life around, the Germans sent in the-- the pilots, the
3 young pilots. They had to learn about the airplanes.

4 Shall I hold that?

5 INTERVIEWER: That would be great. Thank you.

6 TONIA: The young pilots, they were shipped in and
7 on the-- they would have nothing to do with us, they were/as far away,
8 as the other side, but they were working too and they would
9 have gray uniforms. They were not Nazis, at least they didn't
10 have Nazi uniforms. And, and one time one of them shouted
11 over to my master to send me over, like a thing, you know, I'm
12 just-- I had a number. Send her over because something fell
13 into this piece of equipment he was working, and he couldn't
14 get his hand in. And I had smaller hands, so my master told
15 me to go over there. It was an incredible experience because
16 he was running around, he couldn't talk to me. If he talked
17 to me he'd be shot on the spot because we constantly-- the
18 ^{were} unterscharfuhrer was going, and they / women to care for us.

19 You asked me about women, yes, they were
20 worse as far as I'm concerned-- I don't know, because we were
21 young and some girls were very beautiful. I wasn't. Maybe
22 my face wasn't bad but I had very straight hair, look like a
23 porcupine, but some girls with the curly hair, they look like
24 a poodle haircut. There were really, the Nazi women were
25 really ugly. I mean, they were fat and they were-- not

1 because they were fat but they were gross looking and (inaudible)
2 they were all from like the, they were maids, they were from
3 the very lower part of society. And they were really envious
4 of us because the pretty girls. And I was beaten up by them
5 and kicked and anything, just-- they couldn't--

6 Well, when I was sent over to him to help
7 him out he was running around, around this equipment, saying,
8 "Oh what a wonderful war. Oh what a wonderful war," in
9 German. "Oh, my family's killed. Oh, my family's burned."
10 So I imagine his family was bombed. And your heart goes out.
11 I mean doesn't matter, you know, it was-- it was (inaudible)
12 German, and he was another human being. Well, it was-- that
13 was an incredible experience.

14 Okay, and then Christmas came and they didn't
15 know what to do with us because all (each other) a big thing
16 for Germans, they call it Weinachten. So my master-- or,
17 one thing I have to go back.

18 When I was hit by the unterscharfuhrer, and my
19 master was standing, standing there, facing the wall, and when
20 the unterscharfuhrer left, my master turned around and he had
21 one eye artificial, and I saw from the other eye, there were
22 tears coming down his face. And I realized he was really
23 human. (Spoken while crying) I wish I knew his name. And
24 then I realized that he was also being punished. He couldn't
25 talk to me because he was not allowed. He would be shot. He

1 tole me that he comes from a-- was coming from a northern
2 city and his family was there because he didn't join the Nazis.
3 I don't know if I imagined this or he really told me, but I
4 had this feeling. And his food wasn't fantastic-- I mean to
5 me it was like a feast, but he had just black bread and some
6 salami and black coffee. And then he scolded me. We had
7 wing between us, and he was talking like this way, away from
8 me, "Why didn't you tell me you were going for water? Why
9 didn't you tell me you were going for water? You stupid,"
10 whatever, you know, then he would like watch out for me. But
11 then we became very close, without talking.

12 So before Christmas he told me he was going
13 home, so I made him little toys for his children, from the
14 aluminum, the scraps. It's hard to explain but there are
15 soft nails like that you squeeze together for the airplanes,
16 I made a little comb that goes into a little-- that goes
17 into a little case like, you know, with the nail. And I made
18 him this. And for another girl I made-- I don't know how
19 many, I think he had four children. Anyway, I made certain
20 things and he took them, and when he came back he brought me
21 Zweibak, you know, it's like a-- oh, you can buy it-- it's
22 like a piece of bread that dried out, but you can buy it
23 arleady--

24 INTERVIEWER: Matzo.

25 TONIA: No, not matzo, no. It's a--

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1 INTERVIEWER: Cracker?

2 TONIA: Not a cracker, no. I have seen it at the--
3 who makes those famous cookies? I've seen them, people--
4 piece of bread that-- that they always good, like they--
5 kind of toasted.

6 Anyway, and he told me when he came there is
7 something in-- in the wing, inside the wing, you know, for
8 me. And there it was, that. And then he-- and then he was
9 building himself a suitcase and I was watching for him. He
10 told me he's building a suitcase for himself, so everytime I
11 saw a Nazi coming, he was-- he pretended that he's working
12 on the wing with me, you know, he was hiding it. It's hard
13 to explain.

14 INTERVIEWER: He wasn't a Jew, he was a German

15 TONIA: No, no, no, he was a German. German. But
16 he was also being punished for something.

17 INTERVIEWER: Oh.

18 TONIA: Because they took him away from his family
19 Maybe he-- I imagine, I don't know if he told me or I imagined
20 that he was-- didn't join the Nazis or whatever. He was
21 being punished for some reason, being there.

22 INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

23 TONIA: And the, the-- then another thing happened
24 so now I knew where the water was. So he was watching out and
25 I went for-- I was dying of thirst and the-- because of this

1 aluminum. I could feel it in my mouth, those particles. I
2 went for water once, it was all dark in there like they were
3 constructing something. And all of a sudden somebody said,
4 "Psst, psst," to me. And I was petrified, and there was a
5 Belgian prisoner on the other side, it's just far away, the
6 other side of the street, and he-- he said to me to be like
7 quiet, and he rolled me an apple.

8 INTERVIEWER: He what?

9 TONIA: He rolled me an apple. He had an apple and
10 he rolled it to me, and I was like, a, you know, like a rat.
11 You look around, and I put it right in my bosom. And then
12 became friends, I mean unspeaking friends. He was very tall,
13 and strange looking. You know, I know he was Belgian because
14 of his-- whatever he had on told me he was Belgian. I don't
15 know how. And then became friends, so I sometimes met him
16 there. He was far away, and he rolled me an apple occasionally,
17 so I want to do something for him. I received-- I had a
18 sleeveless so I took the wool from the lower part and I made
19 myself needles and I knitted him earmuffs. So I-- so I left
20 it there. I mean, it's a whole world, within a world there's
21 a whole world.

22 But now let me go back to that Nazi soldier
23 because I think it's important. One time there was a terrible
24 raid, a terrible, terrible raid. Americans. We were so
25 happy we were jumping up and down-- we thought were Americans.

1 We could see the planes, very low coming. And we were all
2 very happy. As soon as there was a raid we were very, very
3 happy because it meant something was happening. Even if we
4 were perishing it would be great. And all the Germans are
5 petrified and they just like rats, ran away and locked us up
6 in the factory, and they run down, and we could see them from
7 the fourth story window, to the shelters. And we were stand-
8 ing by the window./ I mean, the I was alone because/other people were
9 always separated in another area.

10 And all of a sudden I feel that-- that that
11 pilot, that young pilot, he didn't go down. And he remained
12 there, and it was-- I know I-- I don't know how to explain
13 it, but it was like a love affair. I mean without touching or
14 anything, he was just there. It was incredible. But the--
15 I just think of it sometimes, you know, then I never saw him
16 again.

17 INTERVIEWER: You never saw him. This is the man
18 that rolled you the apple.

19 TONIA: No.

20 INTERVIEWER: No.

21 TONIA: It's so confusing, the Belgian prisoner
22 rolled me the apple in the construction area.

23 INTERVIEWER: Right.

24 TONIA: This was the pilot that worked on the other
25 side of the-- the giant room, that one time my master sent

1 me over to pick up some equipment that fell into the wing.
2 And he was there always. They sent them in-- I don't know
3 how I knew that, maybe they told us, he told me, for three
4 months each pilot had to go in for three months to learn
5 about the mechanics of the plane.

6 And when this terrible air raid came he didn't
7 go down. He was upstairs. So the two of us were in the
8 dark by the window. We just-- you know, if a bomb came we
9 all would-- would be killed or anything, you know, if they
10 bomb this place. But it just is interesting how, as long as
11 there is life-- not in Auschwitz, Auschwitz was death. It
12 was for me, I don't know about people who were there long.
13 Auschwitz was death. I mean, you have no food, you have no
14 sex, you have no, you know, food.

15 But there was-- we still had like a little
16 food, comparatively. We-- you know, they had to feed us so
17 we could do the work. So we were there together, was for
18 about a couple of hours. Was just-- I think of it a lot,
19 you know, I was 18, and--

20 INTERVIEWER: Fell in love a little.

21 TONIA: Maybe there was something, yeah.

22 INTERVIEWER: This was a German pilot?

23 TONIA: Oh, yes, absolutely.

24 INTERVIEWER: And he-- was he sympathetic to what
25 situation you were in?

1 TONIA: I think he was very sympathetic because he
2 was telling me about-- he was the one who was running around
3 saying all, "They all killed. They all burned. They all--"
4 so I imagine his family must have been burned in a raid or,
5 you know, killed in a raid. Yeah, he was like-- (inaudible)
6 Then I never saw him again.

7 INTERVIEWER: That one night was the only time you
8 were with him?

9 TONIA: Yeah. Well, one time before when I went over
10 and of course we saw each other across. We could never talk
11 to each other, you know, or anything because he would be
12 killed immediately and I would be killed. (Inaudible)
13 But there was there, there was like

14 INTERVIEWER: He was a German pilot.

15 TONIA: He was a German pilot, yeah.

16 INTERVIEWER: Oh, he'd be killed for talking to a
17 Jew.

18 TONIA: Oh yeah, right. You couldn't talk to me or
19 my master couldn't talk to me.

20 INTERVIEWER: And the two hours that you spent
21 together.

22 TONIA: And then that one night we spent two hours
23 together.

24 INTERVIEWER: And it was wonderful?

25 TONIA: It was-- it was great, it was like a human

1 kind of a relationship and-- and ~~the~~ fact that he was German
2 was completely erased, you know, there was something happening.
3 Couldn't even talk because I didn't know German. I don't
4 know what-- he maybe-- he was probably talking to me because
5 nobody was there to watch us. But there was some kind-- there
6 was some kind of a thing happening between us. So I-- I'm
7 just thinking of the (inaudible)

8 INTERVIEWER: So what did you do, you just sat with
9 each other?

10 TONIA: We didn't sit, there was no place to sit.
11 We stood by the window. It was like a factory-- there was a
12 factory, an airplane factory. And when we heard the siren
13 again, that it was over, because there are many air raids and
14 we knew the Germans would come back, he went back to his place.
15 He was just very close to me, I could feel-- originally I
16 could just feel him, like (inaudible)

17 INTERVIEWER: Do you know his name?

18 TONIA: What?

19 INTERVIEWER: Do you know his name?

20 TONIA: Nothing, no. He's probably dead.

21 INTERVIEWER: Did you have any other --

22 TONIA: And that's it?

23 INTERVIEWER: No, no, no, I just-- then we-- then--
24 now we can go.

25 TONIA: Oh, okay. No, it's just that the Belgian was

1 just a beautiful person. I mean he was just-- what the--
2 what the Belgian did, he-- he rolled me the apple twice and
3 I made him the earmuffs. This was just like another human
4 being that gives you encouragement to live. Without them you
5 couldn't possibly-- yeah.

6 INTERVIEWER: Did you see anybody--

7 TONIA: I don't know why I'm telling you this, I
8 always tell not this thing I tell to occasionally to people
9 because I think it's kind of interesting--

10 INTERVIEWER: (All people carrying something)??

11 TONIA: --but I always tell about my master. I think
12 I do it because I-- I want to show some humanity. I can't
13 accept that they were really not human. That-- Auschwitz
14 was not human. Auschwitz was a horror. Auschwitz was like a
15 madhouse. It was-- it was completely out. But here we got
16 food once a day. We still kind of on the edge of, you know,
17 living. They had to feed us, as I mentioned before, because
18 we had to work, we worked very hard. The things-- you had
19 muscles. You should see my muscles. You know, from the hammer,
20 the air hammer, you know, when I first did it I thought I go
21 crazy, but then I learned to hold onto it, you know, so I just--

22 INTERVIEWER: Was there any other humanity, any
23 other connections with people, German people?

24 TONIA: Well, I saw another thing when I first
25 arrived in Auschwitz. And I tell it to my son and my son sees

1 it as human; I saw it as human. Where we were-- we're going
2 back now when I first arrived from the trains and we were still
3 clothed. One-- there was a woman with a baby next to me,
4 and a German, a Nazi, but a low soldier, there she is and we
5 didn't know what was happening, we looked bewildered, and he
6 ran over to her and tore the baby away from her, stuck it to
7 an old woman-- she probably was younger than I-- an older
8 woman's arm, and she went to another side.

9 And the mother was hysterical, running, but he
10 told her to stay here. To me this was-- how do you see that
11 thing?

12 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I agree with you.

13 TONIA: But not Nicky, my other son, (inaudible)
14 he doesn't, he thinks this was inhuman to take it away from
15 the mother. But to me--

16 INTERVIEWER: But it saved her life.

17 TONIA: --he saved-- well, I don't know, at that
18 moment he saved her--

19 INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

20 TONIA: --life. She may be ashes now. But the--
21 according--
22 /Nicky doesn't see this way. So before Nicky I always thought
23 it was human but now with Nicky, I don't know.

24 INTERVIEWER: Anything else come to your mind?
25 Any others, human connection?

TONIA: No. No, (inaudible).

1 INTERVIEWER: Did you see anyone having romances
2 in the camp?

3 TONIA: There was a terrible thing happened in that
4 same working camp. I'm talking about working camp now,
5 Auschwitz if out. That's-- I don't know what happened,
6 people who there a long time, but it was, it's just undescrib-
7 able. I mean, I couldn't even tell you there are no words
8 describe it, you know, the language is too poor for that.

9 But in that working camp there was a woman and
10 a German ran away. And we were lined up, every tenth one--
11 I was the ninth one. I didn't even know what it was, only
12 later that I learned what it was. They called us in the
13 middle of the night. We had to stand with no shoes or
14 anything in mud. That was November or December. And the
15 rumor went out that a Jewish-- there were girls that I didn't
16 even know, there were 250 girls. I didn't have no connection .
17 I was working here and I was sleeping there and I never saw
18 these-- I mean I saw them maybe but I couldn't recognize
19 them.

20 There was a rumor that one German ran away
21 with a-- they ran away, and that was the German punishment,
22 they take every tenth person out. You heard about that.

23 INTERVIEWER: To shoot them?

24 TONIA: To shoot them, yeah. And I was the ninth
25 one, so I don't know. That's all I know.

1 INTERVIEWER: How about--

2 TONIA: And then I heard that they were caught and
3 killed but I don't know how this--

4 INTERVIEWER: How about the--

5 TONIA: Some of the girls were incredible. I mean
6 just like people anywhere. As I said again, we were still
7 young, remember. I don't know if you ever saw the pictures
8 of Biafra, the mother looks decrepit but the child is still
9 has flesh on it, and we were-- I'm ashamed in a way, but
10 we still-- well, I didn't look like now-- but still looked--
11 if you dressed us up you could look like quote, "normal", yeah.

12 And some of them were incredible.

13 INTERVIEWER: Did you see any of the--

14 TONIA: You know they were all very young--

15 INTERVIEWER: Right.

16 TONIA: They were just between 15 and 16 to 20.

17 INTERVIEWER: Did any of the women become lovers
18 with any of the other women in the-- in any--

19 TONIA: No, I don't know of that but the Nazis
20 women terrible, terrible. Yeah, they picked some girls, yeah,
21 I was lucky not to be picked. I was picked once but it was
22 terrible-- but there was one woman--

23 INTERVIEWER: You were picked once; you had to sleep
24 with a (inaudible)

25 TONIA: No, it didn't go that far but the way she

1 looked at me, it-- I knew-- and she was known. She was an
2 older woman, bitch of the first degree, but she was a lesbian.
3 All knew it, And a-- I don't know, I heard that some-- I
4 don't know how-- she forced-- she could force anything.
5 She could do anything she want. I mean, you know, under the--
6 she had two, not only one gun, she had two guns on each side.

7 But they were privileged, you could know that
8 some very beautiful girls, very pretty were--

9 INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible)

10 TONIA: I don't know what they did. But I was once
11 she put me out from the line, took me out, and there was
12 something terrible about her, I can tell you, something--
13 something-- they generate perverted. She didn't do anything
14 to me but she gave me a shirt. I had a shirt/ a little blue
15 collar--

16 INTERVIEWER: Did--

17 TONIA: --that I slept in the night, I folded it up
18 and I slept on it so it looks nice.

19 The most incredible thing happened. We-- we
20 washed outside, you know, not inside. Out. And it was cold,
21 it was wintertime, but we washed. There was something, the
22 cleanliness-- my husband always-- he's American-- he says,
23 "What are you washing always?" I'm not changed now but this
24 really made us survive. Just to keep clean.

25 Still, we were aware of it, I don't know why

1 because-- why, as I said, I folded my-- my little night--
2 was a little nightgown I got, the little blue collar, was pink
3 folded it up so it looked like crease-- like fresh, like you
4 know, like it was ironed. We cared the way we looked, at
5 least the way I-- I did, and I know some people around me
6 did too. So/^{we still--}whatever hair we had we did like this, you know.
7 I couldn't do anything with mine, mine stood up like a
8 porcupine it was so straight. Now I have waves, I don't
9 know how, it was very straight hair.

10 But yes, she was a terrible Nazi. She was
11 a terrible woman. It's something.

12 INTERVIEWER: What about medical experiments? Did
13 you see any?

14 TONIA: No, no. I didn't. If I--

15 INTERVIEWER: What about abortions? Did you see
16 or do any abortions?

17 TONIA: No, I didn't. There were children born
18 on the way out, yeah. I-- I want --

19 INTERVIEWER: What did you see--

20 TONIA:--to tell you another if you want to know that
21 experience I had. Okay, so we got in the working camp and
22 that was like, quote, "normal", like they give us a shower
23 once a week. They had to otherwise they would be infected.
24 They showered-- we had to go to a certain place, take a
25 shower. Looked almost like the showers with the gas but it

1 was a real shower, and we were all together, like maybe 40
2 people taking a shower. And there was the German, the unter-
3 scharfuhrer walked around. I mean, they were all perverted
4 people. I mean, so he walked around and one-- one time, this
5 I told to my son the first time (inaudible) very much
6 in toward the one that was here) I was embarrassed to tell
7 him but I told him because this is what the impression did
8 on me.

9 At one point I was 18, so he took me out while
10 I'm taking a shower, he said, "Come with me." Now, one of
11 my weaknesses, I don't know if I should tell you, but don't
12 put it in--

13 INTERVIEWER: Okay.

14 TONIA: --just for you. I had what I considered
15 large breasts because the typical Polish Christian, I mean
16 the beauty was small breasts-- I mean (inaudible) they all
17 have small little breasts. And the man fits his hand around
18 her breast, you know, you read this all out of books. And I neede
19 I thought, I needed two hands for mine. I was pretty small
20 and my hips are even smaller, but I was pretty large
21 now (inaudible). So anyway, so I had this-- when I came to
22 America I realize its nice breasts, my aunt told me, I have an
23 aunt here. Elizabeth Taylor-- you know.

24 Okay, so I was taking a shower, he takes me
25 out of the shower and we go to outside and he, oh, disgusting,

1 he had a pencil or something. He said to my breasts, "What's
2 this?" I didn't know what he was talking about. So he said
3 to me, "Are you going to have a baby?" I was-- I had no ever
4 relationship at the time, I am sorry to say. I mean, if I
5 knew-- (inaudible) different, you know.

6 So I says, "No. What do you mean?" you know.
7 He says, "Well, are you going to have a baby, are you (inaudible)
8 a German speaking. Anyway, he was thinking I was pregnant
9 because of my breasts being-- only now, really I know that
10 your breasts do become bigger. And he was poking them around
11 and the-- because there were pregnant women and they sent
12 them back to camp, to the death camps. And he could have sent
13 back. I don't know why, what stopped him. He took my word
14 for it, or maybe there was-- maybe there was so much amazement
15 in my look or whatever, or whatever it is, he did not send me
16 back to the death camp, he accepted me.

17 But that was-- I-- I don't know, I (inaudible)
18 people walk around naked, like my children and even I, you
19 know, from one room to another-- sometimes, not-- but to be
20 naked and somebody, a man, touch your breasts or talk about was
21 something that you never did. Was-- terrible, was, oh (inaudible)
22 you know, was like they humiliate-- the humiliation. I will
23 tell you the humiliations was sometimes worse than the pain.
24 Like walking around naked or being exposed and men looking at
25 you, you know, men that you had nothing to do with. And Nazis,

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1 it was just terrible. But that's-- but there women who were
2 pregnant and they were sent back. But then the women who
3 were pregnant were either women who didn't know they were
4 pregnant yet or they didn't say. And there was some children
5 born right in the trains.

6 So we were there in April, and in April,
7 around that time, again they shipped us out. To Mau-- I
8 didn't know at that time, but to Mauthausen. It took about
9 two or three weeks we were en route, because by that time, I
10 imagine that the war was coming to an end. We didn't know
11 it, but they-- the railroads were bombed.

12 Anyway, we sometimes stood for days and
13 nights in one spot, in the railroad, without no food or
14 anything.

15 INTERVIEWER: How long were you in Mauthausen?

16 TONIA: Mauthausen, about three weeks before the
17 war ended. But then--

18 INTERVIEWER: And then you were liberated from
19 Mauthausen.

20 TONIA: Liberated by the Americans, yes.

21 INTERVIEWER: How were you feeling then when
22 liberation day came?

23 TONIA: How-- what--

24 INTERVIEWER: What-- what were you feeling when
25 you were liberated?

TONIA ROTKOPT BLAIR

1 TONIA: Oh my God, it was-- it was just-- we got
2 to Mauthausen and-- I'm getting exhausted (inaudible)--
3 we didn't know it but the Nazis weren't there anymore, but we
4 didn't know it. What they did, they dressed some of the kapos
5 in Nazi uniforms. See, all the Nazis ran away. The war was
6 coming to an end. There were many, many things happen between
7 last what I said and-- but we may just skip it, otherwise we
8 go on--

9 We didn't know this. So, okay, we got to
10 Mauthausen and from the train, and we walk, we walk all the way
11 to the camp. I want to take the trip one day, I must take it,
12 because with all the horror and agony, people just falling by
13 wayside. People just falling. But there was the blue Danube
14 and I'll never forget that. I love the country, you know, I
15 just-- and that was, walked all along there to the camp and
16 then we got to the camps, and at that time I didn't know it
17 either but one point my girlfriend and I, we managed to go
18 together, this (inaudible) who committed suicide from the
19 working camp in Frieberg, on the train together. And somebody,
20 a soldier, a uniformiguy, came over and offered us
21 a can of sardines. We didn't (inaudible) we were holding on,
22 we didn't want to take it.

23 I understand later on this was / ^{the} Swedish sent
24 in the food for the-- to give it. And those were not Nazis,
25 they just didn't have any uniform-- they had a uniform but we

1 didn't realize that they were not Nazis. They wore guns, but
2 we didn't know.

3 And then they took us, we were 250 girls,
4 or, many died already but they want to give a shower, a real
5 shower, and that was really incredible, the story. They told
6 us to line up to take a shower but to us a shower only meant
7 one thing, the gas shower. So we're like lining up like
8 (inaudible) of the day, and every time the people who came to
9 the front ran to the back. We should have realized that
10 nobody's killing us, that something is there astray, but we
11 didn't. But the front came to the back, and pretty soon they
12 couldn't manage us, so they really forced it, but without
13 violence, forced us to take the-- to go in.

14 And we said goodbye to each other. We kissed
15 each other because we knew this was the end. But it was a
16 real shower.

17 INTERVIEWER: What did you feel like thinking you
18 were going to die in five minutes?

19 TONIA: I don't know, Sweetie, right now. It was
20 just terrible. We wanted to die because-- we wanted to die
21 desparately. On the way from Frieberg to Mauthausen, I told
22 you, about three weeks on the train, open train-- was raining,
23 was terrible. Cattle train. Open. You know, like for coal.

24 So we cried, we said, "Please kill us. Please
25 kill us. And the unterscharfuhrer, he said, "Oh, don't worry,

1 you'll be burning very soon. You'll be so hot, you be
2 burning."

3 We said, "We want to, we want to." And he
4 said, first he said, "We wouldn't waste a bullet on you."
5 And then-- but this was really showers. And then we
6 realized it was. So then my girlfriend, when she got undressed
7 I didn't recognize her. At all. I said, (Blue-ma, Blue-ma)
8 there
9 and/she was right there. It was-- she had breasts, they
10 like
11 were/little tiny bags. You know, little tiny bags hanging
12 down. Just bones. It was just incredible. I didn't
13 recognize her at all.

14 And then we held onto each other, and then
15 they put us into barracks. And then we just waited. We were
16 in the barracks, nobody was bothering us, and we were just
17 complete-- some people couldn't move. And my girlfriend,
18 (Blue-ma), blood came out from her. And I could move a little
19 bit, I don't know, I was just a-- so I was sitting outside,
20 just imagine, a barrack in the beautiful country of the-- in
21 Austria, in the valley there. Hot. I was sitting outside
22 like this, leaning against-- I was-- I crawled outside, and
23 I look up and there were like high roads, and I saw something
24 white and a cross on it.

25 I don't know where I got the idea because--
but I starting shouting, "The Americans, the Americans." I
was like an idiot. I crawled inside like this, on all four.

1 Some heads just lifted like this. People were lying like
2 that, you know, like sardines. Some heads, there was no--
3 there was nothing. Some heads lifted a little. I said,
4 "Americans!" That's when the Americans came.

5 And then I was there and a few hours later,
6 (later)
7 I'm sorry to say, whatever, so elated, Americans did come, so
8 (inaudible). They were so afraid of us. They had a blanket--
9 they were so stupid. They had-- four guys came in with an army
10 blanket, each one holding an end of it, and they had-- guess
11 what they had in it? Chocolate. And they-- and they spray--
12 they sprayed us with DDT. They sprayed us, just-- just like
13 the Nazis. Everywhere-- everywhere we went the Nazis
14 sprayed us. They sprayed us with, like-- like, for, you
15 know, like roaches.

16 And we were-- but I suppose they were afraid
17 of infections. And then they moved us, again separated from
18 my girlfriend because she was in a pile of blood. We thought
19 she had TB, but no, there was some kind of a lack of calcium.

20 People had different reactions. So they took
21 her, I didn't see her for about a month. I thought-- and
22 they took us and they put us in the Nazi barracks, and became
23 like a hospital. And people dying, dying, they couldn't save
24 them. It was terrible.

25 And they announced immediately: Any nurses
any nurses. And I, for some reason, recovered very quickly,

1 so I immediately-- I wish I had a picture of me, I had a
2 stomach like that. We had no periods, luckily God took it
3 away from us. No periods.

4 INTERVIEWER: Right. Why no period?

5 TONIA: You know, because of the-- physically/the ^{we were-}
6 body was so depleted that the-- medically we couldn't have
7 our period, because--

8 INTERVIEWER: When did you get your period back?

9 TONIA: That was another tragedy. Story. About
10 four months after the war. And before I got it I almost
11 killed myself-- not knowingly, because-- then I became a
12 nurse with Americans and I gave plasma to people and I saw
13 people dying all the time. It was like another little--
14 another life.

15 And it was just-- plasma, yes, the blood.
16 But that was-- we had to dilute it with water, they had--
17 (inaudible) you know, (inaudible) water and powder. They
18 taught me how to do it. And they (inaudible) I thought they
19 were so beautiful. And they had lipstick on. (inaudible)

20 Well, I got-- started getting terrible pains.
21 So I started taking-- I had access to the drugs. Another
22 thing is, we all had drugs. We all going to commit suicide
23 eventually, I don't know why-- I don't know what I was
24 waiting for, but I postponed-- that was after the war because
25 it was-- and, so I started taking belladonna, and I was out--

1 and I-- I almost poisoned myself. I was out for about 48
2 hours.

3 When I came to there were people standing over
4 me and they-- and they were doing like this to me. But
5 I somehow came out. I kept (taking it) two drops, but I had
6 then I got my period. (inaudible)/terrible cramps, and

7 And I got a picture, Captain (Aust-rick), I
8 wish I knew where he was. He said to me-- I don't know
9 what language he talked-- he said he's going to Japan, and we
10 said, "You're going to Japan on a visit?"

11 He said, "There is war going on." We didn't
12 know anything. There was a war. That was-- that was--

13 INTERVIEWER: You didn't know there was a war?

14 TONIA: Oh, no. We don't know nothing. That was--
15 that was the end. And there was a whole, many stories
16 afterwards, but they--

17 INTERVIEWER: We have about ten more minutes of
18 tape.

19 TONIA: Yeah.

20 INTERVIEWER: And then where did you go?

21 TONIA: I don't know if I should tell you that.
22 But-- my girlfriend came back from where she was and I was
23 prejudice against Americans.

24 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I would be too.

25 TONIA: Why?

1 INTERVIEWER: Because America wouldn't let the Jews in
2 this country.

3 TONIA: Well, I didn't know anything about that.
4 But, I come from a socialist home-- and America!

5 INTERVIEWER: Great. I'm a socialist.

6 TONIA: No kidding. There were bundists, I don't
7 know if you know anything about the bundists,--

8 INTERVIEWER: Yes, of course.

9 TONIA: --they were the-- culture was so-- and
10 we're not prejudice--

11 INTERVIEWER: So Americans were all capatalists

12 TONIA: Capitalists, exactly, they were all
13 capatialists, and they were no good, and that's an arrogance
14 too in a certain way. And Russia was our idol.

15 So what happened, after a few months my girl-
16 friend-- and also the Americans, the arrogance, they all
17 looked very handsome and very clean, the soldiers, and they
18 would say, "Baby, chocolate," and something-- there was
19 something about it-- "Baby, chocolate." I mean, we were
20 all "babies".

21 INTERVIEWER: Babies?

22 TONIA: I finally-- well, they call you "Baby",
23 you know.

24 INTERVIEWER: Oh, "Hi, Baby"? Yeah.

25 TONIA: "Hi, Baby. Hi, Baby." So, --

1 INTERVIEWER: Right.

2 TONIA: --I really shouldn't have felt this way.
3 But anyway, so after a few months, this is in Mauthausen,
4 after the war we are now-- I'm a nurse, and we-- and people
5 sick and dying. There were men-- they're many-- I just--
6 (inaudible) wasn't liberated, I must talk to him about that.
7 So I met him once, you know (inaudible) (Wiesenthal)

8 So after a few months there was-- they were
9 allies, Americans, and Russians, but they made an agreement
10 the Americans who would drove from that area and the Russians
11 would come in, just as a mutual agreement, to make the
12 frontier straighter or whatever. I don't know, whatever.

13 Well, the Americans started proclaiming this
14 on the loudspeakers, a few weeks in advance that they were
15 going to leave, and the Russians coming in. And says every-
16 body's welcome to go to Americans, everybody. And they-- I
17 don't know why they want us to go with them but my girlfriend
18 was/^aCommunist before the war-- I never belonged, anyway,
19 because I never agree with everything, but I do join like
20 anti-Vietnam or-- I was here two years ago for the anti-
21 nuclear march, you know. Yeah, I'm very-- very--

22 So my girlfriend, we decided we won't go.
23 I'll say she decided, because I was-- you know, another thing
24 she committed suicide, she knew Heinrich (Schiener) You know
25 Heinrich / (Schiener) the poet?

1 If not for (Schiener) and her poetry, ^{we} would
2 never survive. We recited this poetry, like one poem-- and I
3 never knew because my education was very low compared to hers,
4 she had high school and I didn't. I had just-- didn't even
5 finish grade school-- was so young. I had-- enough, I
6 (inaudible) you know.

7 But there was one poem, like : Meine schmersee.
8 Meine Klagen (Phonetic: She das book a gossen. Und ven
9 (My complaints) do-as auf kess slagen. Hi ver mine heart
a slossen)

10 Do you understand? It's just-- you know,
11 Yiddish a little bit? It's-- anyway, she taught me Heinrich
12 and
/she was like my education. And it was just fantastic.
13 She wrote poetry too. And we didn't know how you got--
14 but then, anyway, so they-- we decided not to go to Americans,
15 so we-- so we-- and we saw the Russians coming. They looked
16 like they went through a war-- that was about three months
17 after-- they looked awful, but beautiful.

18 They had shoes-- they had-- they had rope
19 (inaudible) of the rifles, no leather but ropes. Anyway,
20 they're very proud. Well, there's a whole story to it.

21 But at one point they arrived, and the
22 Americans, we had friends, and some of them-- there were
23 some love stories with some girls. And I had Captain
24 (Aus-age), no love story, but he was just beautiful. I think
25 he thought I was too innocent-- I looked so innocent.

1 But he did leave us lots of plasma. Yeah.
2 And cigarettes, lots of Camels-- the first time I had a
3 Camel, I used to smoke a lot, and I didn't have a cigarette
4 but it was fashionable to smoke when you're young, you know.
5 But the first time I had a Camel I fainted. Oh, I took--
6 you know, a drag of that.

7 Anyway, so when the American-- so then the
8 Americans gone and the Russians were there, so we-- we
9 could understand each other better because it's a Slavic
10 language, you know. And at one point-- they-- they just--
11 I don't know how we were in the same room-- I was immediately
12 was understood too because they were the same people, and I
13 offered them Camels and they said, "No, thank you. No
14 capitalist cigarette." I couldn't believe it!

15 And they took out their paper, newspaper--
16 a piece of newspaper-- no, no, they tore out a piece of
17 newspaper and they had the tobacco, and they rolled it and
18 they smoked. They did not take an American cigarette. It
19 was incredible.

20 Of course I was romanticized, but I had a
21 bad experience with them too.

22 INTERVIEWER: Did you see any resistance movements?

23 TONIA: No, I must admit, I didn't. I was very
24 young. My father was very radical but he was not around, and
25 I was very young and I was a nurse in the very beginning and

1 I lived in the hospital, and when I was sick I was in the
2 children's ward. I was sick for almost a whole year with all
3 the children diseases. With diptheria and then-- then I had
4 the (puff) on my lungs. So I really didn't, I'm sorry to say.

5 INTERVIEWER: Ruth, when you're done we'll go

6 (Unidentified voice: Inaudible)

7 INTERVIEWER: Okay.

8 TONIA: So, I didn't see any resistance at the--
9 at all, because I was involved in the work and then I was in
10 the hospital was my whole life. I-- I was-- people dying.
11 It was just-- I was a very advanced nurse, I was the head
12 of a (house), you know, in my young age. Of the whole floor.

13 I was also sick a lot. And when I was sick
14 and there was the raid in 1942, the nurses hid me, otherwise
15 I would have gone with the--

16 INTERVIEWER: Where did you go after the war?

17 TONIA: After-- well, the Russians immediately,
18 as opposed to Americans, as soon as you recovered more they
19 sent everybody back to their original country. So they sent
20 us back to-- well, we wanted to go. I don't know if they would
21 have forced us, what they-- where else would I go? I didn't--
22 I didn't have any place to go, I had to go back home.

23 And they were wonderful, really, they were
24 wonderful. And my girlfriend already tried to commit suicide
25 at that time. Once she took iodine. I could never understand

1 how she could do that because it's so painful.

2 INTERVIEWER: Iron?

3 TONIA: Iodine. She swallowed iodine. But we
4 rescued her. And so they-- there were about 15 of us and
5 they put us-- they confiscated the whole-- not-- not the
6 whole train, but one part-- a car. Just for us. They give
7 us lots of food. Bread and salami and wonderful food. And
8 they made a sign, because people were going and coming, people
9 were hanging on the rail-- on the outside of the train, but
10 they couldn't go into our car. They made our-- we went through
11 Vienna, we went to Poland.

12 We had a terrible welcome in Poland. And I
13 went back to Poland and it was-- when we arrived in Poland,
14 believe it or not, I was standing aside and a Polish uniform
15 guy on the-- we didn't know what to do, we just standing on
16 the train station, and all bewildered. And I was standing
17 on the side and a train of a-- one that works there with the
18 uniform, comes over to me and said, "Look at all the Jews.
19 We can't-- we thought they would be killed by Hitler, but
20 here they come crawling back."

21 You know, I was so petrified. And now I know
22 that I could have had him arrested, but I-- I couldn't arrest--
23 I could have because the Russians, you know. But I was still
24 so-- we just (got Poland back on view). I was trembling,
25 and pretty soon somebody, I don't know, somebody arrived and

1 asked (inaudible) and that-- that's it.

2 INTERVIEWER: And then where did you go?

3 TONIA: And then there were the Jews, and they
4 took us, they already had organized the place, and they took
5 us there. And-- and then was another story. There was
6 terrible anti-Semitism, at least that's what my experience was,
7 and I was under the influence of my girlfriend, and she found
8 a cousin, and we-- we tried to get out of-- we left, we
9 left Poland.

10 INTERVIEWER: And came to New York?

11 TONIA: No. Sweetie, that's a long way from New
12 York. Went to the American zone and we had a terrible
13 experience, one small bad thing. And I don't know if there's
14 time to talk about it--

15 INTERVIEWER: Yeah, we only have a couple more
16 minutes.

17 TONIA: Yeah.

18 INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you this: Did-- did you
19 feel, as a socialist that you-- were there a lot of political--
20 highly conscious political-- were the Jews, you know--

21 TONIA: We talk about the war-- during the war?

22 INTERVIEWER: During the war.

23 TONIA: Sweetheart, because I didn't have any family
24 and my father-- my one friend of my father was at least to
25 visit me, there was an older-- I mean, I don't know what

1 happened to him. I was always very radical. When I came to
2 this country I was always-- I identified with Blacks. I
3 felt close to them. I used to go to Harlem, and people
4 couldn't understand. But they-- they (mastered) them.

5 It just happened that I was left kind of like
6 a branch of a tree. See, my connection, my father,-- I was
7 14 when I got in the ghetto. I was working. So I was
8 (connected)
9 (inaudible) to the hospital, and I was a nurse, and I was sick
10 for a whole year. And so-- so that was my whole life.

11 And then I was (inaudible) to the (inaudible)
12 but they took me away because I was young, and they put me
13 in the children's, and I'm just crazy about children, I'm
14 like a born nurse, you know. Sicker you are, if you get better--
15 I don't know how good I am, but if you're sick-- so it was
16 my whole life, my whole-- so I really-- and people (inaudible)
17 and talk about it, whoever did it wouldn't approach me because
18 I either was too young or too-- if my father were around, my
19 mother, they were very active bundists before the war. They
20 would maybe find some friends.

21 So the only thing is that I saved some food
22 and gave it to my aunt. My aunt-- one of my aunts. The
23 whole four of them, two sons, they all just-- just died of
24 starvation. The last time I brought them a bread that I
25 saved up-- I don't know how I got this bread-- they were
crazy. I brought the bread and she took the bread and she

1 ran around the house, "Bread! Bread! Bread!" They were
2 dead within a week. Just dying in their beds. You know,
3 you-- right in the ghetto.

4 INTERVIEWER: What happened to your parents?

5 TONIA: Oh, I-- oh, they-- I told this in the
6 beginning,--

7 INTERVIEWER: Oh--

8 TONIA: We were separated, right in the very
9 beginning, yeah, and I never-- oh, I finally went, you know,
10 I went back to Poland; unwillingly, but I did. And I finally
11 found out what happened to my parents. My husband helped me
12 a lot, I could never have done it myself.

13 In 1942, we did correspond. I heard-- I got
14 a card from them, it was the most tragic thing. It was a card,
15 was written in pencil and it was all erased. I could not
16 make anything out except the name of the town it came from--
17 the postage stamp-- (Shana Doughna) (town in Poland, foothills
18 of Carpathian Mts.)

19 So two years ago, November, 1980, we went
20 back. It was a pilgrimage to the dead. And I said to my
21 husband, I won't go to Auschwitz, but I did. And I went to
22 Treblinka. And we found (Mis-Shana-Dowl-Na) And we found there
23 what happened to the jews

24 INTERVIEWER: Say that again. You said you found out
25 what happened?

26 TONIA: I finally find out-- found out what happened

1 to -- to my family. 'Til-- 'til two years ago, people ask
2 me, what happened to my family, and I would say I don't know.
3 If you don't know what happened to your family, I mean, you're
4 like nobody. You have no identity. You have no background.
5 You have no-- everybody needs an identity in life otherwise
6 you're like nothing. You-- when you meet people, they always
7 say, or-- oh, "What's your father do? Where do you come
8 from?" You know, it gives you a certain status.

9 I had nothing. I was my husband's wife, I
10 was my children's mother. I was even my dog's mother, you
11 know, Bridget. They knew me by Bridget, you know. Whatever.

12 But finally I took the courage, I wouldn't
13 say I made a decision, it was just kind of happened. The day
14 when I left for Poland, I was still at work at 4:30. And my
15 plane was at 10:00. 'Cause my husband had a job in Germany
16 and he said he's going, and I said, "Well, I can't. Why should
17 I go to Poland? Who are they to me, anyway?"

18 And I went back, and we went to (Mis-shana-dowl-na
19 We found that little town in southern Poland, and I found out
20 there what happened to the Jews. I just assumed that they
21 were there. That's-- because the last card I heard-- got,
22 was 1942, summer 1942. So in August 19, 1942, they round up
23 all the Jews in that area, 881 women, children, men, adolescents,
24 whatever, round them all up in a-- in a-- on a hill, and the
25 tragedy of it was that they made them stay there for 24 hours,

1 while the Polish Nazi collaborators, well the Nazis told them,
2 dug the grave. Just-- just-- I don't mind of somebody
3 comes to me and stick me out-- sticks a knife in me-- I
4 mean-- I don't mind, of course I mind. But I mean, the fear
5 is the worse thing. That's one thing I learned from that,
6 fear is the worse thing. To be afraid.

7 Something happens, God forbid, in a car
8 accident, you know, something happens, okay, you aren't aware
9 of it but it happens, it's another tragedy-- but, they were
10 there for 24 hours. Can you imagine to stand and know what's
11 going to happen to you? They shot them all. Shot them.
12 Killed them. And they threw them in the grave. And there's
13 a little monument that I have a picture of.

14 Some original Jews from that town escaped to
15 (two brothers)
16 Russia and (inaudible) survived and came back in '65, and they
17 (Sween-mon-taint)
18 built that monument (inaudible) . And I left also
19 some money, and for flowers, to put flowers. I put flowers
20 there.

21 And I had the most incredible experience in
22 the same day, by a Polish woman in the grave. So now I can
23 tell-- people say where your pare-- I have a grave. I have
24 a place. I have a frame of reference there. Died in 1942,
25 August 19. I light a little candle, we take time out with the
family and friends and we make-- I'm not religious in the
respect of, you know, organized religion. But we do take out

1 and I write their names, you know, we-- have a certain day,
2 but only they-- we couldn't find that monumment because it's
3 right in the, on a plowing field.

4 And we ask everybody around, and where's the
5 Jewish-- and nobody knew. Finally, we were going down the
6 street, we rented a little car, and we asked another lady,
7 we saw a Polish lady, a woman about 35 or whatever, and we
8 said, "Do you know where the Jewish monument is, and this--"

9 She said, "Sure, I know it. I take you
10 right to it."

11 I thought, you know, so she came in the car
12 and she was carrying food, packages, and she had beautiful
13 boots on and it was November, very muddy. So, she took us
14 there. And I said, "Oh thank you."

15 She said, "Well, you'll never be able to find
16 it. I take you there."

17 And I said to her, "You can't go with your
18 beautiful boots, you going to get muddy."

19 She says, "Ah, that's nothing." So she left
20 the food packages and she went with us, maybe like a half a
21 mile from where the car could go, the end of the road.

22 A gorgeous field, it's so beautiful there, I
23 can't tell you. It's just in the foothills of Carpathian
24 Mountains. And she was there, and she held my hand. And
25 then when I really broke down-- it's written in Yiddish and

1 in
2 in Hebrew and in Polish, that/this spot 881-- I have a
3 picture of it-- and she would embrace me and kissed me.
4 And then-- it was November and it got very dark, so she
5 asked us to go to her house and she made coffee for us.

6 I wonder-- I never knew that (inaudible)
7 had such (inaudible) coffee. And then she asked us to stay
8 for dinner and for the first time in 40 years I had real
9 Polish borsch. That the mother made, you know, for the
10 family. And she's a beautiful woman. And I think she's
11 beautiful. And she was so worried. It was the most incredible
12 thing she did because I couldn't face the world, I couldn't--
13 I had to have someone, some human warmth. And even my husband,
14 I mean, he's-- he's not Jewish, so he's-- I needed some
15 warmth.

16 And it's interesting enough that I'm Polish--

17 INTERVIEWER: Right.

18 TONIA: I'm Polish. You can't take away your
19 background. You can't take it away. I felt at home. I felt
20 some trepidations, like before the war and things, but I--
21 it's your whole background of hundreds of years that you're--
22 your ancestors lived there and the whole culture. And I
23 recognized certain things, people very often said to me, "Why
24 do you always apologize? Why do you always say "I'm sorry'?"
25 That's what the Poles, they're so apolo-- but that's in their
26 culture. They begin a sentence, "I'm sorry," you know, and

1 they kiss your hand. Nothing changes with the Communists--
2 or, things changed fantastically, there's no poverty, they
3 have-- it's really fantastic. It's unfortunate that they
4 should leave-- I mean they should leave and leave them alone.

5 But as for culture, you know, nothing change
6 they still call you "Ponee," you know, not like friend, but
7 they kiss your hand. One day I counted, my hand was kissed
8 40 times. But you know, that's the custom to. So they still--
9 the only thing that changed was the greatest, it's not poverty,
10 everybody works. Food. Because I know where to look for
11 poverty, I know this-- no slums. It was incredible, 1980,
12 now it may be different because of the-- and I had very--
13 and I found a Pole I never knew existed because we were so
14 separated because of anti-Semitism.

15 There was another-- there-- they are
16 different people, and I hope that they are not genuinely anti-
17 Semitic. That was because of the economic-- the conditions
18 and the church and this thing. But that was a-- so I'm very
19 happy about this (Mis-shaw-no-dough-na) So now I know where
20 they are. And now I can go back there, at least I can-- I
21 have a place to go.

22 INTERVIEWER: Did you see-- you know, I'm a
23 feminist. Did you see any, in the camps, unusual leadership
24 from women or (inaudible)

25 TONIA: I saw something unusual from women. I tell

1 you, when I went I was at the last leg of things, whoever was
2 a leader was killed, was murdered, was gone. I was like the
3 last, because I was a nurse so they needed me for the sick
4 people and then I was last, so, ah, I think we were all
5 feminists. I mean this feminist, just a new word. My
6 mother used to work, she was very socialist. We were-- we
7 were-- had education. Education was primary thing. I was
8 going to be a nurse, before the war I was planning to be a
9 nurse. I mean it was-- we were feminists. Women worked,
10 would
11 women/make decisions, women were doing-- I don't know where
12 they got this idea-- maybe it came from the American middle
13 class suburban women, that they were-- you know, they stayed
14 at home.

15 And another thing I don't-- one thing I don't
16 like about American feminists, to knock down the housewife.
17 That's a perfectly wonderful job. And I had the opportunity
18 to have both. And I think my job at home was much more
19 important than what I'm doing now. And so that-- departmental
20 assistant, they call. You know, what I do, is administrative
21 work for department at Columbia University Teachers College
22 but that was one thing that was a horrible thing that they
23 did. Because they-- they did two things: one, they knocked
24 down the women for doing-- for doing dishes or cleaning house
25 and it's the most important thing, to feed your family, to
give good food to your-- to your stomach. It-- it just, it

1 that's always happened.

2 I mean, the press-- and then another thing
3 they did, they elevated men's jobs to certain heights, so the
4 women I know who are feminists, only thing they want to do is
5 emulate men. I went to some famous workshops at Columbia.
6 I couldn't believe my eyes. I took the opposite stand. What
7 they want to do is make more money, let the men do the dishes;
8 the dishes are so terrible to do, why inflict your horrors on
9 somebody else? Why not show the men to be human.

10 Anyway, I think they're completely in some
11 respects miss the point. But in any new idea organization,
12 they have to make mistakes, and they learn by the mistakes.
13 And they-- that what happened-- another thing about women,
14 women are very oppress-- oppressive to other women. Again,
15 they take the man's point. I have heard women saying, oh,
16 the secretary should bring coffee. I never heard a man saying
17 that, and not in-- I know men/must have done it. And the--
18 and another thing-- well, anyway, that's another thing.

19 But I did particularly write a paper about
20 the housewife, because the housewife became here a derogatory
21 word. And to me it was strange because you judged a woman
22 as a housewife. She was a good wife. She was a good cook.
23 She prepared nice things. She had-- her house was in order.
24 I mean, this is more-- an administrator, what is she doing?
25 Like keeping the things in order, you know. But--

1 INTERVIEWER: I heard that--

2 TONIA: But what I did have, you asked me that
3 question, I didn't answer. There's so many things. On our
4 way from that, the working camp to Mauthausen, something most
5 incredible happened. That was the most horrible journey. I
6 mean just-- we really were sardines, we couldn't move. And
7 somethings, I don't understand what happened, the war--

8 INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible)

9 TONIA: Oh, thank you, Sweetie, thank you.
10 That-- something, during that time-- thank you (inaudible)
11 They, for some-- they still put in people from the outside
12 as Jews, into the train. I just don't know the-- the
13 philosophy. I know they-- of the German, who is Jew and who
14 isn't.

15 But anyway, at one point for the train, we
16 were about three weeks in transport. That was from the working
17 camp to Mauthausen, they put you, you were in very bad shape.
18 We were like sardines, we could-- some people couldn't move.
19 They were like giving up, they were dying. Women-- some
20 young girls who were German, but they were supposed to be
21 Jewish, the rest of the family weren't-- I don't understand--
22 but one woman, I think was Tito's girlfriend, because that's
23 what she said. I didn't make it up.

24 She was incredible. She had long black hair,
25 made into a bun, and to us it was like a queen, because we

1 had nothing. And she still had flesh-- skin. I mean, she
2 looked normal. And she must have been about 38 or 40, and
3 she kept us alive for the rest of the trip. There was-- she
4 was sitting at the back of the train, of the car, and she was
5 telling us stories. I don't know how I understood that
6 because she was Yugoslavian-- and was a Slavic language,
7 but it was in the tone of her voice. She was, whoever she
8 is, wherever she is, if I only knew--

9 What she did-- we were really at times forgot
10 where we were. She was encouraging us. She was singing to
11 us. She was doing the most-- I-- I have no words/^{how}to explain
12 what she did. When I-- I very often think of her. And just
13 to look at her, she looked like life. She-- I remember, she
14 had gorgeous feet too. And this hair. And the face. She was
15 like-- like hope, like there's still a possibility.

16 So if that's-- I-- I am sure there were
17 other incidents, but I can't think of it at the moment. But
18 she was incred-- she really kept us alive. I know some
19 of the women died, there was one dead one next to me,
20 but-- and^{we moved,}when/we had to all move together because we were
21 really like sardines, in a-- in a can. Okay.

22 INTERVIEWER: It must have been awful.

23 TONIA: I-- but you know, we were very into
24 Zionist. As a matter of fact, we used to have fist fights
25 with Zionists. Where the Hassidim were completely out.

1 There's so many things involved. First of all, we blamed the
2 Hassidim for all our ills, but that's all wrong, because they
3 were different looking-- you know, Hassidim-- but of course
4 it's all wrong because we took, again, adopted the view of
5 the oppressor. The oppressor said so, we thought so too.
6 But I really wish I had my father because he was such an
7 intelligent man and a true philosopher, without education,
8 formal education. To find out why they were so anti-Zion, but
9 I think now that to have a Jewish state was so beyond the
10 comprehension at that time, it was so absolutely out, that
11 they had to do something to have a Jewish state wherever they
12 were. What-- you know, the bundist idea was to be Jews,
13 speak Yiddish, continue with the tradition but be full-fledged
14 Polish citizens. And they could not achieve that. But they--
15 they hoped to achieve.

16 Now, sometimes we did. I don't know if you
17 are aware of it, but we had local governments, like the city
18 I grew up at one point was socialist government, so our
19 school existed officially. And it was very good-- the Jews
20 had the theatre and I was in plays, and we had all the official
21 plays, like a regular, you know-- and it was always full,--
22 and poetry reading and very culture-- I don't know if you
23 saw the film, Image Before My Eyes, okay--

24 But then the government changed, became fascist,
25 we had no school anymore, we had to meet in people's homes.

1 So, that was their idea, so I really understand/^{to}some degree
2 why they were so anti-Zionist because the dream was completely--
3 out. And maybe they wanted to be integrated, that they didn't
4 want to have just a Jewish state, but now we see we needed a
5 Jewish state.

6 INTERVIEWER: But you're changed now, you're a
7 Zionist.

8 TONIA: Oh, absolutely. I am a-- I only learned
9 I'm a Zionist two years ago. At Columbia University. They--
10 according to this particular leaflet, everybody who is for
11 the State of Israel is a Zionist, so therefore I am a Zionist.
12 And we have to have a state because in our society, so far,
13 unless you have a state to represent you, they still can kill
14 you and have atrocities, but at least there's someone to
15 speak for you, somewhere. To stand up for it, you know, and
16 I believe that Armenians should have a state; everybody should
17 have their own state, because we live in this kind of society,
18 you know, to at least have the representation.

19 So I am definite, absolutely for the State of
20 Israel. And now I also think about Israel a lot. We expect
21 so much from it. Just think of Israel. You have a state.
22 You have Jews from every, every country in the world. And
23 all those Jews adopted the culture of that country, like the
24 Hungarians are like Hungarians, the Poles are like Poles,
25 and then supposed to be all integrated and live happily ever

1 after. And the same thing about Afircan states, they're
2 only 20 years they have independence, they want them to be
3 just like we are after 400 years. I saw "we", American-- I
4 identify with America.

5 Really, so I-- so it's so difficult for them,
6 they have the North African Jews, who just happen to be
7 German Jews origin (came). And they took-- so they in the
8 government jobs, and the Polish Jews are the next-- in
9 Israel I'm talking about now-- because the Germans were the
10 most educated and-- not that I think education is such a
11 great thing-- they/going to kill us too-- but nevertheless,
12 they have lots of rifts. And I would love different Jews to
13 stay-- you know, I love the different traditions, the
14 different-- I love the Yemenites, the Yemenites not to--
15 but unfortunately will integrate eventually.

16 And that's what's so difficult for Israel.
17 But people don't usually see it. I think I had a little
18 inkling of it, or whatever, introduction, after the war.
19 There were Jews from every part of the war, and we're as
20 different-- when I first met the Greek Jews, I thought they
21 were something out of this world. They had knives in their
22 boots! Can you imagine?

23 INTERVIEWER: From where?

24 TONIA: The Greek Jews. They were-- they were
25 Greek. They were like gypsies. As a matter of fact there were

1 a few gypsies survived, they became very close, they had
2 lots in common with them. Those Greek Jews were as different
3 from the Polish Jews as-- as day and night. (Inaduable)
4 I find them very attractive, so I became friendly with them.

5 And my girlfriend, married a Greek Jew, the
6 one that committed suicide. She committed suicide in Israel,
7 in '52.

8 INTERVIEWER: Did she write to you?

9 TONIA: Oh, yes.

10 INTERVIEWER: Why she was doing it?

11 TONIA: Oh, she didn't-- that was after the--
12 no, well, at that time I didn't much-- I don't know much
13 about now too, psychology and things, now I realize more.
14 She tried a few times before, she-- we never discussed it,
15 and that. But only maybe a psychiatrist, she probably--
16 well, there's the guilt that we live with, there's-- she had
17 a sister, just like my age, who didn't survive. There is--
18 who knows what her action-- we all have different reaction to
19 what the-- to what happened. You know--

20 INTERVIEWER: What guilt? Why-- why would you
21 feel guilty?

22 TONIA: Well, you feel terribly guilty for
23 surviving. I mean, why didn't your friend survive? Why
24 didn't your sister survive? Why didn't the people next, you
25 know, standing in line next to you survive? Why do you survive?

1 Why aren't you--

2 INTERVIEWER: I understand. Of course--

3 TONIA: Who were in the hospitals, who-- oh God!
4 That's my really-- I give it lots of thought. The
5 intellectuals first were taken, you know, on both sides. I
6 only knew the bundists intellectuals, the socialists. But
7 they were really (inaudible) taken. They were marked. Some
8 were marked immediately.

9 And our professionals were in opposite to
10 these professionals, they were really intellectuals.
11 because not many people were professionals, and to become one
12 you really had to struggle. So they were gone to begin with.

13 Then again, when it came to the ghettos and
14 the camps, the people, the more sensitive, the--

15 INTERVIEWER: Poets.

16 TONIA: They-- they didn't have to write poetry,
17 they were poets by heart, or whatever, they were also gone
18 again. I had seen it, like my girlfriend, or they committed
19 suicide, or they-- you know, they-- by the (inaudible)
20 so the people who-- that were-- I hate to mark-- I hate to
21 name them anything bad, God forbid, like I have two cousins
22 how survived, of maybe 300 people, they were originally--
23 they were very poor, and they were street people-- they--
24 they tried to, you know, I couldn't cope with my cousin. He
25 was a street kid, he knew how to, you know, and he also-- I

1 don't know if it helped him or not, maybe it did. They may
2 be stronger, they're a little more assertive, they may grab
3 it when, you know-- let's say they were-- there were two
4 crumbs of bread; the aggressive one would get it, nothing
5 wrong with the aggressive one-- I-- I-- but I wouldn't
6 get it.

7 It's hard to believe now because I talk so
8 much and shout, but I-- I really, I-- I was (always) at the
9 end, end. You (inaudible) for-- I never got the meat, when
10 you stood on line. I just was always at the end. Somebody
11 pushed in. And people was not supposed to push in but they
12 did. And other people fought with them, physically. You
13 know, you didn't-- you wouldn't here, was a matter of life
14 and death, you know, you wouldn't here. And they-- either
15 whoever won, won, but I was always somehow at the end. I
16 didn't get even there. And even bus stop, now once in a while
17 I don't get the bus and I really start crying, like I'm
18 rejected, you know, by the time I get there the bus is gone.

19 So these people are gone. So from my own
20 little observations, very small, I observed that like my
21 cousins, the people I talked to, they just accepted this
22 and they are-- accepted the lower middle class values--
23 forgive me, the lower middle class-- I'm sure there are
24 great people. But it changed like from our working class who
25 were really striving socialism, you know, to change the world,

1 here working class strives only-- shouldn't say "only", take
2 away this word-- it's hard to be middle class, to have make
3 money, to have a bigger house, another car, you know, what
4 American values are. The-- the average American value, you
5 know, ^{for} the general. And that's what I found, that most of the
6 people come from Eastern Europe, of my background, they
7 saw in-- I thought I would spit, the way they were talking
8 about college education yesterday-- I don't know if you were
9 there in the evening-- so many children went through college--
10 second-- so you know, college-- they had a better-- they
11 were more privileged when they came here than the Blacks. I
12 have same, this myself, I have seen it.

13 So that's what happens. So they are not too
14 political. But maybe some people who don't say much, (inaudible)
15 met a little old-- a little old man, a little Jewish man, I
16 would never expect it, he was very beautiful, he talked the way
17 I did.

18 INTERVIEWER: Well, because you're rare, I mean,
19 I certainly--

20

21

(Rest of the tape is blank)

22

23

24

25