

**INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER AWRUCH**

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**Transcending Trauma Project  
Council for Relationships  
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## INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER AWRUCH

**INTERVIEWER:** This is an interview with a survivor, Esther Awruch. It's March 13th, 1995.

Mrs. Awruch, I just wanted to ask you first some questions about yourself today. Could you tell me what year you were born, and where you were born?

**ESTHER AWRUCH:** I was born in Poland, in 1923. The 28th of December.

**INT:** And the name of the town?

**ESTHER:** Narol. This was, two hundred years ago was Florianov. Those days was also, they kill like 400 Jews in that city. And that's what they call Narol, this is in Polish, this is a Polish name, like was blood all over, they cut the hand and the breast and everything from the Jewish people, and 400 for sex, you know, and so later, they builded up the whole city, like became like a forest, you know, and that's from the blood, you know, they put it over, and start to making wheat, and all, you know, to grow, you know, like a...like a farm. That's why call Narol.

**INT:** Now how do you spell it?

**ESTHER:** I didn't do it? I'm going to spell it for you. (writes it down)

**INT:** So that's N-a-r-o-l.

**ESTHER:** Narol, Poland.

**INT:** Was it near a bigger city?

**ESTHER:** It's not far from Tomaszow-Lubelski.

**INT:** Oh, okay.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Not far from her. We met them [Sarah Klein and her family] in Siberia, together. When they put 300 they bring us up on the wagon, I was in Lvov, a Polish big city. It's like Philadelphia. And when I was there, when I was there, everybody have to sit in that thing, and her parents was staying here -- they got plenty children there -- and my parents here. It was a sheet...you know, like a tablecloth -- not a tablecloth -- you know, hanging up our door, and...

**INT:** Separating you.

**ESTHER:** Separated. That's the way.

**INT:** Okay, but before we get into that. Let's talk about, I was wondering if you could tell me, you're widowed now?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I'm a widow.

**INT:** And your husband, when did he pass away?

**ESTHER:** My husband was in Poland, he was...1937 he went to the army. Was no war. And he was born in Solowchow, you know, like I never know him before. I met him in 1945, and five weeks later we got married. It's a Jewish thing...

**INT:** We'll talk about that.

**ESTHER:** When you have the period, then you make the date from the wedding. You know?

**INT:** Right, right. We'll talk about that, but I just wanted to know, how many years were you married to him, and how many years since...

**ESTHER:** 28 years.

**INT:** And then...

**ESTHER:** 21 years he's deceased.

**INT:** 21 years.

**ESTHER:** I was 48 when he died.

**INT:** Oh, that's very young. Did you ever remarry?

**ESTHER:** After seventeen year. I remarry, and not quite a year. Was the people -- nasty -- also Jewish people. And they told me, he's an older man, and I saw him. I can see he looks like ninety. And how people mean. Maybe you heard, he's also, he writes himself, he's from the Holocaust. Yes. No, he was not in the ghetto. Of course, the whole parents, the whole family was probably killed. He was from Czestochowa, and there was all the mean Polish people. You know? The Czestochow, "Matkaboska Czestochowska" -- [Polish saying] you understand?

**INT:** What does that mean?

**ESTHER:** This mean, Miriam, they believe in Miriam. This is Matkaboska in Polish. They still believe her eyes are still crying. You see, you heard this on television? In New Jersey, one Polish guy put her on the stand, and everybody, the Polish people come to see, and he said she's crying? (laughs)

**INT:** Right, right.

**ESTHER:** People are making things, like the imagination, you know?

**INT:** So you're talking about the Christian Polish people?

**ESTHER:** Yes. I'm talking from Poland.

**INT:** And he was from this town?

**ESTHER:** He's in this town. No, I don't believe he's from a city. Maybe. No, the man who I marry, maybe he never, because when I go in to the synagogue, Ner Tzedek, as soon as we come in here, my husband said, "Esther, it's 7:00. It's not too late, honey. Go in and sign us up to belong to the synagogue. Because you like the synagogue." You know. We used to walk fourteen blocks to the synagogue in southwest Philadelphia, to a Hasidic synagogue. And here, we got it across the street.

Do you know the rabbi, the first, when I moved in here in 1968, September the 8th, 1969, we moved in this neighborhood. We bought a house. We didn't got much money to pay in, we got the business, and then three years later my daughter got married. Not three years later. In a year later, eight months later. My daughter's a teacher. Now she's the highest from all the teachers.

**INT:** Okay. Let me just get back to this. You remarried and you only stayed married for a year?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no! When my husband died, you want to ask me for my beginning from the Holocaust?

**INT:** I'm talking about today. I'm talking about just today, I want to know your marital status, and I wanted to know...

**ESTHER:** I was married, just, I will tell you why. We got married because seventeen years, I don't want even to be bothered with nobody. A lot of men went out with me, and I'm still Hasidic. I'm not going with men in bed. **Never!** Except when I get a chuppah, then we're going to bed. And I'm still, it's in my head, I can't help it. If they give me a million dollars, I don't want a million dollars. I can make my own rolls, and make a coffee and I got enough. And a piece of cheese, or a piece of chicken, this is also good enough. I'm not, I need to have the diamonds? I can live without it. It's laying in the bank, I don't use it, when my husband die.

You see, my daughter got married, my husband was to the wedding. You know, I don't have the whole thing. I'm going to show you the books, too.

**INT:** So you have two children from your first husband?

**ESTHER:** Of course.

**INT:** And what are they doing now?

**ESTHER:** My son is an optometry doctor.

**INT:** Okay. Does he live in Philadelphia, also?

**ESTHER:** No. He lives in Connecticut with the wife.

**INT:** And how old is he?

**ESTHER:** He is married in 194...he was born in 1946. He was the first, when I was always passing out, you know, after the war.

**INT:** And what is his name?

**ESTHER:** Samuel Isaac Awruch.

**INT:** Okay. And he's married to...

**ESTHER:** I think I got, I got a letter, they're sending here letters, "Dr. Awruch," comes to me, and I have to send it away to the mail to his house.

**INT:** Does he have children?

**ESTHER:** One son.

**INT:** One son. And how old is he?

**ESTHER:** He's going to be six in a couple of weeks, yeah.

**INT:** That's nice. So they live in Connecticut. And your daughter?

**ESTHER:** My daughter-in-law. Yeah, she works there, she's a teacher for the nurses. She's born here in this Philadelphia.

**INT:** Is she Jewish, your daughter-in-law?

**ESTHER:** Of course!

**INT:** Okay, and what about...

**ESTHER:** That's what I want to prove to you. When you have children, you have to sit down with your husband and tell the children, "We come from a religious family, and we're not allowed to mix in." I remember when my daughter used to go in the library, and I used to say, "Frances, don't make too many friends. You came for books, pick up the books, and you have a

house, a clean house." I used to clean, I used to take in a lady to clean it later, five years I didn't took in a lady to clean. I do everything myself. This I got four hours sleep. You see what I mean? Later the doctor said to my husband, "She's 41 year old, your wife. She cannot go on all her life like this. She's always rush, rush, work...You healthier from her." You see, he die, I'm still alive. But he went through too much. Maybe more from me.

**INT:** So your daughter?

**ESTHER:** My daughter is Frances Awruch Halpern.

**INT:** And so she's married.

**ESTHER:** She have two daughters.

**INT:** Oh, does she? How old are they?

**ESTHER:** My older [grand]daughter, I show you the picture. She graduate last year, and she's going out to college again. She wants to be a psychology doctor. I told her, I told my daughter, tell her...(shows a photograph)

**INT:** Oh, she's pretty. She's beautiful.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And tell her, she's the name Gitele, after my husband. And I told her, not to, what you taking now? She said, "Grandmom, we're going for education." And you see, she don't lose nothing. She's taking now education. She goes in college.

**INT:** Very nice.

**ESTHER:** And I told my daughter, "You must help her." You know, a teacher, she don't make much, no, still, we got to...

**INT:** So your daughter's a teacher?

**ESTHER:** Yes. She's a high school teacher. Yeah. And you know, like eighth, ninth graders.

**INT:** What does she teach?

**ESTHER:** English. Languages too.

**INT:** And her husband, what does he do?

**ESTHER:** Her husband, thank G-d he's alive. He's born an American, and...he is just like teaching driving ...

**INT:** Driving lessons?

**ESTHER:** Driving. Yeah.

**INT:** And do they live in Philadelphia?

**ESTHER:** They live in Bucks County. Richboro.

**INT:** Okay. So that's not too far.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** So you can visit them. Okay. So do you belong to any organizations?

**ESTHER:** The Jewish Holocaust.

**INT:** What organization is that? Like the "Newcomers?"

**ESTHER:** Yeah, sure.

**INT:** Yeah, you belong to that? Any other organizations, religious, or Holocaust-related?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, that's why I belong. I belong.

**INT:** Anything else, any other organizations?

**ESTHER:** The Sisterhood to the synagogue. I belong to, they send me for so many, B'nai B'rith give me, I send donations. But I didn't go never for the...

**INT:** You don't go to meetings and stuff.

**ESTHER:** I can't, with my bronchitis. I want to explain. It's like, eighteen months ago I got an open heart surgery. I never know I'm even sick. In the morning, at night I baked a cake for a Jewish man. I was in synagogue, he said, "Esther, it's high holidays is coming, would you bake me a cake?" I said, "Good." And I call him up, I said, "Your cake's ready. Come and pick up, it's 11:00." He came 11:30. And I thought, 11:30, maybe he wants to eat lunch with me. It's an older man. I felt sorry. And I said, "Mr. Hirsh, you want some lunch?" "Oh, no I have lunch in my house." Something like this. His wife used to work with me. When my husband died, we was in business. And if somebody is in business, you can't sit like this. Oh, no, you got to work. And I went to the synagogue, I talked to the rebbetzin, Adele...I forgot her name. Wachfogel. Maybe you heard, yeah? And she's a fine person. And she told me, "Go in there. You like to do mitzvahs, like you said, like your grandmother. Go ahead. Do something." And I used to go downstairs, and ask a lady, and I give her a dollar in the hand, let me pick up a pitcher orange juice. And I went to the fourth floor, they had older people, they cannot walk, you know, like this. And I went over and I give them a glass of, I took paper cups, and I give everybody a little juice, and then the schwartze nurse come over, "What's your name?" I said, "Esther." Because

at that time I didn't work. And she said, "We hire you. Would you help us give the medicine?" I said, "Yeah, you give the medicine, I give them the juice." The people start to crying, they don't want it from them, from her. And she give them the juice, and I give them the pill, or I hold them both, she put it all ready for me, and I just give it, like this. Everybody kiss my hand, and the boss was staying, and watched this. And later in a couple weeks later, they say I was doing nothing. Somebody shall say, go in school. I got potentials, you know? You see, I will learn. That time, I couldn't go in college even. Not to be a teacher. Just to write in letters, just for myself education. I didn't got a chance. My son told me, "Mother, if you're not going to work, I don't have a father. At least I want to have a mother." When he told me this, I felt sorry for him. Because of him, I went to work. When I went to work, I gained, because when my husband die, I lost fifteen pounds. My life is finished, and he said, "No, Mother. You're so young." And my daughter said, "Mom, listen. You're so young. Listen careful. You don't have to get married if you don't want it. Just go out, and you meet people, you talk to people..."

**INT:** Enjoy life a little.

**ESTHER:** Enjoy a little bit life. Because we're not rich, my husband left... You know, after the husband die, I didn't left too much money. Just I have to pay Dr. Levick \$5,000, and another doctor \$2,000. Why? They should come every day and say hello to him. Isaac Levick. Yeah. Simon Levick. Yeah, I hope he's still alive, yeah.

**INT:** So this synagogue that you belong to is a Conservative synagogue? It's Conservative?

**ESTHER:** Conservative.

**INT:** Okay. I'm wondering now if we can talk about...

**ESTHER:** You don't want this will go in there?

**INT:** No, that's okay, I just want to back it up a little bit. Could you talk a little bit now about your life before the war. What you remember. If you can tell me about your childhood, and who was in your family, how many brothers and sisters you had?

**ESTHER:** I have three sisters. We all together three sisters. My mother lost a baby after me. That I don't remember. It's nothing to talk about it. Just, I remember one thing, was a happy home. This I remember.

**INT:** You lived in Narol. It was a little town?

**ESTHER:** It was...it's not big like Philadelphia. Half like Philadelphia. This was like 5,000 Jews was living there.

**INT:** And the rest were Polish people?

**ESTHER:** Polish, Ukrainian people.



**INT:** Did all the Jews live in one section of the town?

**ESTHER:** Yes. In the front. The Jewish people was living like in the front of the city. I remember it was big. I used to walk from our store, where my father's house, you know like with my mother's...we used to walk a mile. A kilometer is a mile?

**INT:** Yeah, a little less. I think it's a little less.

**ESTHER:** More.

**INT:** It's more? Two miles for a kilometer?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. I used to walk from our store to my aunt, because my cousins used to go with me to first grade. Even they was older from me. See, I'm born the 28th of December. This mean for three days I can go in school. You a year older almost, and I'm like a year younger, three days, I go in school with you in one class.

**INT:** I see. Okay.

**ESTHER:** This is in Poland. That's the way they count.

**INT:** That's the way they did it.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. When I come here, and I say I'm 24, they say, "Uh-uh. You're not 24 yet." I said, "Yes, I am."

**INT:** But they count it differently in Poland.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's what I'm saying. One thing they teach. I realize I never went here in school. I figure they teach a little more, the children, you know, you shall teach, not to play, you understand? Because they say the lesson, they give you assignment, you got to do it. And here, maybe the teachers afraid for the children. They're going home, they say the teacher hurt them. Because, you know, always they say, you know, like stuff on the teachers.

**INT:** It's a little different.

**ESTHER:** I remember my son was a teacher, just when he finished college. He started with (?), and he wants to teach. And he was teaching three years. And he couldn't teach. The doctor told me, "He has temperature. The blood pressure's so high for him." I said, "Blood pressure high? Maybe because of me, when I was pregnant, I got nothing to eat." I was hungry, you know, I got nothing to give him? I didn't got milk in my breast even.

**INT:** Okay, let's just get back. You had three sisters. Could you tell me their names, and the birth order, who was first, second, third?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. My sister Tzipporah. She's six year younger from me. And the other sister, Rivka, she lives in Holon. And one lives in Natanya.

**INT:** Are you the oldest?

**ESTHER:** I'm the oldest.

**INT:** Oh, the oldest, okay.

**ESTHER:** And when I come to Israel, they always say I make Simchas Torah there. The whole family comes together, and I bake a cake, and I bake streudel, and I bake all of those good stuff, and I make a kugel, and we all sit down and eat, and my sister, and I help them to make meat, you know, roast beef or something, and we make a simcha. **Always.**

**INT:** That's nice.

**ESTHER:** As a matter of fact, last week, we were sitting here, ladies with me, from the, my friends, and I got a telephone, I pick up the telephone, my sister called me. It's like, it was 5:00 here, it was in Israel...

**INT:** Midnight, wasn't it?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. It's midnight. It's like 2:00 at night. And she said, "Esther, we invite you for the holiday, for Passover. Come over." And my son-in-law, yesterday I spoke to him, he said, "Are you going?" Because my daughter gave me money to buy a ticket.

**INT:** Great.

**ESTHER:** No, I'm still afraid, the way I'm going on with my bronchitis, if I will sit twelve hours on the plane, this will cost a little...

**INT:** All that bad air is coming in.

**ESTHER:** Yes. I'm afraid.

**INT:** So both your sisters live in Israel.

**ESTHER:** In Israel. Yeah. They came there like, they was fourteen or thirteen. The younger sister was like thirteen, we came to Israel, and the other was fifteen. You know? Thirteen and fifteen.

**INT:** So just the three of you. You didn't have any brothers?

**ESTHER:** No. My brother died, I just mentioned.

**INT:** Oh, he was the one who died.

**ESTHER:** Died, she was seven months pregnant, my mother was, because always in Poland, I just explained to you, pogroms and all of those. Even my grandfather was a rabbi, he was three weeks old when they come and they kill his parents. Why? Because they always say they got a pulwark.

**INT:** What's that?

**ESTHER:** What's that? It means they got a piece of land, rich, and you can make people working for you. You know, something. And they give this, like a diary for the daughter, and they got, and the daughter was eighteen, they got married at seventeen, she got married. Those days, you know?

**INT:** Right. You got married early.

**ESTHER:** It's early, because they shall not do things not necessary. Special religious people. And that's how it was.

**INT:** So your grandfather was a baby when his parents were killed in a pogrom.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They was calling (?) those days. You know, my mother told me. It was Polish always pogroms. Always pogroms.

**INT:** A lot of anti-Semitism in Poland.

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes.

**INT:** Even before the war.

**ESTHER:** Yes. And the grandfather was three weeks old. Was two children. They got a maid. Who can care, if you have two children, you have to have a maid to help you, right? And they took a maid in. And they saw the maid there, and they took away the key and they buckle her face, you know, like she shall not scream. No, later, people went by in the morning, and they saw her staying like this...

**INT:** Tied up.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And they went into the house and see the parents. The kids was crying, and the parents was killed. You watch "The Godfather?" Yeah? You saw when they put the horse on him, the blood? This was not a horse. This was, they killed the young people.

**INT:** And the children were still in the house.

**ESTHER:** The baby was laying, like in Poland, there was a lot of little flies, you know? They put a little...

**INT:** Like a screen over the...

**ESTHER:** A screen, yeah, a little nice silk something, the air shall come in for the kids. You see, the kids have to survive, they didn't see the kids, and they didn't kill the kids.

**INT:** Oh. They would have killed the kids if they had seen them.

**ESTHER:** Oh, sure. How can, the kids was asleep.

**INT:** I see. This is your grandfather on whose side? Your mother's side? Your mother's father?

**ESTHER:** Mother's side. Yeah.

**INT:** Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What their background was? Let's start with your mother. She was born also in that town, or was she from another town?

**ESTHER:** She was, when they got married, they got married, when he became a rabbi, they was married, and they was living in Narol.

**INT:** Was she born in Narol, do you know?

**ESTHER:** I don't know.

**INT:** Don't know. What was your mother's name?

**ESTHER:** My mother's name is Reis. Freyda Leah Reis.

**INT:** Okay. Freyda. And her family, and she was religious? They were Hasidic, or...

**ESTHER:** That's why the grandfather was a rabbi, I'm explaining. She had to cut off the hair, and she was wearing wigs. You see my hair? This is natural. I didn't know my mother got natural hair. After the war, my mother said, "I'm not wearing no more wigs." I said, "Why?" She said, "G-d took away, let kill my six brothers, all of them so religious, two shochetim, two this, you know, with six brothers, this, when you wear a wig, you have a pleasure. I don't want to have any more pleasure like..." (coughs, pause)

**INT:** Okay, we were talking about your mother. She was Hasidic. Do you know what group, what Hasidic group it was that they belonged to, your parents? Satmar or Ger, or Belz, or anything like that?

**ESTHER:** I think like Mizrachi. I guess so. Because my father said, "We all like Mizrachi." I used to ask him one time.

**INT:** So they were Zionists then. Zionist religious? Or...

**ESTHER:** Yes. Because they want to build Israel.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** And his friends went to, from New York -- I say "New York," from Lvov -- he was living, and he finished college, he was like an architect. And he built Tel Aviv.

**INT:** Oh, my goodness.

**ESTHER:** And he wants my father should go to Tel Aviv and build a house there. Guess what my father, this was 1933. I remember like today. And I said, "Oh, good! Goodie, goodie! I want to go to Tel Aviv." He said, "The house is not built yet." You see, you have to build, so it will take long. And my father answer, he said, on the list he got a lot of people from Lemberg, you know, Jewish people, and a lot of people, because of course, if you have a business, it takes two boys, shegutzim, and they said, "Don't buy by the Jews. Come to our store." You see, this makes you feel hurt. At the same time, when the war started, the bombs was flying, and you're running, and you don't know where to hide, and we're walking, and I met my cousin laying on the floor, dead. And he was still like this, shaking. I said to my cousin, she lives in Hadera. She wears still a wig, my cousin. And she said, "Esther. What do you think, this is my brother?" I said, "Of course. This is Freum." I said to her. And I liked him. He was just....I was so young, thirteen and a half. And he was nineteen.

**INT:** So your mother...

**ESTHER:** He died. He was shaking. Like this. You see, here on my hand. His neshama went out. He hold, I hold his head, and he die. And this is still in me. I was suffering. I was sick. That time I cried so much. I got temperature, took me in the hospital for the day, you know, for a couple hours. They gave me some medicine in Poland. And then we were sitting on the cemetery six days. No, the priest was across the street, the church, and he saw that we was carrying him, dead, with no casket, nothing, just like this, to bury him. It's like because he was, they killed him. Do you imagine? The other cousin, they put in the hospital. When he was shot. He's still alive in Israel. And that one...and the only thing, it's the Americans fault, with Chamberlain's fault. And I will still say it. Because Chamberlain, and America sold, he promised, they're going to help Poland, and they never did.

**INT:** They made a deal with Hitler.

**ESTHER:** And Hitler took it over, and maybe the people, it was the people's fault themselves, because they trust. I don't know. I don't know what to say anymore.

**INT:** Before we get to the war, though, could you just...your mother had six brothers, and she was the only girl, or did she have sisters, too?

**ESTHER:** Of course. She got another. She got three sisters.

**INT:** Oh, my goodness, and six brothers?

**ESTHER:** Yes. One sister died when the grandmother died, 33, she was four months old. And my mother was twelve years old when the grandmother died. They lived from another city. She came here, she got married. No, later, my mother always used to cry. And I remember, I was two year old already. And I see her crying. You know, a mother, you always like a mother. And I said, "Mom, nei nisht." You know? Nei nisht.

**INT:** Don't cry?

**ESTHER:** Don't cry. But I used to say, "Nei nisht." And she used to remind me those words until I was already myself a grandmother. (laughs) She say, "Esther, you remember you used to say, 'Nei nisht?'" No, she said when I was a half a year old, so pretty, that wherever she went by, Polish officers, you know like anybody went by, they said to my mother, she hold me in the hand, "This is a beauty. You're holding like a...you know, a beauty." Like this, on me. And I was a big baby. I was eleven pounds. Where you have eleven pounds? Two doctors have to take me out with klishes from my mother.

**INT:** Boy. Your poor mother! (laughs) So, I just want to talk about your parents' background a little bit. So she had six brothers and three sisters.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And what did her parents do? Do you know what your grandparents did for a living?

**ESTHER:** I just said.

**INT:** He was a rabbi.

**ESTHER:** He was a rabbi. He was teaching kids. You know, like in Poland, he was a rabbi. Then he was teaching kids for bar mitzvah, you know, like taught them the right...

**INT:** What about from your father's side?

**ESTHER:** My father, they got four children also. And the grandfather, the aunt, an uncle, when Hitler came, they took, the Russians came in their city first. When the Russians came, they took away the keys from the store, and they throw them out like this. They (?). And they put them, right away it's like in a ghetto, I think. I don't know what's happened. Whether the Russians did it, or the Germans did it. Because we never saw them again. No, after the war, my father was, oh, we go later to that.

**INT:** Yeah, we're not talking about the war yet. But just about his family. What did his father and mother do?

**ESTHER:** They got a business from leather and shoes.

**INT:** Shoes. You were telling me earlier. He was a shoemaker, and a shoe salesman.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Is not a shoemaker. Yeah, they got a business. You buy leather, and we have people who works for my father, like I'll give you an example. Like when my husband...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** See? My grandfather, somebody comes in, the grandmother used to give for all poor people, she always, because she promised, when my father was sixteen, Austria, Poland was always separated.

**INT:** Yeah. It was always divided up.

**ESTHER:** Divided. And those days, my father was sixteen, it was 1914, they took him to the war at that time. And it was 500 boys.

**INT:** What army took him?

**ESTHER:** The Austrian took him.

**INT:** The Austrian army, okay.

**ESTHER:** There was fighting, they were fighting the Czar. And at that time was starting to be Lenin, and...

**INT:** Right, 1914-1917.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, that's right. And you know, at that time, my father was so young. And they would start the fighting, all the boys start to cry, and the Austrian general, see, nicer like today. Today they killed. In those days, they hang up the white flag, and he said to the Russians, "Take the kids and don't kill them." Those days people were more intelligent. You understand? They didn't kill the Jews special. A war is a war. I just explain it to you.

**INT:** So he fought in the First World War, your father.

**ESTHER:** Yes. At sixteen. He couldn't even...

**INT:** He was sixteen years old?

**ESTHER:** Sixteen years old, no, he was six foot tall. The other brother was six foot two, the other city I just mentioned. And the younger brother was also six foot. When the war, when the Germans came, we all, we was hiding all together. And they was hiding under the ground in the church, you know, in the basement, for about eight weeks.

**INT:** Yeah, you're going to tell us about that. Let's go back to before the war, though. Your father, what kind of business did your father have when you were growing up? What did he do for a living?

**ESTHER:** I just say. When he was sixteen, he was in Russia that time. He told me the city where he was. General saw he's a Jewish boy, and he was a Jewish general. And he took him in a factory. They were smart, smarter like the Americans. Don't put them in jail. Give them work to work, and let them be free. You know? See, the American government have too far to go to be smart.

**INT:** That's for sure.

**ESTHER:** I'm telling the truth. You know why? They don't have common sense. The Jewish people have common sense. Trotsky was a Jew, Lenin was a Jew. All was Jewish people. They all were intelligent. They, all the smartest rabbis was from Russia. My mother, I used to read, my mother used to give me in Poland a book from Russia. If a Jewish lady wants to bentsch licht, she have to go in the basement to bentsch licht, by the Czar, you know that?

**INT:** Yeah, you weren't allowed.

**ESTHER:** Not allowed. If you make a bris, they put all in jail. They could not do it, because, it's a shame. A lot of, why did all the Russian people didn't come right away here, or to Israel? They're still...because maybe they didn't let them out. No, when they give them freedom, to let them out, they were still staying. Now, it's almost late.

**INT:** So your father was in Russia. After the war they kept him.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, seven years.

**INT:** Seven years!

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And then what happened?

**ESTHER:** In 1923 he came home.

**INT:** Came back, I see. And married your mother.



**ESTHER:** And my mother got a wedding to go [to]. Her cousin in Lvov, she have to go. And she, my father saw her. And he was staying with a brother, and he said to the other brother, the younger brother, Azreel, he said, "Oh, she's a beauty," on my mother. And he said, "Good. I'm going to talk." You know, like he going to synagogue, you always meet one Jew meets the other, and he said, "We'll make a shidduch." And then they met, and the grandmother, right away, she took off, she gave her a diamond ring, something like this. Time from the war, everything we left. We run, there's nothing in Poland. I remember like today. Time from the war, the priest said, "Now, you must leave already. Because otherwise they're going to kill us, too."

**INT:** Do you think your parents had a happy marriage? How would you describe their marriage?

**ESTHER:** Very happy. What I remember, my mother was like, we ate, we used to bentsch, you know, you have to bentsch after you're feeding. The two sisters was smaller kids, and my mother used to sing, and my father danced with me a waltz. He taught me dancing. Because when he was in Russia, he was like modernized, you know, young teenager by himself. When he went to dances there, and he want to dance, and my mother was too Hasidic.

**INT:** Right, right. You don't dance with...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She said, "How about taking our daughter? Dance with Esther. Teach her." I still remember the father was dancing with me. I was nine year old, ten year old. I was dancing already.

**INT:** What was your father like? Can you describe him? What did he look like, what was he like as a person?

**ESTHER:** I'm going to show you the picture. So nice. The quietest man. He told me, I used to say, he say, "How many girlfriends you have?" (?) is girlfriend. And I said, "Four." "Okay, you have to owe [earn] money." I said, "How I'm going to owe [earn] money?" He said, "Oh, take a broom, sweep up the store, and I'm going to pay you ten cents." My mother used to give me ten cents, like ten groschen, I washed the milchige dishes, and I got twenty, see?

**INT:** That was a good deal. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** You see? Then he said, "Do you have enough?" I said, "That's all. We will share with the girlfriends." And he said, "No. Go into the Grandma, and do the job for her, you're going to get money."

**INT:** Get more money. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** That's what I used to do, and I got money. See? I was already. They give me in the head, to be like business, to be a worker in the business.

**INT:** Did he have a sense of humor, your father? Was he...

**ESTHER:** A very nice, quiet man. Very nice man. And used to be very nice family. We used to go every Friday, we come into the, it's not far, you come in from this door, you go in that door. And you go into the grandmother's house, and my uncle, he die in Israel. And my cousin, she lives in Herzliya. When I come to Israel, I have to, till 4:00 we're talking. We still remind the stuff. Her husband laughs. He said, "You're not cousins, you're sisters!" That's the way we always talked.

**INT:** Related to your father's brother.

**ESTHER:** Mother. Yeah. And she died, she was not too old. Maybe 74, or something.

**INT:** So she lived connected to your house? Did you live in a house? In Poland, what was it like there?

**ESTHER:** In Poland, was like one house built near the other. The grandmother lives here, and the aunt here, and we're here.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** See? And sometime, if I don't want to eat by my mother, I don't like the smell from butter, she used to (?), you know, like, butter, I run away. And I come over. Where I run? I go over to my Grandma next door. And I said, "Grandma, (Yiddish) Blintzes. In one second, she got it. How fast, the food, you know? And I said, "I don't want to eat by myself." (Yiddish) I want to eat with my cousins, you see? We loved the cousins.

**INT:** You're very close with your cousins.

**ESTHER:** Oh! I'm just telling you, when I come to Israel, the sisters, and the cousins, like all of my sisters.

**INT:** This is on your father's side of the family.

**ESTHER:** Father's side, yeah. I have the mother's side, there, too.

**INT:** You also have cousins from her side?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah. They die a few already.

**INT:** And you think your parents had a pretty good marriage?

**ESTHER:** I'm just explaining. We used to sing Friday night. And dance. And that's all I remember.

**INT:** It sounds like a happy home.

**ESTHER:** Happy. He always, even if he was Hasidic, he always, you know, it doesn't matter, he can be Hasidic, he can be a mensch, too. And he used to come over and give her a kiss, and put her in the money, you know, like from the register, because you're not supposed to leave too much money. Somebody going to kill you, you know? Something like this. This way you leave a little bit. That's how it was. I remember how the Polish people used to give us trouble.

**INT:** What do you mean trouble?

**ESTHER:** If a baker went in, you come in a bakery, and you buy rolls, or a loaf of bread, and you take out a half a zloty, and if you, and always, they make false money, too. It's like here. And if you throw the money on the table, and if G-d forbid it fell down on the floor, he grabs right away a knife or punch you.

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. See? That time, I remember, how old I was. This was 1937. I'm a big girl already. I remember. And my mother said to me, "Esther, go call, go in and call Maglegevich." It's like here, if you're in business, you went in to Rizzo, and you give him a little money, and they shall watch the Jewish neighborhood, you understand? Like Shabbas, we don't keep the store open. We was closed, 3:00 Friday was closed the store. My Tate had to go in the mikveh. You know, it's Hasidic people, my father don't have a beard. He can be Hasidic without a beard, too. Don't think you have to have a beard, see? You got to be a heart, good-nature. My grandmother, she was so nice, she always see, anybody went by, and they ask, you know, like...

**INT:** For tzedakah?

**ESTHER:** In Poland was always poor people. And they asked like a penny, give them two pennies, one penny. And right away she said, "Sit down on the steps," and she took out a glass of coffee. In Poland they give a glass, the coffee in a glass. In a glass, and a slice of bread, and she put on so tiny the bread, then right, I was jealous, and I come over. "Grandma, I want just, give me a coffee like this, and give me the bread just like you give the lady." I never forget those words. And she look at me, and she start laughing and crying. "Why? You got to be happy, we give you more butter." "No, I like it like you give it to her. It tastes good, better. Tastes better." Do you understand? A kid I was? A bad kid! (laughs) And I remember, I never want to eat. But when I go to Grandmom, I eat.

**INT:** Yeah, how come you didn't want to eat at home? You didn't like your mother's cooking? Or you just...

**ESTHER:** My mother was busy. She cooked, she wake up 4:00 in the morning. She cook, she baked everything. She put in the oven, like this. I give you an example. This is an oven here. No, there was with kafles, you know? How you say kafles? It's like special stones. Oh. I think like formica? Something looks like formica. Was not formica. Was special things that was so

beautiful. I remember in Polish, Yiddish, they say kafles. Maybe it's in Polish kafles. In English I don't know. And if you put it, you make, you close the oven, when I come back from school, it was 12:00 the food was still hot.

**INT:** Oh, nice. She would bake in the morning.

**ESTHER:** Cooked, yeah, and put everything in the morning, and she didn't cook for tomorrow. For today. Every day fresh. Yeah.

**INT:** And you didn't want to eat? How come?

**ESTHER:** No, I ate a little. A little. Milk I don't like. I drink a glass of milk, then I'm going to drink two sips, and the rest I put in the sink. And I lied to her and said I finished. See, that's why G-d punished me. (laughs)

**INT:** What were your sisters like?

**ESTHER:** My sisters was little. I remember one time I was mad. She grabbed my book. And I need to make the...

**INT:** Homework.

**ESTHER:** I want to hit her. My mother said, "Don't you touch her. Never hit you. Don't touch the sister." This I remember. It was a nice, my father used to say, "Never touch nobody. Never say a lie. And never steal." If you see people, like they used to give me money for breakfast, I shall buy a butter roll, and a glass of milk. The butter roll I bought. Costs fifteen cents.

**INT:** But not the milk.

**ESTHER:** No, the milk I didn't have to buy. In the schools, the priest got so much milk, he give all the children a roll with milk, and they never give the Jewish kids.

**INT:** Are you serious?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Maybe because they figure the Jewish kids have it, because, you understand what I mean? I don't know that. I know I came home, I was little, maybe I was seven year old, and I cry. My mother said, "Wos weinst du?" "All the kids, they give a roll with milk. Because everybody drink, I like, too. I will drink the milk." You know, my mother went over. She went to the principal, she said, "What's, far wos, why you didn't give mein child, too? I don't have time to run over her to beg her to drink, because I give her money she shall drink." You know, she used to give me ten cents, you finish the glass of milk. I used to give one sip and I throw it in the sink. And I didn't tell my mother. She didn't know I did it.

**INT:** I see. I see.

**ESTHER:** She didn't know I did it. Oh, no, she will be mad on me. And what I have to listen, then she used to say to the principal, "I give you a zloty. This means that I pay for ten kids. And give my kids the milk." Like every day, the kids have to bring ten cents for the milk. My mother gives a dollar, a zloty for the milk. For ten kids for other poor kids. They shall respect me. I remember, I was dressed up so clean, and my mother used to bathe me, and dress me so clean, not special. You know, when you go into school, the teacher used to take me out every day to understand, to show all the kids, shall take example to see how clean Esther Kessler, "the Kessler Rovka is so clean. Please, tell your parents to do the same thing."

**INT:** What kind of school was this? Was this a Polish school?

**ESTHER:** Polish elementary.

**INT:** Like a public school?

**ESTHER:** Public elementary school.

**INT:** So Jewish kids and non-Jewish kids were there.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, both. Ukrainian, wherever, all of us went together. I remember when I was older, I was going higher school, higher grades. One boy, oh, I still miss him. He used to like, give me a note, and used to put it in like this.

**INT:** Slip it over to you, yeah.

**ESTHER:** And what was the note? Give me your paper, I'm going to make, because you have to draw, you know? You make a house, a car, you know, something like this. And he put on, it was my name. And I put on my name. The principal noticed. And then the principal came over, and he said, "You know, everybody shall know: Esther Kessler is my granddaughter." I came home and cry. And I ask, "Mom? I'm Jewish. One grandfather's a rabbi. The other grandfather have business. How come the principal is my grandfather, too?" And she explain me. "He teach my mother. He was a teacher from my mother, he was a teacher from me, now he teach you. Then the third generation. He's a grandfather." See, he's joking. He's making a joke.

**INT:** Yeah. And you were all upset.

**ESTHER:** I was crying, and she said, "Why you cry? He take good care, they give you milk."

**INT:** So they were nice to you, the Polish teachers?

**ESTHER:** Yes, sure. I still remember Anna Nimchiska. She was the first grade teacher. And I still remember Maria Levijuvna. She was teaching me geography. Pshirova.

**INT:** But they didn't discriminate against you because you were Jewish?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. In the school is equal, everybody.

**INT:** What about the kids, the Polish kids?

**ESTHER:** I remember, the Polish kids, they're kids. Kids is kids. They don't make...

**INT:** But they didn't specially...

**ESTHER:** No, no. I remember, I got a girlfriend, her name was Chayala. I still remember her name. She, when comes the Christian holiday, and she live across the street...to the church. And when they're coming out from church, they're throwing stones in the windows. And she was like the first grade, second grade. She said, "Ask your mother can I sleep on the floor? Because I'm afraid. I can't stand it. I cannot sleep, and I cannot learn nothing." You see, because she's afraid. And my mother said, "Of course. Let her sleep with you in your bed." I still remember this.

And later, guess what? Later, she used to see me eating the roll, and I never ate alone. I cut a half for you, and a half for me. And my cousin is sitting with me, and she said, "Why you give her, why you didn't give me a piece? I brought it for her. Her sister sell it. How come they don't give her?" I don't know that. Maybe they was poor. It was fifteen cents, and they cannot afford it. The next day, I remember, see? I cut three pieces, one for you, one for me, and one for her. I give it to her. Was good. And then, the girl, I give her the quarter, she said, "How much costs so good roll? I said, "Fifteen cents, groschen. Cents." And she said to me, "My mother and my brother still sit in the house, and wait until my father brings home money to buy a loaf of bread." Guess what I did? This was in my second grade, I was smart already. And I bought for five cents a roll. Not a butter roll, a regular roll, with poppy seeds, I guess, I don't remember. And I used to give her, and she don't see it, I give her the roll, and I give her the fifteen cents, and she shall buy. And I told her, "You buy for your mother a loaf of bread and take it home."

**INT:** Was that your idea to do that?

**ESTHER:** Nobody told me. It's mine. I'm explaining it to you.

**INT:** That's nice.

**ESTHER:** Because I remember the grandfather used to, the grandmother used to give everybody.

**INT:** Yeah. So you got it from her, you think.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, I got it from her. It stuck in my head. You remember I said, "Give it, you give the lady, give me a coffee, the same coffee, I want it." See, I felt the taste. I want to see how the people feel the taste. You know, like bread. What I gonna tell you, when the war started, and when we was in Siberia, or this will come later, I can tell you right now. The...my, we got nothing to eat. The first thing, we came into Siberia, we was in hiding, and then when the

priest said, "You have to leave, because otherwise, they're going to kill us, too." Then we left, to Rava-Ruska, you know? To Rava-Ruska, from our city, it was like fifty miles. And we went there. We came there, the Polish people, my father give them so much money, they took away all of my shoes. I was like bare-footed. I got nothing to wear. Then the father said, "Don't worry. We still remember our home, and we have the key, and we're going to go in the basement." We got a basement, in case there's a war, nothing can burn. So fire is under there. And my mother sent him home. Was my aunt, and everybody, the uncle, they went home to the city. And they took out like a lot of leather shoes, whatever is ours. And the grandfather took also, a few things. And the uncle took, and we didn't took the grandfather. He was too old to walk. The uncle went. And we all went, and my aunt, husband, you know, my uncle, with the son, and the daughter, my girlfriend, the cousin. She's in Herzliya. She went with them. They don't let **me** go. I was too precious for my mother. She said, "Oh, no. Not Esther." The kids was small. The kids was small. The youngest sister was like five and a half year old.

**INT:** How old were you when the war came?

**ESTHER:** The war started, I got finished seven grades already. Seven grades, I was thirteen and a half year old.

**INT:** Very young.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And I was older from them. What I want to say, they came, and then they asked us take passports. And my father said, "Hitler is the same like Stalin." Because my father remember him from Russia, from that time. If two people talking together, they put you in jail. They take you away. Like two Jewish people talking. My father said, "Oh, no. I never want to see Russia." Then 3:00 at night, they pick all the Jews, they know the names, and they pick who is signed up to go back to Germany, to our house, and the Germans got it. They occupied our house, the Germans occupied, you see? And we was not at home anymore, anyhow. We was afraid to go home, they're going to kill us. Then we left. My house is still there. It's a new home. It was 1937.

**INT:** He had just built it.

**ESTHER:** They just built it. I remember my father paid 21,000 zlotys, you know, like dollars. And what's happened? We was afraid to go back, and we was hiding in the woods, and we was hiding in the forest.

**INT:** We're going to get to all that. I don't want to get to that yet.

**ESTHER:** I want to tell you, when we got nothing to eat, and my mother said, and I took off my watch. For thirteenth birthday, my father bought me a watch like this. Not a gold, just like this. And the first thing, I took off the watch, and I came over to a lady, to the Russian ladies, and I said, "Give me bread, milk, and potatoes." You see? I got...

**INT:** That was in **your** head to do that.

**ESTHER:** I was smart. I bring in...and my mother, she was not feeling good. She was sick. And that's what got me. You know, when you're in danger, you got me. They took us right away to work, in the forest to work. Cutting wood, shoveling snow, everything. And when I did, they comes a man, he's Ukrainian, and at that time was Russia got Ukrainian, too. They got everything. And his name was Jan Tolstenko. I still remember his name. And he said to me, he looked in the book, my name. He said, "You're not allowed to work. You have to go in school! You didn't finish." Because in Russia you got to finish ten grades more. See? You know, in the higher standard who has in the whole world? The Russians. And who has the next? Israel.

**INT:** Oh, Israel, yeah, with education.

**ESTHER:** You see? And Germany's the third, and French the fourth. I remember when I read this in an article.

**INT:** America's pretty down there on the...

**ESTHER:** No wonder. Why? The narcotics. Always the smoking. The whole world is smoking. Israel smokes, too. What I want to say, they took my father in jail. My father said, not in jail, they're going to put him in jail. My father said, "I didn't steal it, it's mine!" My mother, that's why I'm doing the same thing. She used to crochet, she used to needlepoint, and she used to do all kind sewing. Like...

**INT:** Embroidery?

**ESTHER:** Embroidery. And she used to make, like on everything, she used to make: Freda Lusa Kessler. And they sold, my father sold two, and he bring bread in the house, because his father's hungry, we're all hungry, we have to bring. And they put my father in jail. They want to put him in jail. And they put him, like he said, come to our house. I still remember where I lived.

(?) This means, Bolotna is the name from the street, 55, and this is Bolotna. Bolotna means it's a street when it's always like...how you say? It's like dampness there, and you walking in, you're walking like in mud. A mud. Yeah, this is mud. Bolotna is mud. The whole street is like from mud.

And I remember, when they took me to work, and he said, no, I come home, they want to take me to another city, a nice city, to go in school, and my mother start to cry. And she said, "If you go in school, I gonna die." And I said, "Why you gonna die?" She said, "Because **you** bring the food in the house." This is true. Every day I go over, wherever my mother got the things, I took out, I took out a kettle, I took out two towels, I took out like, I remember like silverware. Like, I know like to making a set. I took out two sets.

**INT:** And you'd sell them for food?



**ESTHER:** Not I sell them. I went over to a lady's house, like to your mother's house. I give an example. I said, "Here. Give me milk, bread, and potatoes." And I bring this home.

**INT:** Well, why do you think your mother couldn't do that? Why were you doing that and not your mother?

**ESTHER:** She was sick, she was young, when they kill my cousins, they kill, they both kill, one is still alive. And they was sitting shiva in our house. Sleeping, we went to the basement there, to the church sleeping. In day time we could walk over, you know, to bring her something from the house. That time, how was so bad, then we was hungry. Then I used to bring over, you see, wherever I bring, I give away, even the Polish lady, I give this, all right, she'll let us stay there one night.

**INT:** So you were doing that even then. You started very young doing that.

**ESTHER:** Very young. I told my rabbi, he said, "You see, you got education from the war." This was like college. "You finished college from the war." And I still remember. I never forget when they put my father in jail. And I, I came home from work, I was working making the blouses. They don't pay me. They give me a glass of water with a piece of bread. And I never forget it, I came home, and my mother crying. And the sisters crying. I said, "What's happened? Somebody hurt you?" And we was living with three Polish people. Families. Like one got three children, the husbands, the Germans took them away, because he was an officer. It's the same like they took my husband away. My husband was in Treblinka two years. See? And everything like this, then meantime...

The grandfather came to the dream to my mother. He said, "The door is open, he will come out." Because sometimes they forgot to close the door. They didn't forget. He still have years to live. If he will be in jail, he will die? And he opened the door like this. He went out, and my mother was staying with a shawl. And following in my grandfather's direction. He was dead already. Because I got twice malaria in Russia, in Siberia. Malaria, I was hungry, and that came, because if you're working, in the water is a lot of mosquitoes, and you catch a bite from the mosquitoes, I got a malaria, I was sick and I almost die, and I got luck again.

**INT:** You're going to tell me. We're going to get to that.

**ESTHER:** Later. Later.

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** Working there, and my grandfather used to say, you have to pay forty cents for the cereal. And he got the money, and they said, "No more cereal." And he used to go home hungry, and he died. And how long, I was not working. Like I were working, in the inside, like

in the woods, you know, like this side. They took me to work in another town. I have to go. Yeah. And that's the way my grandfather died.

Now he used to say, "Oy, mein Esther. Mein Esther. If she's here, I'm not hungry." But the first thing, I said to my mother, I was like a boss. I said, "Ma, give the grandfather first." Because I learned in cheder, I went to Hebrew school. You always give the babies food first, and then you give the older people for the second. That's what I told my mother. "Give first the grandfather, then you give the two sisters. Put them all together, and then we're all going to eat." And what we got, a soup, I bring the milk. My mother, the potatoes, she cook a potato soup. And she put milk inside and a piece of bread.

**INT:** So where do you think you got that strength to do all that? You were taking charge of the whole family.

**ESTHER:** Oh, I was, I'm telling you, I still, sometime I dream that G-d, because my grandfather, when he was always, Talmud in his house, and he was living with us, you know, like I go into his room, and I used to like to study. When you study, here, you have a radio, yeah? In Poland, my house didn't got a radio, I don't know. Then I remember my grandfather used to sing. And when he, Haftorah, he was singing. And I used to sit and teach him my poem, the melody from Grandfather's davening, the poem came to my head so early, so good, that I was the best student. And the teacher asked me, and I said, "I'm sitting and studying in my grandfather's house." "It's your house?" "Yeah. He lives with us." I told her. No, he's so smart, he's the one who saved my life.

When I was ten year old, I was poisoned by the maid, by mistake. They could not read. Instead of putting in syrup, she put me vinegar. Not vinegar, peroxide, something in the tea, and I drink it out, and I got swollen like this. And my father, because he was (?), like here, Medicare. Not Medicare. It's like you belong to a...

**INT:** Some kind of health plan.

**ESTHER:** Health plan. And the doctor was Yablonski. I remember the name from him. Yablonski. He bring me in, he said, "You took her right away to the hospital." And the most hospitals, they're all Catholics, and nuns. Then my grandfather -- my father could not go, he would stay in the business, he can't -- no, my grandfather, it was Friday, he said, "Hire somebody." And they took us to Tomaszow, to their city, and all the nuns, is the nurses. They're the best. They're the best. And I'm telling you again, I was crying, and the doctor, I got high temperature. And the grandfather was sitting with my mother outside, and the priest came over, he said, "Don't cry. You're in good hands. We're going to try the best to save your little girl." I was ten year old. And you know, I was poisoned, and the medicine, the thing, like 2:00 in the morning, Saturday morning, the grandfather didn't go in synagogue. He was still there, staying in the hospital with my mother, and I was crying.

And the nun was sitting, and I was asleep crying, because my mother always cry, and it remind her mother when she was twelve year old, she has to raise eleven children, my mother. And she

told me always her story. And I never, when she told me how the grandmother was wearing, and I always, and I used to say, "Mama, nei nisht." Don't cry. Then here, I got her in a dream. And she said to me, "Here, my child. Drink a little bit wine." (Yiddish) And I cried, because I was afraid she's dead. I remember from a little. My mother said she died so young. I never met her. You know, and this was like, coming to tell me good deed. Because in the morning, 9:00, a nun came over, with doctors, they have to take me to pump my stomach out. They pump my stomach out, the temperature slowly went down. I was three months in that hospital.

**INT:** Three months!

**ESTHER:** Guess what. And I want to go home, and they don't let me. They said, "We're going to heal you out." You know, the priest spoke Hebrew to my grandfather. You know, the priests then must finish Hebrew. If they don't know Hebrew, they're not priests. They have to know.

**INT:** I didn't know that.

**ESTHER:** You didn't know it?

**INT:** I thought they had to know Latin, but not Hebrew, too.

**ESTHER:** Hebrew.

**INT:** Wow. So he could speak to your grandfather.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They speak Hebrew. And the nun came over to tell me, what they both was talking. They understand probably, too. And they said, in Polish, "You gonna live. Don't worry. We took out the poison, thing what you drink, you started to drink this." I don't know what they gave me, vinegar, something else. And here, and they gave me medicine. They make me extracts (?) all the time. And they saw I gonna be alive. Now what I gonna explain, then my grandmother told me I'm going to get better.

**INT:** In the dream.

**ESTHER:** In the dream. And I cry. And the nun asked me, in Polish, she wake me up. "Why you crying?" I said, "My grandmother just gave me wine to drink." And she went to the priest, and she told the priest, and the priest told right away my grandfather. He said, "Yes." Because my mother, like my mother deserved. Like, "She raised all of my children" -- the grandfather said to the priest -- then she wants to save my mother's child. She came to save me. And that's how it was. You know? The grandfather likes me the best. Everybody likes me the best. Even, when I came, even in Poland, when the Grandmom, we used to go, she was sick, and she used to go, like to Lawonitch, this is like you go to Florida for vacation? She used to go, bring home umbrellas, little brushes, something like this, and we both hold together, and we used to walk. Like two sisters. Everybody thought we sisters. And you know, when I was four year old, my mother tell me, she put me on a nice dress, and a whole day we was not home. We want to go to

make Seder, and I was still not home, because I was by my grandmother. (laughs) To all the ladies, I show...

**INT:** Showing off your dress?

**ESTHER:** Showing off my dress. That's the way I was. I got a happy life. And I will explain you. I was happy. When I got, the time from the war.

**INT:** I just want to understand something. This grandfather that was with you in the hospital, is your mother's father.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** And the grandmother that came to you in the dream was your mother's mother.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** And then the grandmother who lived with you then, was your father's mother, right?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. That's it, yes. She was the kindest person.

**INT:** And you were always at her house.

**ESTHER:** More like in **my** house!

**INT:** Yeah. She was good to you.

**ESTHER:** Whatever I say, whatever I ask her, she make right away, and how, in a second I got it cooked. And I used to say to my mother, "Why you didn't teach yourself to be like the grandmother?" (laughs) She said, "Because my mother died when I was twelve. I didn't got a mother."

**INT:** She had to be the mother for the kids.

**ESTHER:** She used to run into another rebbetzin to ask her how to do this, you know, to cook, you know, to show her.

**INT:** Yeah, cause how could she know?

**ESTHER:** She was so young. Yeah.

(Pause)

**ESTHER:** We lose the periods. I got my period, I was thirteen, or twelve and a half, and when the war started, we came to Russia, Siberia, all the girls, nobody got, because from hunger. Not

nourishment. And is scary, too. If you sleep with fifty people in one room? Even, you just, you know? You're shaky. Everybody slept, and I was sitting, the policeman sits and watch us. And he asked me, "Why you not sleep?" And I said, "People snoring, and I cannot sleep." And the light was on. Have to be light. In a school we slept.

**INT:** Weren't you exhausted?

**ESTHER:** We lived six months like this. Everybody. Ask her. [Sarah Klein] She told you that? She didn't tell you, she didn't remember nothing. When I told her, she start to remember. I told her stuff, that she was confused. She said, "How you remember everything?" I said, "How you can forget?! This will be till I die."

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** The only thing I remember, they took me to work, they want to take me to Barnaool (sp?), this a big city, like to Washington, or like to California, I shall go to theatrical school.

**INT:** When was this?

**ESTHER:** In Siberia. In Barnaool. It's a big city. And I came there, with my mother. Not to a school to go, I went to a doctor. At the time the war started, she was forty year old, my mother. My father, too. And she got the period, when they kill, they started killing, they kill my cousin, and the other cousin, they shot him. And I pick him up, and we took him to the cemetery. My mother start to bleeding. The period. She never stopped it. That's why she cannot do nothing. And I went into a doctor's. You know, I read, and I ask this doctor, yes, and this is a nurse. And this was his wife. I don't know this is his wife. And I come over, and I don't like when on the table is piled up with junk, you know? Because my mother was very clean, see? That's why I remember. A clean house. And I remember this. I said, "I will clean this up, and I will make clean, and I gonna wash the floor." I wash the floor, clean up the table, put all the papers on one side is everything, and she came over with him, "We want to adopt you. How many children you are?" I said, "We three sisters." "You're going to be ours," she said. I said, "No, no, no." Everything, and they ask me, "What do you want?" I said, "Give me medicine for my mother, because she's still bleeding." It's a half a year, she still have the period, you see? From 19....like it was '39 started. Like it's September, October, when the Hitler came, and she's still bleeding from that time, you know? It's going. She's so weak.

And I said to the doctor, "Give me please." He said, "We have no medicine. Go to Barnaool." Then we went to the big town, and I went to the hospital, and they want to put her in hospital, and she start to crying. "Oh, no! I'm not going to the hospital, because my mother die in the hospital. And I don't want to go, and I don't want to go, and I don't want to go." And I said, "Okay. Come home." We come home, and I went in to the doctor. And I cry and I beg him. "I will do anything. I gonna wash every day the floor for you. Give me medicine for my mother."

**INT:** So you don't have to put her in the hospital.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And he said, "You know what you can get for your mother? Give her four glasses milk a day. How? You take from four glasses milk, you cook it to make one glass." You understand? You take a quart milk, you make one glass.

**INT:** Right. Cook it down.

**ESTHER:** And that's why I did. My brains, G-d gave me seichel. You know what I mean? Working overtime. And I went, and I remember I got a nice brush on my hair, I took this out. Everything I give away, just to bring a lot of milk. My grandfather was that time alive. He was still living two years with us. You know, was out there, he died later. When they took me to work, this was springtime. When they took me to work, to shovel the wood. And nobody got to bring the milk, with the water. And I come, and my mother used to go down, and I don't know how to cook that time. No, my mother used to go down, even sick, and cook what I told her. I bring her the milk and everything. She drink, and she ate, I said, "You got bread. You got milk. Give for your grandfather, for my grandfather, and you eat, and give everybody. Don't worry, I come home. Don't leave me nothing. I come home, I'm going to bring more." That's the way I used to tell my mother.

**INT:** But did the milk help your mother with her problem?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. She lives till 88 in Israel.

**INT:** Unbelievable. So what was it? What was going on with her? She had endometriosis, or something?

**ESTHER:** I will explain. No, this was the weakness. Like you cry, and I wish you never cry. Alle Germans shall cry, the bad Germans. And I'm telling you who is good, all right? I want to just tell you. They did so much, the Russian people, they're wonderful people. Even the goyim, the gentile people good. They put us on top, when we went away, like 1942, we have to leave. And the grandfather die already, because I got twice malaria. And he thought I gonna die, and he was crying, and that's why he died. My mother said, "Why Esther have to be sick? Why I'm not getting sick? I want her to live." (crying) You know? And I never forget. He used to give me Chanukah ten cents. I still remember this in my head.

**INT:** You were very close to him.

**ESTHER:** To the whole family. I come to Israel, I come to all my brothers and sisters. Why? The cousins hold me like sister. Because the cousin's wife is my cousin, and he's the husband, like also from Poland, we met after the war. We be all like, one family. I gonna show you an album, not today, whenever. I have plenty from the cousins.

**INT:** I'd love to see them.

**ESTHER:** Oh, wait a minute, come here.

(Pause)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with Esther Awruch. It's March 29, 1995. (pause)

I have a few questions from the last time, when we were talking about your life before the war. And I was wondering if you could describe for me what your parents were like. What their personalities were like. You could start with your mother. What kind of person was she when you were growing up as a little girl?

**ESTHER:** I was like a queen in a king house. Everybody, the grandparents, you know, like, "Mein Esther, mein Esther," you know? I felt like I am raised like in, when I used to go in school, you know, even the teacher used to put me on the stand and show all the girls, "Look how Kessler Ruvka," -- because in Polish you're talking. I went in public school, Poland. "And how clean" -- zhyto means clean. "How neat she is. Look around her ear. Look here." They showed the kids. The kids are coming, you know, like dirty, hungry. I came hungry, too. No, it was different. It was **my** fault. My father used to give me twenty cents every day I shall buy a butter roll. This I want you to see, let the whole world know who I am.

Then mein grandmother used to be the kindest person. Every poor girl, she used to go to the Rebbetzin and say, "Here is 200 zlotys, 300 zlotys. If any girl is poor, and the parents don't have...she have no parents, you know, for yisoimer (sp?) have no parents, make sure they shall make a wedding for me." Sometime the rebbetzin used to come over and show her, this is the kallah, you know something?

**INT:** This is the grandmother from your...

**ESTHER:** My father's side. Because my grandmother, the other died, my mother was twelve year old. My mother died, when my mother got married she was 26. She have to marry off all the kids!

**INT:** Oh. She was like a mother to them.

**ESTHER:** Like a mother, yeah. That's why she came, when I was ten year old, and I was poisoned. The grandmother came to me in a dream. I just told you. "Your mother done everything like a...she was the mother from mein kids. I came to save you, you shall live."

**INT:** But what was your mother like to you? Was she... did she have a sense of humor, was she...

**ESTHER:** Oh, yes! I will try to tell you. She make sure I make my lessons. And she told me, "Do you make your lessons? [Polish] In Polish, (?) And I used to say yes. "Now you go to play." She never let me out to play before I make the lessons.

**INT:** Oh, okay.

**ESTHER:** And she always make sure, and she asks me, "What you like I shall make for supper, you like it?" And I said, "Whatever the Tate lieb, ich hab auch a toben lieb." You know, something. I used to say it. "Whatever the daddy eats, I like it." Because in Poland, they used to write on a calendar the meal. Today you cook this meal, tomorrow you cook the meal like this. You know? In America it's different. It's all different. There it's more different raise the people, so kindly. You have to be **clean**.

And one thing I remember. My mother used to say, "Drink up the milk, I give you ten cents." And I ...

**INT:** You hated the milk, right?

**ESTHER:** They **pay** me.

**INT:** (laughs)

**ESTHER:** They pay me I shall drink the glass of milk. And I got the money. Then my father used to laugh. He used to say, "What are you gonna do with the ten cents?" I said, "I gonna buy a cone." You know, a ice cream cone, an ice cream cone, and they give like a...a cookie inside, you know, to the...yeah. That was in Poland. Then my father used to say, "Do you have any girlfriends?" I said, "Yes. I have three." My cousin and I got more cousins, not just with her. I was playing, Raisele, she nebbech went to the crematorium. She went with me in school, yeah. (cries)

**INT:** She was your cousin?

**ESTHER:** Girlfriend. Yeah. The cousins living in Israel. I want to tell you, then here I used to come home from school, from the third grade I still remember. And we used to, I was tall, I think like today, not exactly, just...then I go into the house. My mother stays home with my father. Then she used to say to me, "Bring the food, eat first, and then go," and she used to be up early. She used to wake up 5:00 in the morning and cook the supper. And put it in a kaflugen like this. She puts it and it keeps warm. When I come home 12:00, everything is cooked. That's why I learn from her to know how to do everything -- I saw. I was smart. One thing was the kindest thing to me. I got a good heart because I used to saw how my grandmother does. Every person, it doesn't matter, she was a...a gypsy or whatever. She went by, she said, "Give me a penny." You know, like a penny. She used to call her in, give her a glass of tea. In Poland, they drink coffee. She used to give a coffee, and like a little bit light milk, not much, then I used to come over with a piece of bread, and put butter like very thin. And I used to say, "Can you make me this?" And she said, "I give just for the poor people. You can have the whole bread! Help yourself." But I said, "No, Grandma. I like **you** shall make me. Because this looks very good. I feel hungry for that."

**INT:** It was a little different, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Different, you see?



**INT:** But she would give to non-Jewish people, also, your grandmother? To gypsy people, and...

**ESTHER:** Yes! I'm just explain.

**INT:** Not just to Jewish people.

**ESTHER:** She was, wherever somebody begs, she was the kindest person. That's why my mother said after the war, she said, "You see why we're alive? Because your grandmother give **everybody** help."

I used to, I myself, when I used to go with Chayale. She lives in Israel. No, the time from the war, was very hard. They was living in the forest.

**INT:** Who's Chayale?

**ESTHER:** Chayale Lammel. Her name was Chaya Lammel. You can write down her name, too. And her father was a katsav, you know? And my mother said, "It's not nice you play..."

**INT:** What's a katsav?

**ESTHER:** A butcher.

**INT:** Oh.

**ESTHER:** Like rabbonim and butchers, it doesn't fit.

**INT:** So it was like a lower class?

**ESTHER:** A lower class people, yeah. And also, if he will be a **kosher** butcher, then my mother will not tell me, and that got me a little upset. And I said, "Mom, I'm not that type of person, like you think. My character is like my father's. My father doesn't make difference from them to them, and I like think this is nicer." See? I got already my seichel.

**INT:** That's interesting.

**ESTHER:** Right.

**INT:** So your father didn't see differences among people. But your mother did. Your mother saw...

**ESTHER:** Because she come from rabbonim. And my father came, just they got business.

**INT:** Right, so it's a different...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. My grandfather got a shoe store.

**INT:** But his mother also was giving tzedakah to everybody.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yes! Everybody. She was wearing sheitels. This doesn't mean nothing. In Shabbas they wear shtreimlach. Not my father. My father was modern. A modern person. Why? Because when he was 16 year old, was 1914, the war started.

**INT:** Right. You were telling me. He went to Russia.

**ESTHER:** He **went**? They **took** him. And my grandmother give an eyde, you know? She, if he come back alive, she will always help people, thanking G-d my son comes back alive from the war. See, that's why she did it. This was her...and she was also a poor girl. Like her grandparents, the (?) killed 3,000 Jews that time in the city. That's why they call Narol. Narol mean they killed, Florianov was, and they kill all the Jews. They cut the breasts off, and all of those stuff off, they find this in sacks. It was written. It's in Polish history.

**INT:** You find it in what?

**ESTHER:** In sacks.

**INT:** Oh, sacks. Sacks, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. The same thing...

**INT:** What year was that about? [buzzing noise in background for a few minutes]

**ESTHER:** Like 200 years ago. No, the same thing Hussein close to...in 1973, when was Yom Kippur war, he done the same thing, 108 Israeli soldiers he done it. My brother-in-law witnessed, because he was like a general. He come over with Moshe Dayan, and he come over with Ariel Sharon, they're his buddies, and they work together. He's a \_\_\_\_\_, if a war, he knows so many languages, French, and all the language, and even Arabic they teach him. They have to know translating. They know right away, you know, sitting like this with the...

**INT:** With the radios to hear.

**ESTHER:** Sure. And then here, they find the same thing in the basements. So many, 108 soldiers. Was doctors, you know, like nurses probably. When a war goes, the soldiers going, comes the nurses, too.

**INT:** Sure.

**ESTHER:** In case they need it right away.

**INT:** And they were all killed.

**ESTHER:** All got killed. Cut off the hand, the breast.

**INT:** So what does the word "Narol" mean?

**ESTHER:** Narol, this mean, "on the earth." They built on the ground.

**INT:** Where these people were killed.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And they build, they change the earth, you know? Narol. This means, they just, like you want to grow something.

**INT:** Right, so you dig up the ground.

**ESTHER:** You dig up the ground, and put it back and change it around, and then you build houses. That's Narol. That is my city.

**INT:** So your city was built on the bodies of dead Jews from 200 years ago.

**ESTHER:** From 200 years ago. It was not far, I think it was 30 miles from Tomaszow, where the Rosenbergs was living [Sarah Klein]. Or maybe closer. Because we used to walk there.

**INT:** You used to walk to Tomaszow?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I was like thirteen year old, girls, like teenagers?

**INT:** There was no problem to walk there.

**ESTHER:** Shabbas we got nothing to do. Like, you know, we just...

**INT:** Go walk to the big city.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, we wake up in the morning, we just went for summertime for a walk. So many girls would come over. We meet, like we was...Mizrachi. You see? And we just walked to the other, their synagogue, and we meet other girls. As a matter of fact, I met a girlfriend, she lives in California. We always used to meet, and she said, "Esther, you didn't change nothing! You look exactly like you was a kid. Except you're getting a little older."

**INT:** Yeah. So you belonged to a Mizrachi youth group when you were a teenager?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah, because every synagogue got this, you know? Like you **have** to. Because when I went out from this, I learned two years Hebrew. And I used to write Hebrew, and read Hebrew. No, I don't read. I write Hebrew. No, I daven, that's all I know.

**INT:** Could you explain your education? You went to public elementary school.

**ESTHER:** Elementary school, yeah.

**INT:** And what about, and your Hebrew education, where would you get that?

**ESTHER:** After school, in Poland. Yeah, like we used to go, like I come home about 12:00, I went out from the house 8:00. And then, like 2:00 I go to the Hebrew school. Or 3:00.

**INT:** I see. After school.

**ESTHER:** I still remember the name from the teacher. Mendel Weissler. I met him in Hadera. He lives in Hadera.

**INT:** Oh, really? Wow.

**ESTHER:** And mein cousin's daughter married her son. See how a world goes? I was in the wedding. I was coming to Israel. They invite me.

**INT:** How many years did you have Hebrew school when you were growing up?

**ESTHER:** Excuse me?

**INT:** About how many years of Hebrew school did you have in Poland?

**ESTHER:** Just two years.

**INT:** In Poland. Two years. Okay.

**ESTHER:** There was no time. The war started. Oh, I went to cheder, you know, like with my cousin, you see? I gonna show you later the picture of everything. Yeah, we can put the pictures here.

**INT:** That would be great if you could give us some pictures. That would be wonderful.

**ESTHER:** Yes. I'll give you a picture.

**INT:** Could you, you were explaining your...

**ESTHER:** My girlfriend is in the picture.

**INT:** Yeah, I want to see. I would like to see. You were explaining your mother as being...

**ESTHER:** Excuse me, she was very Hasidic. She didn't got no hair. She was all...

**INT:** Shaved her head? And then wore a sheitel.

**ESTHER:** Right away. Yeah, sheitel, she got four sheitlen. No, you shall see, I didn't see people here to be elegant like my mother. You know why? Because she was wearing a sheitel, every day what **style** that kind of sheitel she was wearing. It used to be you know, the long hair with the rolls like this? She was wearing it. And if she go in synagogue, she put a hat...

**INT:** On top of the sheitel.

**ESTHER:** On the sheitel. And always gloves, white gloves, and you don't wear a pocketbook to the synagogue. Then I used to hold the keys for the grandmother and my mother.

**INT:** Oh, you were the keyholder, huh?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** So did your mother, what was the economic level growing up? Were you poor, were you middle class?

**ESTHER:** No, we was not poor. My grandmother was rich, because they was rich. They got a big business, and any poor people need to help, they always helped them. Yeah, always helped. And the grandfather used to never, taking, like he said, give you a thousand dollars. I'll give you an example, never say percent, you know? In Jewish religion you're not allowed to take percent.

**INT:** Yeah...

**ESTHER:** How do you say this? I forgot, too.

**INT:** Interest.

**ESTHER:** Interest. Not allowed to take interest. They never took from nobody. A lot of people never give her back.

**INT:** Your grandfather was alive. Your father's father was alive.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, sure. He was mit us. He was mit us. When I was sick, he was crying.

**INT:** He was the one that was sitting in the hospital with you?

**ESTHER:** No, that was my mother's father. When I was ten year old.

**INT:** That's what I thought. But you were very close to your grandparents. You always...

**ESTHER:** They liked me. Maybe I'm a lovable person, because a lot of cousins was jealous on me. When I came to Israel, and one cousin, she wear a sheitel. She's a Hasidic. Her husband die already. And she used to say, "Everybody loves you better from me!"

**INT:** The grandparents.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, everybody.

**INT:** Why do you think that was? Why do you think they did?

**ESTHER:** It's the personality.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** In so much when Simchas Torah do. That's what she said. As I come...

**INT:** You make a party when you come.

**ESTHER:** I always make a party. What do you mean "party?" We coming together, and I was fast. I wake up 5:00 in the morning by my sister, and I bake knishes, and I bake rolls, and I bake everything. Cookies and cakes, and my sister said, "Where you bought it?" And her husband said, "Yes. I bought for her." Make a joke. And then she look in the house, she said, "Take a look. When you clean the house?"

**INT:** (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Her house, I clean it up.

**INT:** Oh, yeah. You've got a lot of energy. You have a lot of energy.

**ESTHER:** She ask me, "What are you taking?" I said, "I'm taking vitamins." She said, "Send me the vitamins!" (laughs) I bring the vitamins for her.

**INT:** You have a lot of energy.

**ESTHER:** It's the willpower. It's not energy. Because my husband dies a long time ago. And I was by myself. And always I was dating. You want somebody to come in the house, always be clean. And I worked 40 hours. I worked in Golden Slippers. As a matter of fact, a month before I got sick, I asked them to take me back to work. He said, "We need you. Just you take a little, we sent you a check every month. And we just going to give you one day work." I said, "For one day, what I gonna have? Give me three day work, then I gonna live a little, buy food what I need." Like I never can afford to buy red meat. I told them that. That got me mad. I worked, a translator, I speak Russian, I speak Polish, Jewish to the older people. I used to go from the

synagogue before I worked, I never took money that time. Because the rebbetzin told me, "What are you doing with yourself?" I said, "I come home from the synagogue, I eat lunch and I lay down." She said, "You're too young to lay down. Go over to the Golden Slipper there." There was not Golden Slipper. The Uptown Home, they used to call. "And you will help out the old people. My father is there." "Oh, yeah?" "In the fourth floor." I said, "Good." I used to go every Shabbas, and used to come over and see the colored people. Then I used to put her in a five dollar in the pocket and said, "You better give me, go downstairs." I was not familiar where anything is. "And pick up a big pitcher orange juice."

**INT:** Yeah, you were giving it, you were telling me.

**ESTHER:** "And I will help you to give out the medicine." You know that colored girl kissed me. And I will not push her away when she kiss me. I kiss her, too. I hug her, too. I hug her. And then later I used to bake here my own cookies and bring over a big thing there, and serve everybody, the old people and the colored. I said, "Help yourself." I used to leave the can. And then like the others coming over checking. They said, "Who bring in? Have to show in the office first." I said, "If I buy a bread for my money," here used to be a bakery. I forgot the name. And I...(take a look. Everything I remember, this I forgot already.) And I used to bring over, to give coffee, I used to take there, that time I worked already. And I used to bring over, and the people, the colored people, you give them breakfast, and I told them, "Drink out the coffee. Here's your bread, pumpernickel, cream cheese." I bring my own cream cheese from my house. I bought it. By Davis's store. When I went to store, I bought a loaf of bread, I bought this, and I bring over, and she said, "You're going to eat wherever you have a chance. First let us feed the people." See? And that was, not I say smart. This is like, that's why I felt, you know why I did it? I want my man, my husband should be in Gan Eden. Because my husband was dead. I went to work a half a year after this. And I figure, what can I do for my husband? I gonna do that. He shall be in Gan Eden. I gonna feed the old people. Feed it myself. And I said to the colored people, "Come over. Sisters and brothers. Help me feed those people." Was sitting people like this.

**INT:** Yeah, they have nobody to visit them.

**ESTHER:** And nobody feeds them. And there's some people, they're **blind**. They don't even know how to put a spoon in their mouth. I felt bad. I fed my husband three months before he died. He could not eat no more. Not he, he couldn't even pick up the hand to eat. He was sick, he got cancer.

**INT:** How did he die? Oh, he had cancer.

**ESTHER:** He got lung cancer. He smoked cigarettes, four packs a day. After all, his father was a rabbi. And they kill his rabbi, his father, with the Torah, he hold two Torahs. He want to save the two Torahs to go in the hiding, with two Torahs. The SS kill him, by the head. He was 60 year old and killed him. The mother was 42, they put her in Auschwitz. She got killed there, with his sisters, with kids.

**INT:** These are your parents.

**ESTHER:** These are **his** parents.

**INT:** Oh, your husband's parents.

**ESTHER:** My husband's parents. I put in the synagogue a plaque for their name. And not...the six million Jews there, I put their name there.

**INT:** Oh. At the monument?

**ESTHER:** Monument, yeah. I didn't have too much money, then I just put for the father and the mother.

**INT:** It was nice that you did that.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. No, I didn't even know them. I never knowed them.

**INT:** Sure. Never met them.

**ESTHER:** No, I just done it. He was...a husband like I got, I never dream I gonna have it.

**INT:** Okay. Well, we're going to get to him. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Yeah, that's right.

**INT:** Okay. Let me see if I have any more questions about before...is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your life before the war that would be important for us to know?

**ESTHER:** What to tell you.

**INT:** About your childhood.

**ESTHER:** I just explained you. It was the kindest thing I got. I got girlfriends, and we used to play, like we got **life**. We was not afraid like here. Here the kids, they're so **wild**. They're throwing stones. In Europe, the kids was maybe the Jewish kids are different. I don't know. Because in town, all the Jewish people was living. Outside the town the Polish people was living.

**INT:** And you didn't have anti-Semitism from the kids? The Polish kids didn't bother you when you were growing up?

**ESTHER:** No. No. I just, it was a Polish family, but his mother, his father went with my mother in school, and he went, Monek, with me in school. He was, his father and him saved 200 Jews, the time from the war. Because they was living near the priest, and the priest told them,



because you know, it was a shame. "We have to save G-d's kids." And they did it. She lives, Marisha, she lives in Jerusalem, East Jerusalem. 37 people was alive, and they came back from the war, they went to Israel from Auschwitz. And they came back from Israel. To save him, you know, how much they could. They take him out from the, like they put those people to the oven. When those, the husband and the son stealed them, and put them to the other door outside, and took them away in hiding places. And he hide them. 200 Jews. No, the time from the hiding...

**INT:** This man was from your town.

**ESTHER:** From my town. His name was Yosef. I will remember the second.

**INT:** The last name?

**ESTHER:** I can remember the last name because...

**INT:** Why do you think he did that?

**ESTHER:** Because he was working for my father, and my father give him a whole year he got work. He never was hungry for money, you understand? And he felt it. It's like...

**INT:** So he felt grateful to your father?

**ESTHER:** Yes. And to my grandfather. One time, it was like, in the city, started 1937, I was bigger already. I remember like today. Two year later, yeah, I was twelve year old. I remember it like this. It start like, like bandits coming in to buy something to a bakery. And he throw a half a zloty, and throw on the floor. There's very anti-Semitism in those days. Even the priest himself. He got four stores, and later nobody buys by him, everybody comes to us. Because if you come to my father's store, cost you twenty cents cheaper, wherever you buy. Because my father can afford it, you know? Because he was the one make them. He got two boys working for them. And those Polish people was working, too, for us. Then we give him, summertime, my father make the boots for winter. And wintertime, we make summer shoes for summer. Then he always got a whole year work.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** You see? And the kids remember. He went with, Monek went with me in school. I still remember his name. And they got killed, and my mother met in 1967, I was in Israel, in Jerusalem, we went to see, you know Jerusalem? And my father came, too. And the lady recognized my mother. And she said, "Fredele, Freda, Freda, Freyda Kessler! It's Monya, it's me!" On the Polish lady. "I'm living here. I am a citizen. Because my husband saved so many Jews."

**INT:** Oh, they brought her over there.

**ESTHER:** They brought her over, and they bought her a home in East Jerusalem. She lives in East Jerusalem. Maybe she die already, because she was the same age like my mother. My mother died twelve years ago. You see?

**INT:** That's nice.

**ESTHER:** And she lives in East Jerusalem. The 37 Jews bought her a home in Israel. And her two sons, she got two more sons and a daughter, they was in the Israeli army.

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, because they lived there. They go to church.

**INT:** Did they convert? No, they didn't convert.

**ESTHER:** They didn't have to convert. Israel don't ask them to convert. They just lived there.

**INT:** But they went in the army.

**ESTHER:** Because their father saved the Jews. That was the whole thing. The people said it, not she said it. The people said to the Jewish government, those are the people said, "Her husband got killed because he save us."

**INT:** So they wanted to do something for her.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's why they bought a home. She left Poland, and she lives in East Jerusalem.

**INT:** So you were saying that...

**ESTHER:** We was hiding. We was hiding.

**INT:** No, I don't want to get to that yet. I just want to ask a few more questions about before the war. Could you just tell me what it was like with your sisters? What kind of a relationship you had with them? Or they were too little, or...

**ESTHER:** My sisters? They was too little. I remember not much, because I went to school. I am eight year older from the youngest.

**INT:** Oh, okay. It's a big difference.

**ESTHER:** You see? And six year older from the second, because in between my mother got a little, she was pregnant seven months. She lost a baby. And my mother could not have any children.

**INT:** But did you have a responsibility to take care of the little ones, or not?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. I used to come home from school, and my mother said, "Cradle them." And I threw her out! (laughs)

**INT:** (laughs) Oh, she fell out of the cradle?

**ESTHER:** I never forget. This I still remember.

**INT:** You didn't do that on purpose, did you? (laughs)

**ESTHER:** No!

**INT:** You were just rocking too hard and she fell out. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** I don't know. And my mother said, "Why you doing this? You could kill her." I said "Has ve Halilah. No, no, no, no." I cried. She said, "Don't cry." She didn't hit me. She never hit me. She just always, she sit down like I talk to you. This I remember. And she used to tell me, " (Yiddish) Do the same thing. Never hit the kids. Just explain her and tell her what way is good to talk." Even when I come here, my daughter went to high school, and kindergarten. Oh, you finish this, or you want to finish...

**INT:** No, I want to ask you about that. So to discipline you, your mother would just sit you down and talk to you. If you did something wrong, your mother wouldn't hit you.

**ESTHER:** Never.

**INT:** She would sit down and talk to you.

**ESTHER:** And talk to me.

**INT:** Would she get angry, or...

**ESTHER:** Never.

**INT:** She never got angry?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah! She get angry. But she smile with an anger.

**INT:** Oh yeah? (laughs)

**ESTHER:** She's angry and she gives a smile. She said, "Mamenyu, (Yiddish) mehr nisht tun. Never do it again."

**INT:** But she never raised her voice?

**ESTHER:** What I did? I used to be a bad kid. She used to give me ten cents to drink the milk, I used to give two sips and throw it out in the sink. And this mean I lie. That's why she used to be mad on me.

**INT:** What about your father? Did he ever hit you?

**ESTHER:** No. One time I remember. He never hit me, he never touched me, never scream on me. He loved me so much. You know like here, the kids, scream and rape, the father rapes the children. I can't **believe** that. Maybe the lawyers give this to their mind. It can't be true. Maybe not by the Jewish people, because we was Hasidic. I don't know. Mein father used to go the whole week, he worked so hard. And you see, when it's love, you raise different. When my father came home from work, it was right away my mother put on a schissel with wasser heisse, he shall soak his legs, because staying the whole day schnaden the leder, you know, cutting the leather, and you know, like it's hard work.

**INT:** It's hard work, sure.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Soft leather and sole leather for the shoes, you know, for the heels, for this. You have to measure, you have to do this. You have to look in the book if you do it good. And he learned this in Russia. When he came back, he got a factory. Why the American people don't do it? Shall teach the people, instead of putting them in jails.

**INT:** Teach them a trade or something.

**ESTHER:** Put them in a factory and let them work. And from the factory, give them like a hotel, not a hotel, just a place just to sleep. In the morning let him go back to work. It be not better this way? It will not be, like they have to watch television...

**INT:** Right. Sit around.

**ESTHER:** Or killing coming out from the jail. They're killing again. They're doing the same raping again. It's the American fault.

**INT:** So your father also didn't discipline you. He didn't hit you.

**ESTHER:** He discipline me just like this. He didn't have to hit me. He used to teach, taught me, "Esther, you never shall, you're not allowed to say a lie. You always say the truth." And he used to say, "You want money? Go help yourself." Like to the register. He ask me, "Whatever you take out, tell me how much." You know, I got so used to that. When I got married to my husband, I used to do the same thing. I said to my husband, "Gedalya, I just spend so much money." He said, "Why you telling **me**?" I said, "I have a habit from my father taught me this," (Yiddish) you know, you're taught from little, to be honest.

**INT:** That was important to your father, to get that across to you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** What about...

**ESTHER:** Never lie, never curse nobody. And don't ever play mit kids who's cursing. And if you see the parents curse each other, don't go in this house anymore. Don't play, don't be friends no more. He taught me the very valuable thing.

**INT:** Yeah. He wanted you to have the same kind of friends that had nice families and...

**ESTHER:** Yes, yes, yes.

**INT:** And nobody screaming at anybody else.

**ESTHER:** No. Not screaming. Because my father, even with the yarmulke, he used to come over, grabbed my mother and kiss her.

**INT:** Oh, did he? I was going to ask you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Always do that.

**INT:** So they were affectionate with each other.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's what I'm just saying. He used to say, "Mamenyu," and chap a kuss, and he give her the money from the register.

**INT:** Was your mother affectionate towards him also?

**ESTHER:** Of course! I just mention, Friday night used to be, I used to love it so much. We used to eat, Tate make kiddush, and after this, you know, they bentsch, and I have to sit down with the siddur and bentsch too, because not for the little babies. They was too little. And then the father used to say to the mother: "Bist du singen a tantz, a waltz or a fox trot?" to the Mame. She used to sing so beautiful melody, and she used to sing, and my father took me to dance.

**INT:** And he would dance with you, yeah. He learned that in Russia.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He learned me to dance. I know everything what he was taught me.

**INT:** Could you explain again? He went into the war, the First World War, the Russians took him, right?

**ESTHER:** The Germans. The, he was, Poland was always separated. At that time was Austria. Austria got half and Russia took over. You know, like and Germany I guess got half. You know, Poland was no more Poland. Never was Poland.

**INT:** Okay, so who took him into the army?

**ESTHER:** The Austrian.

**INT:** Austria. Okay.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And then it was those time that Austria was very decent people, the generals. When they see 500 young kids, sixteen, seventeen year kids -- like my father was sixteen year old, and he was six foot tall, then you look older -- they grab him to the war. When the kids, they give you a knife, a stick, you know, in case you fight with the soldiers. They give you a gun. He never was trained for that. All the boys started scare, they start to crying. In those days was different. He took out the white flag to the Russians, to give up. That's why my father was alive. Yeah.

**INT:** So then, but then he wound up in Russia. So how did that happen?

**ESTHER:** He was seven years in Russia.

**INT:** Yeah, seven years, okay.

**ESTHER:** And he was working in a factory. Where they was making shoes.

**INT:** That's how he learned.

**ESTHER:** That's how he learned. That's what I'm just proving to you. You don't have to kill the people, like the Jews were, they catch, like now, the American two people, they catch them, just to crossing the border, they put them for eight year in jail. They're going to kill them, probably.

**INT:** In Iraq, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Iraq. You see, in those days, was not like this.

**INT:** Right. A better, gentler time maybe.

**ESTHER:** I don't know what's happened. You see, like I used to go and daven. The history repeat. Always they're killing Jews. That's why we're the minority. We're so small people. You know, like you see, they killed six million Jews in Poland. Here itself, how many like, in all other countries. And as soon as they see Jews, they kill them.

**INT:** Why do you think there is so much anti-Semitism in the world, and why do you think that the Jews....

**ESTHER:** Because of Esau. He right away, when Jacob took away, he was born a couple minutes before. And that was the hate start from that.

**INT:** You think that's where it started. All the way back then?

**ESTHER:** Yes. That's why.

**INT:** And Esau became the Christians, right?

**ESTHER:** Yes. And he said to him, he was not, in those days it was not Christian, it was not Jews. No, who was Jacob, like Abraham, G-d told Abraham. And Abraham followed right away the Jewish, like he had to mohel the...he have to circumcise him.

**INT:** Circumcise.

**ESTHER:** Isaac. And Isaac followed wherever the father said. And G-d sent like a malach to save his life. Isaac, because he want to kill him. Because G-d want to see if he's **true** to G-d. And we learn this in the history.

**INT:** But you think that the anti-Semitism comes from all the way back then?

**ESTHER:** Yes. And never go. And you know, the Polish people, the Polish, the other, all the Christians, they always, they believe in Moses. They believe in G-d. Just because ...Jesus was Jewish. And he was know the Bible by heart. He knew everything. No, one thing, he wants that time, they was mad, why they sold him to the other people, and the other people killed him.

**INT:** The Romans.

**ESTHER:** The Romans. The Romans killed the people. And because...

**INT:** Well, they blamed the Jews.

**ESTHER:** They blamed the Jews. It was written, the Jews never killed him. The Jews never sold him.

**INT:** But why do you think the Polish people in particular were so anti-Semitic? Why?

**ESTHER:** They still are.

**INT:** Yeah, why do you think? There's no Jews left in Poland, and they're still very anti-Semitic.

**ESTHER:** You're telling me? And there's so many stupid lawyers. There's six lawyers, I know them, my girlfriend's cousins, a lawyer here from, in this country. They went there, each one took a couple million dollars to build their buildings.

**INT:** In Poland?

**ESTHER:** In Poland.

**INT:** Why?

**ESTHER:** (Pause) To make business. You know, when I came in this country, and they used to say here they can kill a father or mother because for money. And you can see it's true. Do you heard what's happening last week, you read in the paper?

**INT:** What was that?

**ESTHER:** Russian people killed themselves.

**INT:** Oh, yeah. The couple, yeah.

**ESTHER:** And he got the gun in the hand, and I said no. I was in Russia. I don't believe it.

**INT:** You don't think he did it.

**ESTHER:** I **know** he did it. I couldn't believe it in my **mind**. And what's happened. It's because of the son-in-law. The daughter. He asked her the money, because he bought two business. He got two business.

**INT:** So it was a business connection.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, and he said, "I'm stuck, I don't have money to..." Why I have to talk this to that?

**INT:** That's okay. All right. So just to sum up your life before the war, you seem to have had a very happy childhood.

**ESTHER:** A happy childhood, yeah.

**INT:** Your parents, you describe your parents' marriage as being a good one, and an affectionate one. And that they didn't...

**ESTHER:** You know, they live fifty years together. When my daughter's supposed to get married, 1970, I ask my husband, "Can I bring my parents to the wedding?" And he said, "Of course, my dear." And he went to the bank, he took out \$1500 and give it to me, he said, "Esther, now take the bus and go over in the Sixth Street, and there is the El Al agency."

**INT:** Oh, your parents were living in Israel.



**ESTHER:** In Israel, of course. They came 1948 to Israel.

**INT:** Oh, I see.

**ESTHER:** And when my daughter was born and she was four months old, then I want to go, too. And my husband, and she wrote me a letter, my mother. "Go better to Uncle Sam." Because 1948 Israel was a war. You know, they went after the war, you know? And my daughter was just four months old. How can you have a baby to bring in here with two kids? She said me. She works. My mother was working as a mashgiach.

**INT:** Oh, really?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. My father, he was so young he came to Israel. He was like 46 year old. Then what he did, he hold a gun like a shomer. He was watching the Jewish country. You see? He got work. And then he saw, you know, that's what she wrote me. "It's very hard." My sister was like fifteen. She go in school in Tel Aviv to learn Hebrew, and then she was like a waitress to save a couple pennies, you know, to buy herself a pair of shoes or something.

**INT:** Right. It was a hard life.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And when she wrote me in that letter, my mother, this was 1948, and she wrote me the letter in 1949, too. I have pictures, I gonna show you in a minute. Then my husband said, "Let us go. I heard I can go to America." I said, "Good, let us go to America." And I have pictures from here. They send me.

**INT:** Okay. All right. I think we can move on to the war now, if that's okay with you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, please, sure.

**INT:** I was confused. You said that you were born in 1923.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** So when the war started for you in your town it was 1939?

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** So then you were sixteen, you must have been sixteen, from 1923 to 1939. Am I adding that right? Sixteen or seventeen when the war started? How old were you when the war started?

**ESTHER:** I was fourteen year old.

**INT:** You were fourteen.

**ESTHER:** Fourteen.

**INT:** So then you weren't born in 1923, you were born like later?

**ESTHER:** You see, in Europe, you count different. You count different. (pause) I was born the 28th of December. It's three days before New Year's. And you count the whole year, you understand? When I came here, I was 24 year old. And I say I gonna be 25. He said, "No, you're still 24."

**INT:** I see. So they count that as a year. Okay, so you were fourteen when the war started.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay. Could you tell me what was happening before the war? How were you getting, were your parents talking about what was happening? What was going on in your town before the war? When Hitler had come to power, and was it getting more anti-Semitic? Were the Germans coming in, what was happening?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. When the Germans came, it was like a rehearsal. Like here, on television, you have to watch, we didn't got that time televisions, nothing. No, I remember. My sister remembers. She was at that time eleven year old. Wait a minute. She was at that time seven year old. Seven, or...yeah. And she came over, and the place, the bombs was flying. And they say alarm, people should go in hiding places. She came in a fruit store. And she saw so many people was sitting, and it was smelling, you know, like people, the Polish people, you know like older people, they're leaving gasses, you know? And they got some odor. And she was like, in our house was clean. Was never smelling anything. (laughs) Then she grab, I still remember laughing, because she told me that in Israel. And she said she put in water, and she put it like this.

**INT:** A towel over her nose?

**ESTHER:** Because everybody was sitting with towels!

**INT:** Oh, they **all** were sitting with towels.

**ESTHER:** All sitting with towels! Because in case, that's what they told them on the radio. The radio. The gas. Everybody was sitting with towels. This I remember. She told me.

**INT:** But that must have been in 1939.

**ESTHER:** And me, wait, and my mother told me, "You go straight home, and take the sisters," because the other one was five year old. She said, "Take the two sisters to the house. And you see their clothes, in case we have to run in hiding places."

**INT:** But before the war happened, you were getting ideas that you know, Hitler was taking over in Germany?

**ESTHER:** No, no!

**INT:** You didn't know anything about it?

**ESTHER:** No, the president was so stupid, Ridz Smigly, his name was Ridz Smigly. When Pilsudski was president, he die in 1933, '35. Is difference. '35. 1935 he die.

**INT:** The president of Poland.

**ESTHER:** Poland. Everybody said he was like a Jewish jadedk. This means he's like a grandfather for the Jews. The Jews hide him.

**INT:** Oh. So he was good to the Jews.

**ESTHER:** Oh, all the time. When he die, they start...

**INT:** The anti-Semitism.

**ESTHER:** And that's how it started, yeah. He always give permission, the first, the Jewish people, everything.

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** They put him, hide him like a rabbi.

**INT:** What was his name?

**ESTHER:** Joseph Pilsudski. Yeah. And Ridz Smigly was after he died, they make another one, a general, they make him for a president. He was no good. He was young, and he was like a Polish anti-Semite. Because nobody hide him, he didn't understand the difference. He was giving, the Polish guy, the other one, Pilsudski, give for all the Jews for the whole country, he was giving like permission to open up factories, to open up this. Before they can't do nothing. Just for the Polish people. And my mother said, "Was no rights, the Jewish people. If you want to go in college" -- college is in Poland, gymnasium -- "if you want to go in college, you have to be rich to go in college." No, my mother told me, "You want to go in gymnasium, you just finished high school. You got to go more, like high school." And the war started, we got nothing no more.

**INT:** The war started before you could get into gymnasium.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Would you have gone if the war hadn't happened?

**ESTHER:** No, I got my girlfriend, she just the first year. And the war started, I never saw her again. That's why I was just mentioning. Raisele, I forgot the other name. Yeah, sure. I used to got, I got pictures from all the girls. I didn't see it.

**INT:** So when this new president became president of Poland, and then...

**ESTHER:** He said like this: (Polish) We will never give a button from an old coat, we will not give even a button from an old coat.

**INT:** To...the Jews?

**ESTHER:** To the Germans.

**INT:** Oh, to the Germans. Okay. So he was going to hang onto the country.

**ESTHER:** Hang on. Country was very good established. It was work for everybody...it was not too much work, the Jewish people was trying...

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** I never saw the people sleeping on the street.

**INT:** People sleeping on the street here. And they weren't doing that in Poland. You didn't see that there.

**ESTHER:** Never in Russia, never in Poland, never in Israel. What's going on?

**INT:** People take them in. They have a place to go.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And I remember we was in, the time when we run away, because we was like five months hiding places, and we came to, when the priest said, "You better go away, because they're going to kill all the Jews here." And then we took together, and we run away. Nu, we went away to Rava-Ruska. There it's Russians. You see, the border.

**INT:** So wait. So your town was in eastern Poland, right, on the east side?

**ESTHER:** In the middle.

**INT:** Oh, it was right in the middle of the country?

**ESTHER:** In the middle of the country.

**INT:** Okay, so when they divided it in 1939, so...

**ESTHER:** Oh, excuse me. The Germans went into our city, and to my girlfriend's city [Sarah Klein] we never come back. They took away the cities. We have to hide. Otherwise they kill us.

**INT:** What year was this?

**ESTHER:** 1939.

**INT:** In 1939 the Germans came in.

**ESTHER:** We never slept in our house again.

**INT:** Okay, so tell me please what happened. It was September first, also, or it was after September first?

**ESTHER:** This was like...this was not September, this is, [Polish word for September], I still remember. (?) is September, that's right. It's a Polish name.

**INT:** September, 1939.

**ESTHER:** '39.

**INT:** The Germans came into your town?

**ESTHER:** Yes. I think it was...the 21st? I can remember that. Because I remember, I was just, you know, like kids playing, and then was Erev Yom Tov. My mother said, "Hurry up. We have to go," Rosh Hashana you go daven, right? And we have to go, be dressed and going, and we came out from the synagogue, and they heard already the Germans is in town. With the tanks.

**INT:** So what did you do?

**ESTHER:** We didn't do nothing. We were sitting in the houses, in the basements, hiding.

**INT:** Hiding in the basements. All the Jews were hiding?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. In all the basements hiding.

**INT:** Why were you hiding? Did you know that when the Germans came in, the Jews would be in trouble?

**ESTHER:** Oh, they kill **everybody**. At that time they came in, they killed Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, they didn't look who to kill. They just...

**INT:** Oh. They were just coming in and killing people.

**ESTHER:** Coming in to kill people. And they took away.

**INT:** Were they bombing your city, also?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. They throw bombs in our city. They throw six bombs in our city, they kill six people, Polish people. Ukrainian or Polish, I don't know, because all kind of people were sitting there. The thing is, in the morning, they went by and the Polish soldiers kill...like a Red Cross from the Germans, you know? Like...like doctors, you know? And they kill a doctor. And that's how they start to burn our city.

**INT:** Oh. They got mad and they started burning...

**ESTHER:** They got mad at our city. And they started putting our stores on fire. And they coming into the stores, and we was living here, and the business was in town. (Polish) Our street was (?) 28 was our street where I was living. The name from the street. And we was in town, living in town. Like Market Street. Over there, all the stores is around there. And we got a store there, and like the grandparents was still living there. You see, they got a room in the back.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And the synagogue...

**INT:** So what happened? They set fire to the stores?

**ESTHER:** Yes. To the houses, of course. To the stores, they took out the merchandise, or they start to burning, yeah.

**INT:** What did your family do? Did your father get everybody together, or what happened?

**ESTHER:** Oh, at that time, we was just hiding. My father's sister run away someplace hiding. Everybody right away, because it was dangerous.

**INT:** What about your grandparents? What happened to them? Were they with you hiding in the house?

**ESTHER:** Not with me. I just say. Everybody went by themselves.

**INT:** Okay. So what happened to **your** family? Tell me what happened.

**ESTHER:** My family, it was just, we went to the woods hiding. We went hiding in the woods. We was hiding for six weeks.

**INT:** Where in the woods? Just in the woods?

**ESTHER:** It was, the name is...if I remember...Oh, mein G-d, I used to remember. Maybe she remembers the woods. It was so many...I have to check the book.

**INT:** But did you have like a bunker in the woods, or where were you living?

**ESTHER:** It was not bunkers.

**INT:** No? What were you living in?

**ESTHER:** You just go in. And it was...Janowski. I remember. Janowski Woods is the name. Janowski, you know, like the name was for a general, you know? Like Janowski Woods. Was so deep, you can't even throw a needle there.

**INT:** It's a really thick forest.

**ESTHER:** Thick forest, yeah. And we was sitting hiding there.

**INT:** Just your family, or other Jews were there, too?

**ESTHER:** Many people.

**INT:** Who was there?

**ESTHER:** A lot of people.

**INT:** Non-Jews also, maybe?

**ESTHER:** No, no. Just Jews. Just the Jewish. The priest told us to hide.

**INT:** What were your parents telling you? I mean, how did you understand what was going on?

**ESTHER:** If you're fourteen, you're grown up. You're a lady, you're a person. You have to do it. One thing, my mother start crying. When I said to my mother, my aunt come over and she bring bread and honey, and like tea. And I said, and I ate so fast. And my mother was looking. And I said, "Mom, can I have another slice bread and honey? I'm hungry." And she start crying, she said, "Now is going to be a big war. Because you never want to eat nothing. I have to pay you ten cents you shall eat. And you shall drink a little milk."

**INT:** Now you're hungry.

**ESTHER:** "Now you're hungry! You tell me you're hungry? I used to pray to G-d, when is she, my daughter gonna say, 'Mama, I'm hungry?'" That's what she told me, she started crying. "Now I see the war is big on us." That's how it was.

And from that day, we was hiding. And then we come back. They kill my cousin.

**INT:** Wait a minute. So your whole family was in the forest. Just your mother, your father, and you and your sisters.

**ESTHER:** I will explain you why. First, we was in the house, we went to the synagogue. Mein uncle came from America. He was an American citizen. He came to see us with his son. And he got twelve children. Can you imagine, with the wife.

**INT:** Which side of the family? Your mother's brother?

**ESTHER:** My mother's. My mother's. He was a cantor. I mentioned. All of her six brothers, two was cantors, one was cantor in Poland, and one was a cantor in New York. In Brooklyn.

**INT:** They all had good voices?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Just like I mentioned. My mother, yeah, sure. And my grandfather was a rabbi, he came here, and was davening, it was so beautiful, the services. I enjoy it, everything. And mein...everybody was, you know, knows us, you know, like this. And here, when Hitler went by and was shooting left and right, then who went by fell down and died. Then mein uncle went straight, didn't say good-bye to us, and run away to the...even he was Hasidic, went to the station back home to his house. His home was Nowy Sacz. Nowy Sacz is not far from Warsaw. And there was right away they make ghettos right away there. Nowy Sacz. Maybe it was a day before our city they took, the Germans. Because they divided. Russia took half and the Germans took half. And they took, see, I come with girlfriends they're living here. The Germans never was in **their** house.

**INT:** Right. The Germans took your part of Poland.

**ESTHER:** Town, yeah. My girlfriend's town, our town. She told me, they kill her two sisters. She told you this? Not yet?

**INT:** Oh, your friend, Mrs. Klein. Yeah, she told me, yeah.

**ESTHER:** She was young. They're older sisters. She said they got kids and everything. They kill my cousin. When they kill my cousin...

**INT:** I'm trying to understand how this was all happening. You were in the forest with your mother, your father, and your sisters.

**ESTHER:** No, no, that time we was not in the forest. We came from the synagogue, and everybody runs. And they kill my cousin the next day. The next day.

**INT:** The son of this uncle who came back from America.



**ESTHER:** Not his son. They kill my cousin was living across the street, my mother's sister's son.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** He was nineteen year old.

**INT:** And you were coming back from the synagogue.

**ESTHER:** And we're all coming back from synagogue, and we came into the house. The next day they're going in houses to houses, "Heraus, Heraus." This is go out from the house. And then they shoot you. And that's the way they shoot my cousins. They shoot the cousins. And one fell in the arm, he fell down. That one stand up, they put with a knife to the stomach, and he was laying and bleeding. And the knife was still there, and us they was pushing out, they had four rabbis in our city. You see, it's a big city. Four rabbis. Then I think one grandson from the rabbis lives in Brooklyn. [Problem briefly with tape distortion. This is what is in the missing part:] My girlfriend told me. She asked for me. Because she said, "Oh, that family, they're always helping people like this." Kesslers.

**INT:** So your cousins were both shot?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. No the one who was shot bad, he's alive. [End of tape problem] He got a gold medal. He took back Poland, Bratslav. He took the city of Bratslav. See?

**INT:** How did he manage to live after being shot like that?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. He got better. The Germans took him to the hospital, and they give him right away, they took out the...you know, the...

**INT:** Bullet.

**ESTHER:** The bullets, and they make him feel better. He was in the hospital like maybe eight days or something. They make from the schools. And the other cousin, when I come over, you see that? [points to a scar under her chin] They punch me with... like a stick. And they slapped me. Why I pick him up. I want to give him air.

**INT:** You saw him lying there. What was his name?

**ESTHER:** Rottberger. Freum Rottberger. I gonna show you the pictures from his brothers. All nice people. Ah, ah, ah! I'm gonna show you when we finish the whole story. And that time...

**INT:** So you picked him up when he was dying?

**ESTHER:** I didn't know he was dying. I saw him laying, I said to my cousin, she lives in Hadera. And I say, "Oh! This is Freum. Why? Oh! They kill him? The Germans!" And I pick him up and on mein hand he died. On my hand, his head was on my hand like this. And the Germans went by and saw I hold him, he opened the eyes, look on me, and make like this (shakes her head) and die. And you know, I got sick? And they took me in the hospital.

**INT:** How did you feel when that happened?

**ESTHER:** I was vomiting. I just saw the blood was running. They took me to the hospital, maybe just my mother took me there. Was a **hospital**? Was from each school they make a hospital, because it's a war time. Yeah, and they give me something to smell, and this and that. And then we went, everybody, my father hold a leg, and the other cousin took a leg, and they took him to the cemetery.

**INT:** To bury him.

**ESTHER:** And they bury him with the clothes, what he was wearing, like a hoyrik. And then they came back to our house sitting shiva.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** See? And the Germans are still in our city.

**INT:** And you're still living in your house.

**ESTHER:** Not living. We was just eating, like you sitting shiva, a couple. We were sitting in the...in the cemetery. We was sleeping in the cemetery.

**INT:** Really.

**ESTHER:** We was afraid to sleep in the house.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And then, but that's why the priest was so nice to us. Saw we didn't do fire and we didn't make nothing there. We was just sitting.

**INT:** So the priest came up to you, and what did he say?

**ESTHER:** The priest said to the ladies, this lady what she is in Jerusalem, and said to her, "You better making food, and make soup."

**INT:** To the non-Jewish lady.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. The Polish people. And she knows us. See? Everybody knows us.

**INT:** So she made food for you.

**ESTHER:** Not for **me**. She made for the whole family. It was like, I will say thirty people, or 29, something like that. It was more. My mother said she lost 69 from our family died. 69 from my mother's family. In the war time. Because she count up. Each brother got eleven children, twelve children, something like that.

**INT:** They all were killed.

**ESTHER:** Everybody with the families. Now she said, my father's side 28 people. Mein uncle who was with us, he was in the Polish army. When my mother said stay with us on the floor, and we slept on the floor, everybody. Even in Russia, we got nowhere to sleep. We slept on the floor. And he was so nice. Never went over to rape me, never went to touch me. That's why I can't understand why people doing this! Maybe the Jewish people not. Because we was raised better. My mother used to say, "Take a look how the grandmother raised good sons. Take a look. Your father treat me how nice. He always called me 'Mamenyu.'" This you understand? "And take a look the uncle. He doesn't go to shiksas," you know, like others here. Like sex and this. I never **seen** that in our family. I not, you know, do you know, when I got married, I was still a psule?

**INT:** I'm sure. I'm sure, yeah.

**ESTHER:** And so my daughter, I train her that way. Because that's the way. Even the Germans saw me, they never, I was some, it was from Himmel. Nobody touched me.

**INT:** Lucky.

**ESTHER:** And I went out and work, I was working, and a Jewish boy, I was seventeen already. It was 1943. You know? We were already free, like from the camps. We was in Russia. When we was in the camps working. I was working in the end of the war. They never took Sarah. They took me right away. I was fifteen. They took me to work. Maybe because her mother got so many children, and she have to help her out. That's why they didn't took **her**.

**INT:** We're going to get to that. Tell me more about this priest that helped you in the cemetery.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah, that's the priest helped to save so many Jews. He told the people to save the Jews.

**INT:** Why do you think he did that?

**ESTHER:** I will tell you why. Because, whenever he come to my grandfather's store, my grandfather never charge him for his boots, shoes. And the same when the nun come to our store. We got ladies' store. We never charge them, too. It was like four nuns.

**INT:** How come? Just...they were smart. (laughs) Because look, it paid off in the end.

**ESTHER:** That's right. We never just charged, and they used to say, no, my mother used to tell them, "Give every day. You can pay us up. Give her a cup of milk every day." And from school I used to stop and drink warm milk from the cow, I used to drink. See?

**INT:** So they remembered that kindness, and so he was good to you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Because when I was sick, when I was ten year old, like they took me in the hospital, I still remember...

**INT:** Was that the same priest?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no.

**INT:** That was a different one?

**ESTHER:** Of course. It's a different city!

**INT:** That's right. Sure.

**ESTHER:** Different city, different priest. When they shake the hand. They speak **Hebrew** both together.

**INT:** Yeah, yeah, you were telling me.

**ESTHER:** I just told you. They speak Hebrew.

**INT:** Because he had to, the priest had to learn Hebrew.

**ESTHER:** Have to learn Hebrew.

**INT:** So how long did this priest keep you in the cemetery? Or how long were you there?

**ESTHER:** We was about six weeks in there hiding. Later we went to the forest hiding, too.

**INT:** So then he told you at some point that you can't stay there. What did he say?

**ESTHER:** No. "They're gonna kill us, too," he said in Polish. "You have to go." That's why we go away. And we hide by other people, you know? Always you change around.

**INT:** But where were you hiding? Where did you go?

**ESTHER:** With other Polish people. A lot of, yeah. That know us.

**INT:** And friends that know you?

**ESTHER:** Maybe the parents pay them money. Do I know? Yeah, sure.

**INT:** And how long did that go on, do you think?

**ESTHER:** This was like another two months. And then by October, by...November we was already in Rava-Ruska.

**INT:** Now how did you get to Rava-Ruska? What happened?

**ESTHER:** My father pays somebody like fifty zlotys, like fifty dollar, mit four horses, to take us over to the...how you say the granetz in English? I forget already. Oh, the...

**INT:** Wagon?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. I forgot. Granitza is in Polish. And in English, is yeah, it's from the border.

**INT:** Oh, okay, take you over the border.

**ESTHER:** The border from Poland to Germany. From Germany into Poland, into Russia.

**INT:** Okay. From the German half of Poland into the Russian part of Poland. Right?

**ESTHER:** Correct, that's it. At that time was so bad, the money we came, was there was no more Polish money. You can't buy nothing. And we was like, for a couple days, like hungry. And my father sold out whatever we got. And at that time my mother was very upset, too. Because they killed my cousin, and she was still bleeding. You know how long she was...

**INT:** Yeah, you were telling me, from the time...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She was, from the time they kill him, she was always crying with her sister, and she was bleeding till we come to Russia. It's almost a year. And I saw my mother goes around so pale, and I went over, in Russia I came over there, three months we was staying. We went by...it's like...train. And the train took us three months.

**INT:** I know. But before we get to the train, how did your father know to go to Rava-Ruska? Why was he going over there?

**ESTHER:** Oh, all the Jews hiding there.

**INT:** All the Jews were going there.

**ESTHER:** The Russians came over, the Russians came over three days before, they said, "We will not [be] staying here. The Germans gonna stay here. If you want to come to us, we will not kill you. The Germans kill you." And they say it was a lot of Russian Jews. That's why we have to save all the Russian Jews. I wish they were all here. Because they said, [Russian], this is Russian, "We're your brothers. We want to save you."

**INT:** Okay. So they **told** you to come over there.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** No, we didn't go straight when they came. No. We go later.

**INT:** But you went to Rava-Ruska.

**ESTHER:** They was not in our city, just for three days. It was border open, we run that time away. All the Jews run away.

**INT:** I see. Because the border opened for a short period of time, and you could get out.

**ESTHER:** That's all. And if you're late, it's too late.

**INT:** Oh, right. Okay.

**ESTHER:** The other uncle's wife, with the baby never came. It was too late.

**INT:** Okay. So you got out in those three days that you could get out, and you went to Rava-Ruska, which was in Poland, in the eastern part of Poland where the Russians had it. Now, Sarah Klein also was, wound up in Rava-Ruska. Did you meet her in Rava-Ruska?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** Oh, you didn't know her yet.

**ESTHER:** We met her in Siberia three months later.

**INT:** But it's funny, because she **also** was in Rava-Ruska, from Tomaszow.

**ESTHER:** We was sleeping under a sheet. You know her father put on a sheet, and they was sleeping here, and we was sleeping here.

**INT:** In Siberia, but not in Rava-Ruska. You didn't meet her yet. You didn't know who she was.

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. Over there, we was sleeping in one room. Mein uncle, he was writing the Torah, you know, I told you. He died so young in Russia. 33 year old.

**INT:** Who came to Rava-Ruska with your family? It was your whole family?

**ESTHER:** The whole family.

**INT:** Grandparents, everybody.

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. The grandfather mit an uncle. The grandmother die. She was lucky. She died 1937, she died.

**INT:** Oh, she died before the war.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She was the luckiest lady. See?

**INT:** But then you had two grandfathers.

**ESTHER:** Two grandfathers. Then the other grandfather went, the rabbi went with my other, my mother's sister. And he was always saying...

**INT:** Did he survive the war?

**ESTHER:** No, no. He die of prostate, I think cancer. But he was always like nothing to eat. And I was wondering, he always say, "I wish I was with Freda Leah, and Esther will give me food." Because I always bring over with my mother cooked. And my father said, "Esther, here. I make you a bag, and the mother just cook, and go slowly and walk slowly, and don't talk to kids. Just walk and bring him the grandfather every day fresh meals." Like chicken soup, whatever she make. Schnitzel, whatever she make, I have to bring over food.

**INT:** Yeah. You were very close to that grandfather, you were telling me.

**ESTHER:** Oh! He used to look, come out, and I was sitting with boys from school, you know? I didn't understand. I'm not going to, my mother told me, "Don't ever let somebody **touch** you."

**INT:** Right. (laughs) But they were your friends.

**ESTHER:** We talking outside. You can sit with boys. You can do, sit. You don't have to kiss each other. She told me not to kiss, too. She told me **good** stuff.

**INT:** (Laughs)

**ESTHER:** Then the grandfather used to come out and look, and give a smile. Because he saw I was sitting and...

**INT:** Behaving yourself, huh? (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Behaving me, right, and we was, what we sitting? Like kids from school, we was repeating the poem what they told us to learn, and I pick up and I show the boy, "Take a look at this. We have to this make."

**INT:** So it wasn't any romantic stuff going on there. You were just doing homework.

**ESTHER:** No. I was so young. It was not in my head that time.

**INT:** But he was checking on you, just to make sure.

**ESTHER:** Make sure, yeah. He was checking. And he smile. He was happy. Like he always said...

**INT:** You were a good girl.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's what I said. He didn't have to get aggravated or holler, or look. Usually I used to go to his house, because we live in the same house. When my father built it, my grandfather shall feel he's his own boss, you know?

**INT:** This is your mother's father you're talking about.

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. He respect, you know? After all, he's a rabbi, too. And a father-in-law, you know? He respect him. You know?

**INT:** So he went to live with another one of your mother's siblings.

**ESTHER:** My mother raised his, all the children. And even the younger son, I mentioned, even the time from the war, the younger brother got two children with a wife, we rented a room, and we took them into us together. We slept. You understand, all on the floor. Why? The bed we give for my uncle's wife with the baby. With the two babies. And we all slept on the floor. My father, my mother, and the grandfather. You know. Everybody slept on the floor. Why? That's the way we was living. Like family.

**INT:** Right. So he went someplace else, and you went to Rava-Ruska.

**ESTHER:** Not we went. Where the Russians **put** us. They put you here, and they put the cousins here. They put away so far, you don't know the language.

**INT:** What year was it when you went to Rava-Ruska?

**ESTHER:** 1940.

**INT:** 1940, all right. What month, do you remember?



**ESTHER:** 1940, it was like...

**INT:** Winter?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no, it was after Pesach. It was two weeks after...

**INT:** Shavuot?

**ESTHER:** Two weeks before Shavuot. Two weeks after Pesach.

**INT:** So around May, in May sometime, maybe.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I think. And we came to Russia, to Siberia. Was a day before Rosh Hashana.

**INT:** Oh, okay. Because it took you a long time on the...

**ESTHER:** On the train.

**INT:** Now when you got to Rava-Ruska what did the Russians say to you? That they're going to take you someplace?

**ESTHER:** No. They didn't say nothing. They say they want we shall take passports. First they say nothing. Because they was like, the Russians was so poor by Stalin, the people got nothing. Just the generals, the principals, they got something. No, the poor people never got nothing. And they came into that city, and they see like beautiful nightgowns, and it was New Year's, they put on the nightgowns, they went to a party! And that's why I remember, next day it was in the papers written, in Polish, and in Jewish, too. It was written, at that time I didn't read too much Jewish that time. Polish I read. It was written that they're like from a dorf. They didn't understand how to live like people. Like decent people.

**INT:** It was very poor there.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** So you were in Rava-Ruska for how long, before you went to Siberia?

**ESTHER:** It's like seven months, no? Count it up.

**INT:** No, but you stayed in Rava-Ruska.

**ESTHER:** That's what I just said.

**INT:** Seven months, okay.

**ESTHER:** I think. I don't remember exactly the dates.

**INT:** What were you doing there? What were your parents doing?

**ESTHER:** What do you mean, we're doing? Doing nothing.

**INT:** Working, or...

**ESTHER:** Doing nothing.

**INT:** Just sitting around?

**ESTHER:** Who was working? Not sitting around. They was young. Oh, we got still the leather. Maybe my father sold the shoes and got money to buy, oh this I remember. We got money. We sold all the shoes, and whatever Daddy with my mother went to, they went to the granetz back to Poland and bring the candelabra from my mother. She left, everything was in the basement there.

**INT:** They weren't afraid to go back home?

**ESTHER:** And my uncle, and my father and my mother, and they went, yeah. And my cousin.

**INT:** They weren't afraid the Germans would get them, or...

**ESTHER:** I don't know. They just went, maybe to the Polish people to help them to open up the thing. They took it out. They close back the door.

**INT:** And they came back to...

**ESTHER:** Because the city was burned. Was nothing built anyhow, nobody, no people, the people not living there, you see?

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** And that's how it was. And when we came there, my father, I remember, bring me a jar...like cherry wishniac. He bring a couple jars. Wherever, this was my mother, the grandmother used to make. This was everything from my grandmother left. And my mother used to make. And they bring everything here. With the candelabra, and whatever, we got shoes. They came, they pay money. It cost them money to go by the border. This called border.

**INT:** But they brought as much stuff as they could.

**ESTHER:** They could, right. And that's the stuff we survive. We sell everything. You know, like to pay. And I told my mother I want to go see my aunt in Lvov. Is a big city. And I went, and I stayed two weeks. And she heard on the radio, was a big radio. In Poland a radio you

hear. And she heard that 3:00 at night, they grab everybody from nighttime, and you have to go pack yourself a package like this and go to the wagon, you know, like to take you there. They take away to the Wasserbaren they used to say, you know? That's what they said. I was not there. And I grab my cousin, and she lives in Herzliya. And I said, "Come back." She was by my aunt. It was not her aunt. It was mein aunt.

**INT:** You got scared?

**ESTHER:** Of course. We came back, and she run back home, and her parents, they grab them, and she went there home. I can't find my parents. My parents said, I came over to my mother, and nobody's home. And I felt like crying. Then who I went? I went to a family Kessler. This is my father's cousin. Also very religious people and very famous people. And she said, her two sons was like generals. They took the city, Poland back. And they came to see their parents, if they're still alive. But they don't know it. They took him to the army in 1939. See, they never came back. Who was a soldier was staying still there. And here, Polish people killed them. Killed them both. That's, my cousin wrote a letter to Russia, to us, to Siberia. Even the two Kesslers, it means like my father's cousins, got killed for nothing. They just came and sit down and cry on the ground. Because he got brothers and sisters. Nobody was saved. Because who took a passport? When you take a passport, they don't let you out. And my father said, "I'd rather die by Hitler. I don't want to take a passport. And we're going to go back home." Because you sign up, we're going back home. That was the night they took you away.

**INT:** Why did he want to go back home? Wasn't he afraid?

**ESTHER:** He said Hitler's the same like Stalin. My father remember.

**INT:** Oh. Because he was in Russia.

**ESTHER:** In Russia. He said, "He's a bandit, and **he's** a bandit."

**INT:** So you went back to Poland, all of you?

**ESTHER:** No! We **want** to go back.

**INT:** You wanted to, but you couldn't anymore.

**ESTHER:** No. They took us 3:00 at night. That's what I'm telling you. Two weeks later they took 3:00 at night, and they took away. And I have to, and I was...

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO)

**INT:** We were talking about...they took you at 3:00 in the morning.

**ESTHER:** 3:00 in the morning.

**INT:** But if they hadn't taken you...

**ESTHER:** Excuse me. I was not, not **me** 3:00. Everybody they took. I was in New York. In New York. It's a big city like New York. Lvov. It's a big city like New York.

**INT:** Right. You were there with your cousin.

**ESTHER:** Mit my cousin. And by my aunt. And my aunt said, "Hurry up, go home. Because in the war time, better [to] be with the parents together." And I went over, I got my aunt there, and she said, "Hurry up." And I went home. Like I went to the station, and takes two hours, I'm back. It's like seventy miles. Seventy miles from Lvov to Rava-Ruska.

**INT:** Did you find them?

**ESTHER:** No. 4:00 in the morning I came back 11:00 in the morning, I didn't eat nothing, and I look around, I can't find them. And finally I find them **five seconds** before start to going away to Russia, to Siberia.

**INT:** Oh, my gosh! You're kidding!

**ESTHER:** What I did, listen. What I did, this is... I always talk. I'm glad you're writing this. A book I'm gonna write from that. And I was staying like one leg on this, you know train...

**INT:** To get pulled up. The train was leaving.

**ESTHER:** No, not yet. Still staying. And the people from the Jewish Agency give me a pot of soup for everybody to put in, and I said, "Please, I gonna do it." They ask me why. I said, "I have my parents, I must find them." I speak Polish to them, and Jewish. And I said, (Yiddish) "Wos is die familie?" "Kessler." "Is family Kessler dudu? Family Kessler here?" And I met family Kessler, my aunt. All right. She said, yeah, the uncle, he grabbed the bread. I give him a loaf of bread from two kilos is like, two kilos is like...

**INT:** Four pounds or whatever.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. It's a big loaf of bread, and a big pot of soup. This you can eat like twenty people can eat from that stuff. And I bring it in. When I came to Israel, they all kiss me, remind me the soup and the bread, I was the one ...

**INT:** So your parents were on the train.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** No, they was on the last, on the last.

**INT:** And how did you find them?

**ESTHER:** I just till the last. Till my parents, I didn't got no more soup. They said it's already almost six of six. Like five minutes of six. And we just got a bread left. That's all we got left. And they give me the bread, and I bring him over. And the Tate, my father start that time, he start to crying with the mother. "Oy, my mamele (Yiddish)" auf mir. "Mame, (Yiddish)!" Then they open up, and I come in, and they close right away **automatic!** It was like my head was almost crushed, because I was holding the bread, and I don't remember. I wasn't in the house nothing to take. I was just like this. Whatever I was dressed.

**INT:** Yeah. You were looking for your parents. You weren't packed up.

**ESTHER:** I was not packing nothing.

**INT:** And your parents must have been really worried about you. Because they thought you couldn't leave with them.

**ESTHER:** Worry? Of course! They was worried, and I was by my aunt, and I figure, I have an aunt there, and an uncle. I can stay there. Or in New York, in Lvov I got another, my mother's sister. This is a brother. No, one lady, the Kesslers, was the sons both got killed, she said, "Esther, mein Kind. Gehe to the Tate and Mame. Time from the war, you're not allowed, just go together. Try to find them."

**INT:** Yeah, she was right.

**ESTHER:** She was telling me in Jewish. "Try to find them." And she was Leitchie Kessler. I remember her name.

**INT:** How did she survive the war?

**ESTHER:** They didn't survive. Hitler killed them. I just told you. They killed the whole family. The two sons was in the army. And when they came back, they find the whole city was burned. I just telling you. Burned again. Because the Polish people, was Polish...how they call? They was Polish people married the German ladies, you know? It's like, there's got a name for that in Jewish. I can't remember the name. Like...you know, like traitors. You know?

**INT:** Traitor. Oh, like a traitor.

**ESTHER:** Like traitors, yeah. And they all was living in Gdansk. Because...

**INT:** It's a port. It's a seaport.

**ESTHER:** It's a seaport, and that's what they was falling in love with them. Like even the time from the war, the Polish people, they clean the planes, and here was in Poland was, and the Germans got a...ball in Warsaw. You know? A ball. They make like a party. And here, you understand? And the soldiers they told to polish this, and here was throwing bombs right away on them. That's why Poland was, they got a lot, they got nothing. I remember how many people -- I was learning in school -- 37 million people was in Poland. Was 34, 33 was Poles, 4 million was Jews, and about 6 was Ukrainian. See? I still remember. And we got so much...I remember, bread, like wheat. You know? The flour. We got so much. I used to learn in school, this is geography. You read it, you learn. Poland can have for twenty years not to worry for food. We always gonna survive. No, the next day when the Russians came, people were standing in line. We got nothing. They took everything out. And they sent everything to Russia. You see? That's why Russians do it. That was their habit. Wherever they come, they take away, right away your possessions, my possessions, everything the Russians.

**INT:** So you were on the train for a very long time?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I just mentioned. Two weeks after the...in Rava-Ruska, like Friday night, my mother make Shabbas. Tate went to daven, and always by davening, brings home two Russian soldiers, Jewish soldiers, to eat supper with us. And they was fighting Finlandia. This I remember. His name was Shulkin. I remember now. I still remember now. And he kissed me and cry. And my mother said, "(Yiddish)" (tears up) And when I remember, tears come to **mein** eyes to remember this. A lot of Jews got killed in the Finlandia war. Always Jews getting killed everywhere. Everywhere.

**INT:** And how old were you when you were on the train to Siberia?

**ESTHER:** Coming to Russia was already, coming like fifteen. Not fifteen, quite. Because there, not quite fifteen, because we came there, and we was cutting wood. Right away, the next day was snow. And we had to shovel the snow. And they gave me a shovel, and I have to shovel the snow, too. To make a road, you know, like the cows, wherever they need to go. They didn't got many cows. No, wherever they got, trucks or something. Yeah. And we was doing the same work. And then, like spring, we cut the trees. And we cut the trees, and I cut the tree, too. And came a chanek (?), he was Ukrainian. Because Ukraina was also Russia. Right? And he said -- I remember his name: Jan Tolstenko. Want to write it down?

**INT:** No. You said it so [clearly], I can get it.

**ESTHER:** And he said, "You're not allowed to work, you're too **young** to work. You have to go in a school. And I gonna put you in a theatrical school, because [Russian] – You're very beautiful." I didn't got no makeup, no rouge, nothing. And you know, I didn't put eyebrow.

**INT:** And he wanted you to be an...actress?

**ESTHER:** He wants me to send to theatrical school. When my mother heard, I came home, and I told her, she started crying, and she said, "I'm sick. You want me still to cry? And my mother die and I was alone, and the grandfather gonna die. Because he said, if you're here, he had..."

**INT:** Something to eat.

**ESTHER:** To eat. I always, the first, I took off the watch, and I bring right away milk and bread and potatoes. My mother got to eat. Because the doctor, you remember I told you? I clean up the table, and I saw a mess like this, and I don't like it, and I make everything shiny nice. And the wife, I didn't know his wife is a nurse. This was his wife, a nurse. Yeah.

**INT:** To get medicine for your mother. You told me.

**ESTHER:** For my mother, and he told me what to do. "Go bring milk. Take four quarts of milk. You're going to make four times for her four glasses milk one cup. Cook it so long."

**INT:** Cook it down. Yeah, you told me that story.

**ESTHER:** And this is the medicine. We got no medicine in Siberia.

**INT:** But when you first came to Siberia what happened? You all went into a...

**ESTHER:** In a school.

**INT:** You were in a school?

**ESTHER:** It was a big school, and like Sarah mit her parents, they got so many children, and like...

**INT:** Divided it with a sheet?

**ESTHER:** Divide it mit a sheet, yeah.

**INT:** How many families in one room, do you know?

**ESTHER:** It was maybe twenty families, or fifty families. I don't know.

**INT:** In one big room?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. It was a big room. It was a school. You know how **big**? It's a big school.

**INT:** But what were you thinking about...

**ESTHER:** It's like, it'll say like 200 people went in to a room like this. The first night I could not sleep. Everybody was sleeping, they all sleep on the floor. On the floor, or wherever you

got your belongings. You put down and like, you got a little suitcase, you lay down on your suitcase, you know? The head and everybody, the feet here, you put on the floor.

**INT:** Not very comfortable.

**ESTHER:** Comfortable. Ha! Comfortable!

**INT:** On the train, do you remember anything that your parents were telling you about what was happening, or...

**ESTHER:** Nobody was talking. Nobody was saying. Everybody was like crying, because we remember they kill so many people. They kill my cousin. And we was wondering if the other's alive [the other cousin who was wounded by the Germans], because we didn't even know it. See?

**INT:** Where did you think you were going? Did anybody tell you?

**ESTHER:** They told us, "We're going to put you to Siberia, and there, you're never, you can die there or something."

**INT:** That's what they said to you?

**ESTHER:** That's what they told us. That's what they said. They give us nothing. They just, that Tolstenko bring us a loaf of bread and water. That's all we got. They give us nothing.

**INT:** How were your parents reacting to all of this? Do you remember?

**ESTHER:** They was young people. My father remember Russia. And he said, "We lucky. They give us the little bread and water. We're lucky for that."

**INT:** Did your father think that it would be worse in Russia than in Germany? Do you think that he...

**ESTHER:** He **said** it. That's what he said.

**INT:** He believed Stalin was worse than Hitler.

**ESTHER:** Is worse than Hitler, that's worse.

**INT:** He didn't know what was happening to the Jews in Europe?

**ESTHER:** No. In Europe, we know it. We read the papers. Was papers from the...the **Americans** didn't know it. No, Poland know before.



**INT:** Did you people, did your family know that the Jews were being killed in gas chambers and...

**ESTHER:** Oh, no, that start...no, no, no. We find out 1942 what they're doing. We got 1942 was in the Russian paper written. The Germans... Oh, wait a minute. The Germans came to...to the Russian city, to Babi Yar. And we know already from there.

**INT:** You know about Babi Yar.

**ESTHER:** No, it was not written in Jewish. It was written in Russia. Written what they're doing. What the Germans done. Killed so many Jews, this was my aunt with mein mother's sister. 33 years old, with her husband also the same age, and the three children, a seventeen year boy, a fifteen year boy, and a twelve year boy. They all was killed there in Babi Yar.

**INT:** In Babi Yar they were killed?

**ESTHER:** Babi Yar, yeah. And what I want to say. My grandfather, I think I worked there by the woods putting out springtime the (?) when he cut the trees, and then you got to put them to send away. They're going to make wood from that. They're going to make houses or what. And we put it, and I was staying that time I catch malaria. Twice.

**INT:** You were cutting down trees?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Me, my father. I helped.

**INT:** With a saw?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**INT:** And it was pretty cold, probably.

**ESTHER:** Ha, ha. In the **water**. Before I done this, every boy -- I was so pretty -- said to my father, "Give me, I'll help you." Everybody helped my father.

**INT:** Because they wanted to be around you, huh? (laughs)

**ESTHER:** That's right, see? And my father smiled, he said, "Esther, (Yiddish)" He went, I didn't say that. When they were sitting all the shiva, and the cousin, mit the father came from Lubatchav. There was Russian too. When the Germans came over there in the city, and he know already, he send away his son. He came to us, he said, "I'm sorry, the cousin got killed." And it was his cousin. He was my cousin, too. He was from the father's side, and this was from my mother's side, the cousin, you see? And he said to my mother, he come in with my cousin -- she lives in Hadera -- and she show him. "This is Esther." He looks on me and he fall in love with me. Young. And he said, and my mother come over, he said, " (Yiddish) " he kissed my mother the hand, and me he kiss here. He said, "After the war," and hold my hand, "(Yiddish)"

When I come back a rabbi, I'm going to Switzerland. I don't remember what city he's going. To America? Yeah, this is America, no? No, no, to Switzerland. And he was going there. Now how the Germans caught them, and killed them. All got killed. That's why I got married my husband later. I was not willing to get married. I was twenty. Because usually Hasidic kids get married earlier.

**INT:** So you'll tell me about that.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

(pause)

**ESTHER:** (Crying) (Yiddish) So first give the grandfather and the zwei Schwestern (Yiddish). When she cooked, what she cook? We didn't cook traife. She cooked potatoes, with water, and then she cut in like a little onion, and I bring the milk, then she put in a bottle milk and mix in, and we got a soup. And I bring bread, you see? I always bring bread, potatoes, bread, and you know, and milk. This was mein language. I just said, [Russian] You know, it was coming to me the language like I was born in Russia. And because when I was sick, one time malaria and the second time malaria. You know how come malaria? The mosquitoes bite me, and that's why I got...

**INT:** Was there like a swamp there or something?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's where we was living, they put us in swamps, of course. Because those was people living, they took away Czechoslovakia before, you remember? I say, "you remember." You learn the history. Then this was like a jail place for them. Barracks. That's where they put us. They took us there. And we was living in that...field. They put us there.

**INT:** But it was like a swamp?

**ESTHER:** A swamp, yeah.

**INT:** With mosquitoes.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Many people die. One time we was, everybody was very hungry, and it was like springtime, was growing mushrooms, and everybody went for mushrooms.

**INT:** Yeah, Mrs. Klein was telling me about that. To go and try to get mushrooms.

**ESTHER:** And a lot of people who didn't understand the mushrooms, they're looking so good, and they poisoned themselves.

**INT:** They don't know which is which, right.

**ESTHER:** That's right. No, that's for Mrs. Klein's sisters, she never went, the mother, because she always was pregnant. I don't understand.

**INT:** Oh, she was always pregnant, the mother?

**ESTHER:** Always she was with babies. Don't tell her I told you this. I don't know.

**INT:** So she didn't work. She stayed.

**ESTHER:** How can you work?

**INT:** She had all the babies.

**ESTHER:** She always have, she came there with a little one, and then we're still there, the baby was a year old. Then I don't know, she was pregnant then again. She got a little baby. You have a year baby, you cannot go to no place. They will not take you. My mother didn't got babies, but my mother was always bleeding.

**INT:** She was always bleeding. She was sick.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I'm just mentioning. She always got the period. She's always bleeding. Till...

**INT:** You found that doctor, huh.

**ESTHER:** The doctor gave her. You know, she got better.

**INT:** That helped her, the milk.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, the milk. The milk and the bread, and she cooked, and she was happy. And you know, many times she called me "Mother?" (Yiddish)

**INT:** Because you were taking care of her.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I take care of everybody. How long I was, the second time I got malaria, I came back, my grandfather die already. You remember, I was working? I mentioned. This is going to be next talk. My father said, "Come, mein Tate gestorben. De Zeyde gestorben. And he cried because you're not there. You shall bring food." Because I was the one got in my head to bring food in the house. (Yiddish -- the father had to work and the mother had to work.) They took her to work, too. Even she got better, right away. Before they didn't give her no medicine. I make her better, because the doctor...they took her to work. See?

**INT:** What family was with you in Siberia? Who came? The whole family? Did your grandparents come? Did your grandmother?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, mein grandfather mit die uncle.

**INT:** Oh, and the uncle, okay.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Then the grandfather died there, maybe was 1941. Yeah, I think before '42, yeah. Because he was living with us. We was sharing the food.

**INT:** You didn't have enough food? Why did he die, your grandfather? From old age?

**ESTHER:** From hunger. Hunger. He was not too old. 74 is not too old. He was so strong Yid. My mother used to say he can live 100. Because he always drink a glass of milk, hot milk, with a piece of cake the grandmother used to bake. She was so very...oh! This what my mother baked she learned from the grandmother.

**INT:** Yeah. Your **father's** mother.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Of course. Of course. She was something.

**INT:** So this grandfather, your father's father... [technical difficulties for about 30 seconds -- the following is reconstructed until the end of the brackets.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, and he was always, he was always in the house mit us.

**INT:** And you were very close to him.

**ESTHER:** Of course.

**INT:** Did he have to work in Siberia?

**ESTHER:** He was an older man.

**INT:** Yeah. They let him alone.

**ESTHER:** Let him alone. No, what, they let him pray. See, my father, if he was saying,] say a prayer, they will put him in jail.

**INT:** Yeah. But they let the old people...

**ESTHER:** Yeah, the older people, yeah, they let.

**INT:** I thought you had to hide that. Hide a minyan.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, there was always a minyan. Then like the police, don't watch all the time. They don't see it. My father...

**INT:** You sneak it real fast.

**ESTHER:** You sneak it, yeah, sure. Was plenty people to make a minyan.

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO. TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with Esther Awruch. It's May 2nd, 1995. Okay, you were talking about your town. When we stopped last time, you had just about gotten to Siberia. That's about where we left off in the story.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And I just wanted to ask you before we continue with Siberia...

**ESTHER:** Excuse me, the priest told us. "Go away today." He heard, "They gonna kill all the Jews, they kill us, too, because we save you."

**INT:** Right. That's why he said you had to leave.

**ESTHER:** That's why he told us. He told us. Do you know the Polish lady's still alive. I don't know if she's alive, her children's alive. Her husband saved 200 Jews.

**INT:** Right. She's living in Israel, right?

**ESTHER:** And she lives in Israel. No, after the years, they die, and when they came 1948, Israel became a country, Israel accept the family, and the Jewish people was 37 families alive, they save him, they're living in East Jerusalem. All right, she have a choice. She goes, and she's Polish. No, the two sons belong to Israel army, because they're living like people. Yeah, and the daughters.

**INT:** That's a wonderful story.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** But could you tell -- it wasn't on the tape, and we were just talking before I started the recording -- you were talking about how the priest came into your father's store, and your father wouldn't charge him for shoes.

**ESTHER:** Never. Never charged.

**INT:** And what did the priest say to him? He said something in Polish.

**ESTHER:** (Polish) G-d will pay you.

**INT:** G-d will pay you. And then later the priest was helping you in the cemetery.

**ESTHER:** Yes. Oh, he'd be ashamed. Because he has to ring the church, and save all the Israelis. At that time they say "Israelis," yeah.

**INT:** That's what they called you? Hebrews?

**ESTHER:** They didn't say "Jews." Yeah. Hebrews. "Save all the Hebrews." He tell it to the Polish people to save everybody shall take Hebrews and put them like in the...basement and this, and to save them.

**INT:** He was a good person.

**ESTHER:** Because, I'm explaining to you, because my grandfather never charged him, and we never charged him nothing, see?

**INT:** Do you think that was the **only** reason why he helped you?

**ESTHER:** I guess so. Because he was not very kind a couple years ago. I remember I went to school, I was like twelve year old, I remember, thirteen, the war started, almost started. He used to put two Gentile people, said, (Polish) "Don't buy by the Jews. Buy by me." Because he was making money for the church.

**INT:** Oh! So that's interesting.

**ESTHER:** So when the war started, wait a minute, and he got the business for a couple years. He couldn't have made business. I will explain. My mother was staying with my father, we got two machines, we was working. Like you need nice shoes. You're going out to a ball, to a dance with a boyfriend, I give you an example. Then you come with your mother, you ask my father to take the measurements, and that Monek who that Pollak kill him, his father was working for us, he got a whole year work. My father gave him summertime, he makes winter boots, shoes, you know, shtibbeletz, and wintertime he makes summer shoes. You know?

**INT:** This is the non-Jewish guy, Monek?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** That your father was giving him a job.

**ESTHER:** He was going with me in school, and Yusef was his father going with my mother in school. That's why my mother knows him.

**INT:** So you **were** friends with the non-Jews in the town a little bit.

**ESTHER:** You have to. My mother never got time to clean the house. She was a very not today people. I'm doing like her doing. Like my mother used to wake up 4:00 in the morning,

because my father have to be 7:00 in synagogue. Then he have to go in, like he always to go in the synagogue first, then you open the store. Here, two boys have to work by us. Then my mother used to wake up early, and we got kafle, kafle, you know? I told you.

**INT:** You were explaining that, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And she used to cook in the morning, like a goulash, kasha -- whatever she cooked mit red beans, this is very healthy -- and she put it there and she close it.

**INT:** To keep it warm.

**ESTHER:** And this keep warm until I came 12:00 from school.

**INT:** You said before that you **had** to be friends with the non-Jews in the town.

**ESTHER:** You **have** to. Because they're living there. We're living together.

**INT:** So you didn't keep separate from them so much. You had to mix with them a little bit.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That guy was so smart. When my father used to pay him, like he bring five pair of shoes, or five pair of boots, then my mother wrote in Hebrew a note. My mother and father was like writing Jewish, you know, like me. And he copied off exactly, and came in to my mother and said, "Here, your husband asked me you shall pay him," like I don't know twelve zlotys, something like this. And my mother took out and pay, and then he left. He said, "No, **this** is your husband's note. This is **my** note."

**INT:** Oh, so he was learning the Yiddish a little bit.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Because he was showing. Oh, the time from the war, I told you, he saved 200 people.

**INT:** Now why do you think **he** did that? Was he a good person, do you think?

**ESTHER:** No, the priest told him.

**INT:** The priest told him to do it.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Do you think he would have done it on his own without the priest telling him?

**ESTHER:** Maybe. You see...because they kill right away my two cousins, shot them, and we bring him in the cemetery, and the church was like half a block from there, and the priest told them, she shall make food for us and bring over.

**INT:** Right.

**ESTHER:** See?

**INT:** But I'm asking you...

**ESTHER:** Yes?

**INT:** Do you think that these people were basically good people...

**ESTHER:** Yes. That's why I'm explaining to you.

**INT:** They weren't just paying your father back, or your grandfather back.

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. They was good people. Even the Jewish generation, they're good and bad. All the generations, they're good and bad.

**INT:** So some of the Poles were good, you think, and some were...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Some good, some bad, yeah.

**INT:** All right. One question I wanted to ask you before we talk about Siberia and your time there is, when all this was happening with, you know, the Germans invading your city, and the bombing, and your cousin died, and...

**ESTHER:** Came the first day, they kill everybody. They kill six Ukrainian, they kill...like right away so many, eight Jews. They killed right away. They didn't care who...

**INT:** They were just shooting and killing everybody.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** No, but I mean all these things that were happening to you, and then your family went to Rava-Ruska, and when all this was happening, what were you thinking and feeling, when you were a teenager? How did you feel about all this? Do you remember what you were thinking?

**ESTHER:** I remember everything. We got nothing to eat. And the Ukrainian, the Polish people who my father used to...like doing business, like they used to come shopping, they used to bring us potatoes, wheat, everything we shall not be hungry, because they owe us money, you know? And my father never asked him for anything.

**INT:** But what were you thinking and feeling? How were you coping with all the...

**ESTHER:** And then the Russian, then, this was like four months later, the Russians asked us to buy passports, to take passports, to be their burghers [citizens], and my father was so smart. He



said, "Hitler and Stalin, they're like brothers. Who gonna kill me first? If I have to live, I gonna live. If not, I don't care. I'm not going back to Hitler. I'm...No, I will not take a passport," he said.

**INT:** For Russia, right.

**ESTHER:** No. He didn't want to, he knew Russia. He was sixteen. 1914, he was sixteen, and he was six foot tall.

**INT:** He didn't think Hitler would be **worse**? He didn't know Hitler was killing the Jews?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's what I **said**. Hitler demonstrated, we're going to take by the Jews and give it to you, to the German people. That's the way it started. And who make it the whole thing? The Jewish people. They was right away afraid from him, and you know? When was the king, the German king was all right. You know, was not bad. They used to say in my land, my mother used to say, because my uncle used to go there and selling Jewish Torahs there. Was a nice, you know, later, ninety synagogues was, when they was doing, how you say...when they cut, how you call this? The night who was burning...

**INT:** Kristallnacht?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Kristallnacht. That's when they done everything. They start the killing.

**INT:** You said earlier in one of the tapes -- because I was listening to them -- you said that your father wanted to go back to Poland instead of, he didn't want to be in Russia, he didn't want to become a Russian citizen.

**ESTHER:** Right. That's for real life.

**INT:** And before they took you to Siberia, he was getting ready to bring the family back to Poland, because he thought that Hitler wouldn't be as bad as Stalin. Is that what you're saying to me?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Nobody believed it.

**INT:** Okay. I just wanted to make that [clear].

**ESTHER:** Because we got a lot of people, like Polish people, and they owe us money, and they could save us.

**INT:** Yeah. So he thought it would be better in Poland. If you **would** have gone back...

**ESTHER:** And they got a lot of stuff.

**INT:** Now you would have gone back there if...

**ESTHER:** They didn't give a chance. 3:00 at night the Russians took us out. I was in Lvov by my aunt.

**INT:** But that saved your life actually.

**ESTHER:** And my aunt got a passport, she was 32 year old, her husband was 33, her son was 17, the other son 12, and one son was 15, they all in Babi Yar. Half a million Polish people die in Babi Yar. Because they got passports. And why, you see, Stalin was smart. Why he didn't put **everybody** to Siberia? Not to Babi Yar? Do you understand? Because this is 1941. He was fighting with Finland, Russia. That's why they didn't got a chance to do it.

**INT:** Okay. They **would** have killed the Jews, you think. They would have killed everybody.

**ESTHER:** No, the Russians never killed Jews. No, no, no. The whole thing, the Russian people, I cannot say they saved a lot of Jews. I wish they saved **all** the Jews.

**INT:** But they did save some.

**ESTHER:** Of course! No, one thing they done bad, Wallenberg, when he saved over 1,000 Jews from Hungary, Stalin give somebody to say bring him to Russia, and he die in Russia. Why they pay him off like this? He was not a Jew. Because he saved so many Jews.

**INT:** Right, right. They punished him.

**ESTHER:** See? Punished him.

**INT:** But my question to you is, if you can remember back when you were a teenager there, and all that was happening to you and your family, and before you went on the train to Siberia, and the terror with all the war that was happening, how did you...

**ESTHER:** We all the time, excuse me.

**INT:** Wait a minute, how do you think that you were going to get through, how were you getting through it in your head? What were you thinking?

**ESTHER:** Nobody think of, nobody think of that.

**INT:** You didn't think?

**ESTHER:** No. I remember when they took us was three weeks after Pesach, I remember. And my father told me, "Esther, you're fourteen year old. Remember, it's a war time, and I don't have anybody to help me." Like the Russian soldiers used to come over and bring like a bottle oil and a loaf of bread for us. And my father sew him the shoes, you see, in a machine. You know, like, break down and he sew it for him. I remember his name Shulkin. I remember the day, he got a

family. He went to the Finlandia war, and he said to, my father used to tell him, "Come here Friday night, my wife make supper."

**INT:** This is in Rava-Ruska?

**ESTHER:** In Rava-Ruska. We lived in Rava-Ruska like four months, something like this.

**INT:** But you said your father was telling you something. What was the message he was telling you? You were fourteen years old.

**ESTHER:** Oh, I shall help him sewing on the machine.

**INT:** Oh, okay.

**ESTHER:** He put me on the machines, and show me how to sew.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** And this came handy, because when I was, when we came to, I went, I told my mother, I take my cousin, she lives in Herzliya, and we went to Lvov.

**INT:** Right. To visit your aunt.

**ESTHER:** To my aunt. And she got those kids, and they got passports. And then in Poland was not radios. You hear outside like a big radio. And like a speaker. And they say, "The Russians took from 3:00 at night a lot of Jews, and they send them to Siberia to the white bears." And she came home, and she told me, "Esther, take Tonia" -- she lives in Herzliya -- "and go home." Because, G-d knows, because Russia's fighting. He said, "We're in war with Finland," and they're neighbors, they war with Finland, "and we don't want any Polish people to be, you know? To be involved."

**INT:** This is 1941.

**ESTHER:** No, no. 1940.

**INT:** 1940, okay.

**ESTHER:** 1939 start the war. We was three months in, under the church hiding, see.

**INT:** Right. The white bears? They were sending you to Siberia and the "white bears?" What's that?

**ESTHER:** They have there white bears, brown bears, that's just an expression. That's what they said.

**INT:** To scare you.

**ESTHER:** Scare you, yeah. And my father said, "Well, if G-d want us live, we will survive." Just like this. What I done, you have to go in college to do what I done. College is the books is not written what I done with my own brains.

**INT:** Yeah, sure. But how did you do that?

**ESTHER:** Let me explain. This is very, I want everybody shall know. The book shall go out, and everybody shall read it. Because what I went through that age. First we running. The Germans put us a picture to kill us. Four rabbis was in our city. You know, with wives, with families, with kids, with grandchildren. And here we're running back, and my aunt said -- she spoke German and she said -- "How about to the Dr. Keffer." He got the Polish lady, now she die. And he said, this is mein aunt of my...of mein aunt is his aunt. And my mother is her sister, and this is her children. She got nine or ten children. Hitler killed right away, got married in (?), her son got married a year before, got already a child, and the other son got married, and we never saw those. I have the pictures of them. Some day I'll show you.

**INT:** But how did you go through that as a....

**ESTHER:** Wait. Then here, how we went through. When I went to Lvov, I said, "I'm fourteen. I want to see Lvov. I never saw Lvov." And Lvov is a beautiful city. Lvov is pretty like Washington. Ah! This is a **city**. So beautiful.

**INT:** Is this the first time you were in a big city?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah, sure. And guess what? Me with my cousin, we used to walk. When we went to school we used to read: (?) And we didn't understand what means (?). "Black Book."

**INT:** "Black Book."

**ESTHER:** Yeah. This mean "prostitute." Do you understand? And I didn't understand, and I was ashamed to ask. I remember my mother, when I was twelve, she said, "Don't let the boys touch your hand. Don't...talk to them, they not touch you nowhere." This I remember. Number one, when we went there, we came home, she find, my cousin find right away her parents. In the (?) you know, like, the people was already inside. The Jewish family, it was a Jewish kehillah in Rava-Ruska, and they was cooking soups and a big loaf of bread like this, and I was so, like ten foot tall, you know? I went over and speak Polish, because it's a Polish city. And I speak Yiddish. I said, "I want to find my parents. Their name is Kessler. Can I help to do it?" And one man said, "Please, do it!" Then I remember I stand up one foot here and one foot here, and somebody hold me, and I bring up the whole loaf of bread. I said, "Open up, I'll give you food."

**INT:** On the train.

**ESTHER:** On the train, yeah. And I was giving, you know how many hours? I went over 11:00. 6:00 the train left. So many hours I was working. I ate **nothing!**

**INT:** You were feeding the people.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** And looking for your parents at the same time.

**ESTHER:** Of course. "Is Kessler's family here?" That's the way I used to scream. Is Kessler's family here? And I remember when I was in Israel, mein uncle said, if not (?), we would starve to death. She give everybody food."

**INT:** But weren't you scared?

**ESTHER:** No, I was not scared. Oh, a matter of fact, I saw there my girlfriend's parents. And I come home, he was a rosh from the city, a Jewish, you know like, he was like...

**INT:** Like a mayor or...

**ESTHER:** Something like this. And his wife said, Laitchie, she was my mother's, my father's cousin, you know? Like the first cousin, my father's. And I come over to her, and her daughter was...Raisele something. I can't remember. I know Kessler, the same name Kessler like me. And she said, "Esther, in a war time, don't run away from the parents. Go find your parents." And other kids said, "Stay mit us." Then when she told me -- Laitchie Kessler, I remember her name -- then I figure, my mother always say, "Listen to older people, they're smart." I always listen what a mother taught me. Then I went, and that's why I find. Five minutes before six, the train start working, I came over to find my parents, no, I didn't got no more soup. They didn't cook no more soup. I just give them the loaf of bread. And that's how it was.

**INT:** But weren't you scared inside that you wouldn't find them, or where were you going, or...

**ESTHER:** Yes, of course. Yes, I was scared. No, we went there for three months they was taking us.

**INT:** What was that like? Three months on the train. What was that like?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And when you have to make pee-pee or something...

**INT:** Yeah. What did you do?

**ESTHER:** They let us out to go in the fields. Was in the fields. And then...

**INT:** Could you sit down? Was there room, were you very crowded inside? What was it like?

**ESTHER:** Crowded? You sit on your package, like you have your pocketbook, you're sitting on your pocketbook. Everybody was allowed to take a suitcase, you know? Then you're sitting there.

**INT:** What about getting washed, or...

**ESTHER:** Where you have water? Who gave you anything? If you had water, you drink it. You will die without water.

**INT:** There was no food or water?

**ESTHER:** Nothing! I remember this: when we came like to Kiev, and Jan Tolstenko, I still remember the name. You know sometimes I sit and cry at night (crying) -- do I live through this? I couldn't believe it. You know, they don't give me money here, because this was not in Germany. I was not in concentration camp.

**INT:** They don't consider you...

**ESTHER:** No. Because we was in Russia. Because there in Russia nobody got killed, you know? But what it did to me? When I said, "Okay, I worked here." My husband died so young. It's going to be next month 22 years he's dead. (Yiddish) What can I do? Why? Because he was in a war. He was by Germans. And at that time, see, American Jewish doctor, I ask him, "He die so young, and you saw he got cancer." And even the Germans send him a letter -- because he used to take money from the Germans -- they send him a letter. They took the letter and said, "It's too late to sign up for a widow pension. Okay? Somebody else got it." No, she never told me. I don't want to mention names, but it was, we're friends. This Sarah. She got it already, because her husband -- the Hungarian Jews are very bright. And right away, she got married with him, and the next week she call me up, "Esther, you know everything, you remember. Tell me, I have to do something." If she will say, "Take, show the letter to the Germans, write it out," then I could have at least a hundred dollars, two hundred dollars a month.

**INT:** She didn't tell **you** about it.

**ESTHER:** Don't say it to her. Don't say it. I never keep a grudge. And I never know it! I never know it.

**INT:** So when did you find out then?

**ESTHER:** Two years, like eighteen months ago, like yeah, two years ago, when we start to making, it was in the "Jewish Exponent," like they have to give us (?), you know, like, I forgot in German how they call. Because you suffer. The time from the war everybody suffer, then I write it out. I went over to the Jewish Family Service, not the...to the HIAS, and the HIAS asked me one question: "How come your girlfriend, you know everything, she's sitting, she didn't remember a word." Because she didn't work like me!

**INT:** Well, we're going to get to that. You were telling me a story about Jan Tolstenko. Something, he came on the train or something.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's what I'm saying. He bring out bread for everybody. He bring out bread, big loaf of bread. The Russians used to bake round bread, you know, like two kilo, you know? And everybody they give bread. Maybe they give water.

**INT:** But that was it, for three months? You just had bread and water?

**ESTHER:** That's all! They didn't give us nothing. And once in a day was good enough.

**INT:** How did you get through that? Those three months?

**ESTHER:** You know, when you're young (sighs) I am explaining to you. When you're young, and you just hope for tomorrow, it will be better. That's the way we survive, we Jews survive in this. Every Jew survive.

**INT:** Hope for the future. What about your mother? How did she...

**ESTHER:** Oh, my mother, when they kill my cousin, and we all take him to the cemetery, she start to bleeding. She was sick, I remember.

**INT:** You were telling me. For a year...

**ESTHER:** Then I went over, how smart I was. I was still fourteen. I went over and I see a sign, "Doctor," like...

**INT:** Yeah, you told me that story. You helped him out...

**ESTHER:** No, I came over, and I didn't know this is his wife. The Russian people, they didn't know how to clean.

**INT:** (laughs) Not like the Polish people.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And my mother used to be so clean. That's why I'm keeping clean. And my mother was **spotless**, because kosher is cleanness. That's what my mother taught me. I never forget it. And I went over and I said to him, "May I clean up your table? I'm going to wash up the floor and everything." And I did it. And they both was talking, and she said she want to adopt me. I said, in Russian, I speak Russian. I was so smart.

**INT:** Was this in Rava-Ruska?

**ESTHER:** This was in Siberia.

**INT:** In Siberia. Okay.

**ESTHER:** And I said to her -- this was in Bolsho Kozarnia (?). I remember the name. And what I did? I clean it up, make everything clean, and he said to me, "Sit down." And she give me a piece of bread and maybe a hot water. They don't have nothing. They was poor people. The Russian people was very poor. Because Hitler and Stalin they just make bombs and ammunition to kill people, and not to give people food, you know? And here the American people, they have everything, and they're going to kill in Oklahoma people. The American people became crazy. They're not normal. I believe, I will tell you, because they still have German blood. All the Gentile people they come from Germany the most.

**INT:** You think so?

**ESTHER:** Yes. I know so.

**INT:** You think there's something in the German blood that makes them...violent?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. 1914 the Austrian people, my father used to say they're the finest people. When he was a soldier, he was 16 year old, and 500 kids they took to the war 16, 17 year, and...

**INT:** You told me, and they waved a flag.

**ESTHER:** And he took out the flag. He felt bad because kids was crying.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** Why this time they kill everybody? See? That's the difference. And now Austria became so nice. They show on the television today. The songs, the things, the...everything Austria, Austria, Austria. I still pray to G-d. I pray Poland shall never be Poland, for this is Poland's fault. If not Poland, will be six million Jews alive. Because there was 37 million people. Four million Jews, or four and a half, was six million Ukrainian, okay? Now the Ukrainian went right away with the Germans. That's the one that sold it.

**INT:** And helped them kill the Jews.

**ESTHER:** Yes. They used to be like this. For a piece of soap, they want a piece of soap, "Dar is a Jude." They give you a piece of soap.

**INT:** So you think the Ukrainians were as anti-Semitic as the Polish people?

**ESTHER:** Always! Always, even here. Sure.

**INT:** Yeah. Do you run into them here? Ukrainian people?

**ESTHER:** I don't want to see them.



**INT:** They are in the Northeast, there must be a large community.

**ESTHER:** Do you know there are **four million Arabs** here in this country? You read the paper? You read the book, the "Jewish Exponent"? And I heard from the television too, I always like to listen to Ted Koppel. **Four million Arabs!** Nu? Go talk to G-d. I don't know.

**INT:** So how do you think you got through, you think you got through the train situation...

**ESTHER:** Wait one second. The train took us three months. After the three months, and like...still us too, because my uncle used to give me so many shoes every holiday, and when I came there, I didn't got, I was wearing summer shoes, and I catch like a cold, and I was six weeks laying sick.

**INT:** In Siberia.

**ESTHER:** In Siberia.

**INT:** What happened when you got there? Did you know where you were?

**ESTHER:** I could not sleep. What do you mean, where you were? They put us in a school, and there was a camp from the Czechoslovakian people. They took Czechoslovakia before Poland. They took the Czechoslovak people in this camp, and then they put them maybe to the war, or maybe...to work, they put the Jewish people to live there, and we was living. When my grandfather wants to daven, my father wants to daven, they not allow him. Because he's too young to daven. The old people like my grandfather, them they allow.

**INT:** Because they couldn't work. They were too old to work, so they would daven.

**ESTHER:** No, they was working. What is to daven? You work. You just say the prayer, takes a half an hour to say the davening, and then you go to work. My father was working.

**INT:** Yeah. Why didn't they let your father daven?

**ESTHER:** Because he's young. He was about forty year old.

**INT:** Uh-huh. Okay.

**ESTHER:** They came to me, they want me to work. I was working. See? I cut my finger half, I was cutting wood.

**INT:** Oh yeah, mm-hm.

**ESTHER:** See?

**INT:** Yeah, you've got scars on your hand.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, my children were, my sisters was little children. My sister from Natanya, she was five year old, and seven the sister from Holon.

**INT:** All right, so wait. So you came to this school, it was a school building or whatever.

**ESTHER:** It was a building, they put it on, and there was living people, and then they made camps. This was a lot, I don't know how much, they bring in thousands or something, because a lot of Polish people...

**INT:** Now is this where you met Sarah Klein, when you got there?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. We was living in the same like, a sheet was closing us.

**INT:** Mm-hm. And she was your age, about or...

**ESTHER:** She's a little older.

**INT:** She's a little bit older? But you became friends.

**ESTHER:** Oh, I'm going to show you a picture here when we was already after the war. This is after the war. I find it in Israel. I went to Israel. Yeah. Take a look. Recognize Sarah.

**INT:** That's Mrs. Klein. That's Mrs. Klein, right.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. This Mrs. Klein. This is mein, she wears a wig, because the whole family's Hasidic from me. She lives in Hadera. She lives in Herzliya, she was in New York with me, in Lvov with me. This cousin. Because I'm six months older from her. You see, we went to school together.

**INT:** And that's you?

**ESTHER:** This is me. Oh, you know why? I'm not heavy. Because I didn't got just this dress. I was eleven year old, my aunt ask me, no not my aunt, my neighbor ask my mother, her husband was building Israel...

**INT:** Tel Aviv.

**ESTHER:** Tel Aviv. He was an engineer, building. In 1933. I was like, you know, '33, I was like twelve year old or something. Then my mother say to her, "Sell me a dress for Esther," and she give me this for free because I was working there.

**INT:** Well, who's the boy in the picture?

**ESTHER:** This is my cousin. This is her brother.

**INT:** Oh, it's her brother. Okay.

**ESTHER:** There was six children.

**INT:** So about how old were you in this picture, and where was it?

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

**INT:** 1945. You're about twenty. And does Mrs. Klein, did she see this picture? Did you show her yet?

**ESTHER:** Oh, she's the one, I give it to her one, and she make pictures.

**INT:** You gave her a copy, oh, that's nice.

**ESTHER:** And she make pictures, and she bring me...

**INT:** Does she remember this picture? Did she know about it, that it even existed?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She was never, she was always friends with me, and her father...I don't want to say nothing.

**INT:** Well, I want to talk to you...

**ESTHER:** I don't want to say nothing. Because he always make children. How you make children when there's no mikveh, there's nothing? I ask **you** the question.

**INT:** There was no mikveh in Siberia, I guess.

**ESTHER:** Okay? Okay? That's all. Don't even mention it or nothing. Okay?

**INT:** Of course not. But tell me about your friendship. Tell me about...

**ESTHER:** Mit her? We're always friends.

**INT:** Now what happened there? You met, she was a little bit older.

**ESTHER:** Oh, we didn't get talking even then. They took me to work. They didn't took **her** to work. They took me to work.

**INT:** I thought they **did** take her to work. She was cutting trees and stuff.

**ESTHER:** She was cutting trees?

**INT:** Yeah. That's what I thought.

**ESTHER:** (Pause) No. Her sister, not her.

**INT:** Oh.

**ESTHER:** She have to, the mother came to...to Siberia with little babies.

**INT:** Right.

**ESTHER:** A year and a half year baby, and then maybe she got another one there.

**INT:** Oh.

**ESTHER:** See?

**INT:** Yeah. So they took you to work right away.

**ESTHER:** Me they took because that Tolstenko wants me not to work. He said, he look on the paper, he said, "Oh, no! You're fourteen. You're not allowed to work. You have to be fifteen or something." And he wants to take me, I was **very** pretty. No lipstick, no makeup. No, my lips was red like, you know, like yours, you know, natural. Yeah. And everything, the face, I used to have red cheeks. And my mother was crying. And he said, "She must go in school." When I go in school, I be better off. My mother said, her mother die she was twelve year old. "And you have to stay mit us."

**INT:** Oh. She wouldn't let you go away to school.

**ESTHER:** No. Because the grandfather said, when I come into the house, I grab, I go over here, like to a suitcase, I took out something. Like a pot or something, go in, walk. I was not afraid to walk. When you want to survive, you're not afraid from nothing. I walked over to see a light, I went over, and I said, "Give me potatoes, bread and milk." And I used to bring home, my mother used to, she was sick, she was bleeding, and the doctor told me, "You have to give her...four cups milk a day."

**INT:** Cooked down, yeah, you told me.

**ESTHER:** Cooked milk, from four cups make one cup, and give it to her. This is the medicine.

**INT:** And she got better, right?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She lived to 88. See? And then, when we was in...

**INT:** So wait, so were you working then, or you were just helping getting food for the family? What were you doing?

**ESTHER:** I was working. When I come home from work I done it.

**INT:** What did you do for work? What did you have to do? Cut trees, or...

**ESTHER:** Whatever, yeah. And my mother said, "Go mit the father, whatever he does, do too."

**INT:** Oh, you went with him.

**ESTHER:** Otherwise, because he was nice, heavysset, I gonna show you the picture from my parents.

**INT:** Yeah, you did show me. You showed me, yeah.

**ESTHER:** I did? Yeah. And...and she always say, you know, that's the religion family. My mother said, "Watch your father. This is our life." You see? They give you love. They didn't say, the father's no good or something. You understand what I mean? This is the Jewish families. I was raised like this.

**INT:** So your mother stayed in the house with the kids.

**ESTHER:** Not she stayed, she was in bed sick. She was bleeding.

**INT:** Right. And your little sisters, they stayed...

**ESTHER:** She was little sisters, yeah, little, I told you. They was like five year old.

**INT:** What did they do? They stayed in the...

**ESTHER:** Near the mother, yeah. Maybe...

**INT:** And you went to work with your father.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay. And you worked a long day?

**ESTHER:** And the uncle went to work, and the grandfather was in bed laying. They went into the...they used to give us soup for forty cents, you know, like you take a big soup, until he came, it was bad people, too. They was taking so much food, when they came to my grandfather, was no more left. I was mad when I find out. My mother...

**INT:** You were very close with your grandfather.

**ESTHER:** Ha-ha. Everybody loves him. When I was sick with malaria, my grandfather said, "Nu, Esther is sick. Where is she?" My mother says, "She's in the hospital." "I hope I die and she gonna live." (crying)

**INT:** Yeah. So you were bringing food for the family.

**ESTHER:** Every day. Every day. At night. Yeah. And then when I bring home, Sarah saw, everybody saw, then they used to ask me...

**INT:** How you get it?

**ESTHER:** "Take me along, too." And I used to take everybody who wants to come, come.

**INT:** Oh. So is that how you got friendly with Sarah?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, my mother, when she was better, my mother, we used to go like 12:00, 1:00 at night, when everybody's asleep, we go into the, to the...near the restaurants, where they're cooking for the people, you know? And peel, took cabbage leaves, or potato leaves, and my mother used to wash it up with hot water, and make a soup from that. And I used to bring the bread.

**INT:** Oh. Where'd you get the bread from?

**ESTHER:** I just told you. I took everything, I took off the watch. I took anything to survive. To trade.

**INT:** Yeah. So tell me what your friend was like. What Sarah was like. What her personality was like, what her family was like.

**ESTHER:** I didn't, I'm explain to you. I never got time, even that time we never got time to **talk**. I was always, I come home, I try to bring, potatoes, help my mother to cut it. And make a soup, because the grandfather and the uncle, my father and my two sisters, we're all hungry. No, the only thing, I was like a boss, I said, "Give the grandfather, give the two sisters first, and the grandfather. And then give us."

**INT:** How did you know that?

**ESTHER:** Just my...that's how I was smart. I remember when my grandfather used to always say, you know, sitting like a rabbi was, and when he was always with the Talmud, and I used to learn Polish, when I used to sit down on the side and liked to listen to his melody. The whole lesson went good because I...

**INT:** You were sort of singing it in your head.

**ESTHER:** It was like concentrating with [music]...you know? It came to me. I remember, I remember all the names from the teachers. I remember everything.

**INT:** Yeah. You have a very good memory.

**ESTHER:** Because I was a happy kid. Everybody likes me. I never forget it. **Everybody.** I remember I came to Israel, 1961, or when I come here, 1950. Do you believe me, we got not much. The Jewish Family Service don't help the Jews much because, they was not used to help the Jews. (laughs) Maybe they was not prepared. They didn't got the money, like the Russian people lucky. First of all they give us \$27 a week. You have to pay rent yourself, and twelve dollars -- take a look how I manage. I took off twelve dollars, I put away in one pocket for my husband's jacket. I put in for the rent. And three dollar was gas. You have to pay to cook a little meal. And then was left like a dollar in the pocket. And I have to, I used to buy a chicken. My husband said, "Don't buy chicken in the big stores. Buy kosher." Then I said, "Okay." I went in to the Jewish store, and I bought a chicken. At that time it was so cheap. Then I bought a chicken, and I bought a pound ground beef. Like a pound and a half, I guess. Then I make, I didn't, I didn't remember what I did, no my neighbors always talking from me to the other people. "A balaboste like Esther, you have to go in college for that."

**INT:** (laughs) Because you could make it last all that, you could make...

**ESTHER:** You know what I did? First of all, I took out the wings, the labelach, you know? And I cook a couple eggs, and I make like chopped liver. This was a vorspeis. My father used to like it. Then I make this for my husband, and for my children, and for us. I used to buy bread. The bread is 37 cents, a big loaf of bread. And one time I was two cents short. And the lady, a Jewish lady, don't want to trust me two cents. Then I went, I didn't, I was three months in the country. I cannot speak English. Then I speak German, and I said to the lady, (German) "My husband brings me the money today, then tomorrow I bring over the two cents." Because Friday he was working. Do you imagine? This Irish lady, that's why the galus is azoy gross. She said to me, "Come here. I give her my two cents. Because you're not allowed to let people be hungry."

**INT:** This is the **Irish** lady, not the Jewish lady, right?

**ESTHER:** And she give me the two cents, and she not give **me**, she give to the **lady**, and she took my twenty, to buy a half a loaf of bread. Then next day I bring her over the two cents. I bring her over the two cents, she was so mad, she said, "Come for a walk." And she spoke German good. Maybe she was in German, I don't know who she was. She was Irish, all right? And she said to me, "Don't come no more in that store." She worked, and she told me in German, "Don't come."

**INT:** She worked there, and she said don't come.

**ESTHER:** "Don't come no more. Because it's not nice. I'm Protestant and you're Jewish. How she treat a Jewish person. Germany killed so many Jews, is not enough? What do you want, should starve your children for hunger?"

**INT:** This is the Irish person said that to you?

**ESTHER:** She was Irish. Yes, yes, yes.

**INT:** Wow. That's very nice.

**ESTHER:** That's right. I told you. A lot of Gentile people they have more sense like the Jews. But the Jews is jealous one on the other. Why? I don't know. Maybe that's the world is born. One brother killed the other. That's how it started. G-d **said**, "You're going to be paid. I see the blood is running from your brother. And the whole world will be always like this." You read the Bible. That's how it **is**. That's all. There's two people in the whole world, he was jealous on the brother. Jealousy is everything.

So what I want to say? She asked me to go, "Go to Michael. One block from here." This was German Jews, but they got a store. And this was like, I don't know, Russian Jews, probably. Russian Jews, no, they're not the kindest people. You understand? Probably. Then, because this was Solis's, this was Michael's (bakery). And this is Michael's. Then I went there, and I speak German, because a German store, and I speak German, and she said, (German). "You want yesterday bread, yesterday cookies, yesterday cakes?" And I said, "Ja, ja, ich woll das haben." Yes, I will.

**INT:** It's cheaper.

**ESTHER:** Half a price. Yesterday. And if I bake, I have yesterday, I used a couple days. Then I used to bring home a **large** loaf of bread for 27 cents. See? A large loaf of bread. 25 or 27.

**INT:** So you think you learned this in the war?

**ESTHER:** The war, yeah.

**INT:** How to make it stretch, how to stretch your...

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. I explain to you. I was just doing. One thing, I was already seventeen year old, sixteen they took me to the, my father, my mother used to say, "Take a couple sheets and sell it and bring potatoes. We're hungry." The grandfather die already, and the uncle was still there, all with us, sleeping everybody on the floor, in one room. It's like here in the kitchen. We're all laying in the floor. What I want to say, my mother was still young, you know? It's a shame, yeah, she went through. And she survived.

What I want to say, they took, and we always got food in the house. I always make sure we have bread.



**INT:** But **you** were making sure. You were the only one who was making sure.

**ESTHER:** I the one. Nobody else, just me.

**INT:** Why you? Why was it you that was doing this, do you think?

**ESTHER:** I felt like...I have to, I felt smart. My grandfather gave me that idea. "If you were a man, you'd be a rabbi." That's what he used to told me.

**INT:** (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Because I used to like his davening and everything. He said, "It's a shame you are a girl." And I said, "Nu, G-d will give me years. I will live in a nice way." He used to like me much because, we go home from school, you know, boys and girls going home. I never went with boys anyplace. I was sitting on the big chair, like a thing, outside, and the grandfather used to daven, come look through the window, he said, "You're going to be good. You're going to be good." That's what he always used to say, in Jewish. "You be good."

**INT:** But you think this was your personality, that you just...

**ESTHER:** Yes. Oh, yeah. What I want to say. This is my personality. When I went to the third grade, and my parents love me, we got business. My mother was right way, I told you. 7:00 she open the store. I was by myself. The sisters was asleep. What I did, you know what I did? I used to, she used to say, "Twenty cents. Buy yourself a butter roll, and a glass of milk, and you have breakfast." My mother used to tell me. Then one time I bought it. I went into the aunt, she got a store. They got a bakery. And I bought it. It cost fifteen cents for a roll. Like a Danish roll, I bake now those rolls. Guess what? Then when I'm sitting lunch time, right away she look on my face, the cousin. Then I cut off a quarter, and I give it to her. Then the girl was sitting next to me -- Chayale Lammel, I still remember her name -- they was poor. Even the father was a butcher. No, in Poland, if you're not a kosher butcher, you're starving to death. See, nobody wants to buy treif. And why he bought treif? Because Polish people used to come to him shopping, and a little cheaper, all right. Cheaper, have to be not a flemishke, kosher have to be exactly no spots. My mother was a mashgiach in Israel. I know it. Have to be exactly kosher. Strictly, everything. And then she used to walk with me, she said, "Esther, how much you pay for the roll?" I said, "Fifteen groschen. Fifteen cents." And she said, "My mother, and I have a brother from three year old, and sits the whole day with my mother in bed, because they're hungry." You know, when she told me she's hungry, I didn't buy no more those rolls. I went in, I bought for **five** cents a roll, and she said for fifteen cents I can buy a small loaf of bread for my family. I used to give her all of those years. And you know, I never told anybody? Nobody know.

No, when my father sold the sheets, and the Russian people put him in jail, because was written "Lusa Kessler, Freda Lusa Kessler," they said, "You stole." My father speaked a good Russian, because he remember Russian from the other war. He said, "I never steal nothing. This is mine.

My wife, she was making needlepoint. She monogrammed the names." And they took him to the house, and they took away **everything** what we got. All of those, you know in Poland, if you have three girls, you put on like...how you...

**INT:** Dowry. Like put away clothes and...

**ESTHER:** Put away, not clothes. You put away sheets and...

**INT:** Sheets. For when they get married.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. My three girls, she got it. And they took everything. They don't left us a towel, they don't left us nothing.

**INT:** When was this?

**ESTHER:** In Siberia.

**INT:** Oh.

**ESTHER:** This was after the war, this was 1943 already that time. I was working, I was working, they took me when I was fifteen, I was working three years already, in a (?), a (?) is a blouses for the soldiers. I was working.

**INT:** In Siberia you were doing that?

**ESTHER:** In Siberia they took me to work. She didn't work.

**INT:** Wait a minute, you were cutting trees, or you weren't cutting trees?

**ESTHER:** We was cutting trees, we was shoveling snow, and when I was fifteen they took me to the machine to work.

**INT:** I see. To make shirts.

**ESTHER:** To make shirts, yeah. And over there, you just make one seam, you put this on, they show you how to do it, and you work. We worked 12 hours a day.

**INT:** Every day?

**ESTHER:** **Every** day. I sold my watch for bread, I told you, when the mother was sick, I never got another watch. I used to wake up 3:00 in the morning, and walk to work. I walk maybe eight miles or seven miles to work. I remember the streets. No, nobody touched you those days. You see, the people was in the war.

**INT:** You were a young girl.

**ESTHER:** I'm explaining to you, yeah. Nobody used nothing. Then they, if you have a loaf of bread, they will kill you for a loaf of bread, too. That's the war time.

**INT:** What did they feed you in the factory? Did they give you anything?

**ESTHER:** Nothing! Nothing, I remember nothing. Just maybe they give you a piece of bread, and a glass of water, hot water. That's all they got. Russia's always poor. You know, they have so good land, and they don't have here, to develop. You know why? Because they're communists.

**INT:** Yeah, sure. They messed it all up.

**ESTHER:** All the communists, they're rich, and all the poor people poor. Like the Arabs, the same thing.

**INT:** But it's good land. It's good land to grow things on.

**ESTHER:** This is the best land, I'm explaining to you. The best land. What I want to tell you, when I come home, my mother's crying, from work. My mother's crying. And I said, "Mom, (Yiddish)" First day he sold two, he bring home two loaf of bread, and this and that. The next day she said, "Take three." Nu? And they put him in jail. And my mother cry. And I have a lot of friends. Always. Always I like friends. I went over to a girlfriend, and I told her, and I cry. And she says, "Why you crying?" I said, "They put father in jail for our stuff, they put the father in jail for nothing. They say he stole, and they put him in jail. And he's going to die in jail." That's all I said. "And I don't want him to die. If he die, we're all going to die." That's what I said to my girlfriend.

You know how much she likes me? She went over to her mother, she said, "My mother makes..." She's smart. She was young. She make like ice cream herself. Maybe she learn. Maybe her father got a factory in Poland, you know. And she make tea and all the Russians coming in, and she bake cookies, and she serves, and one time, my girlfriend said to me, "Esther, I gonna help you. My mother said, the mayor from the city coming to see you tomorrow. No, you have to have 2,000 rubles for that to pay it. He gonna make for your father a passport." Like this. And that's how it was.

**INT:** Where were you going to get 2,000 rubles?

**ESTHER:** Excuse me?

**INT:** Where were you going to get the money to give him?

**ESTHER:** Oh, my mother got...my mother? She got a bracelet, a gold one, she sold it, and she got the 2,000 rubles. No, my mother say Tehillim, nobody should touch me. I come from, I'm telling you. She was afraid. I was seventeen year old there.

**INT:** Sure.

**ESTHER:** And she said, "Esther, you look so beautiful. G-d shall help you." And she bought me the first shoes. She said, "Mamale, I never got so nice shoes like you. You got so many always," the uncle used to give me from Lubatchav, I mentioned it. Then one thing, "Take the shoes, take the girlfriends and go for a walk. Don't sit in the house. You work so hard." I used to work twelve hours. Sarah doesn't work twelve hours! She worked maybe in a bakery, she said. Okay. I didn't know her that time. You know? Because we worked.

Then a lot of boys like me, because I was a original beauty. My father said, "You're not allowed to marry anybody else except a rabbi." You know 1939 when the war start, and they kill my cousin, and everybody was sitting by us shiva, they came, the cousin from Lubatchav, his father was a rabbi, and he went a rabbi to Norway. No, the Germans came there, killed him there! And he give my mother a kiss in the hand, and me he kiss here. After the war, he was seventeen, I was fourteen, you know, not fourteen even. "And we will get married." He took my mother's hand, he will marry me, because I was very pretty. I'm telling you. And this I remember. I didn't want to go out with any boys, I still was waiting for him.

**INT:** You were waiting for him.

**ESTHER:** Yes. No, one time, mein cousin, no, my sister, she was already twelve year old, and this was 1944, and she said, oh, she was eleven, and she said, she works like a babysitter for somebody, and the man was (?) you know, like...you know (?) It's like for the government, you're the special, like, special police for the government. KGB is (?). This is a Jewish expression. KGB. And he was the main thing. And he said he brings two tickets for my sister for a present, because she watch his baby, he have a little boy from three year old. She feed him, she walk with him, she watch his baby.

Then my sister said, "Esther, you want to come with me in the movie?" I said, "Okay, we go in the movie." We went to a movie.

**INT:** Where? Where was this movie? In Siberia?

**ESTHER:** In Siberia. They got, Siberia is big. It's like Philadelphia. It's a lot of forest, you know? It's big. And guess what? This was already 1944. It's almost, you know, the middle the war to stop. What I want to say, he saw me walking out with my sister, and he walked by and he said, "Girls," like in Russian, "I want to (Russian) We will take you home." He with another soldier. He was a doctor. And then he went out with me one month. You see how intelligent the Russian people are? They're not raping you like here. No. You went out a month. He was a doctor, because his father was also a doctor and a general, and he got killed in the war. They send him back because his mother got just the only son. That's why they sent him.

**INT:** Was he Jewish?

**ESTHER:** I'm explaining you, Jewish. And he came in, he was so nice. He liked me, and my mother said to me, "He is a Yid?" She ask him: "Bis gewehen a bar mitzvah?" She talked to him in Jewish. "You was a bar mitzvah?" The Russian people never allowed to speak Russian. Nu, my mother didn't know it. And guess what? He said, "I wrote a letter to my mother, she's in Leningrad, and she wants to meet me, and we will get married, and we have in Leningrad a big synagogue, and we're going to get married in synagogue." He told this to my mother, and my mother said to him, "(Yiddish -- Go home) I don't want to see you, and don't come no more. Don't come no more my house."

**INT:** She didn't want you marrying him?

**ESTHER:** No. Because he was never bar mitzvah, she said.

**INT:** He wasn't religious.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And guess what? You know he cried? He was 23 year old, I was eighteen.

**INT:** Did you want to marry him?

**ESTHER:** He was a **very** young man. Nice man. Beautiful man, like six foot tall. What do you mean, "I want it?" Do I got a choice? My mother said no, it's no.

**INT:** Yeah, but what did you want?

**ESTHER:** At that time I don't want anything but what my mother said I wanted. I want to go in school, she don't let me. I want to do this, she don't let me. I explaining to you.

**INT:** But that doesn't mean that you didn't want it inside.

**ESTHER:** Inside I want it. But what can I, what I got? Now, you see? I'm 22 years alone all by myself (pounds the table). And soon, I went to the, you know where Sarah was selling blouses, too? And we, and there, somebody saw me, my husband. He was in the war. He was twelve year older from me, and my mother saw every boy I went out, they didn't know how to daven. She didn't let me go out with them. One girl, I liked the man, he was a tailor, no his sister was a dummy. I told you, she saw something, because they was hungry. Like she put it in my purse, in my little thing, like my pocketbook. Not a pocketbook, I sew myself a little pocketbook, holding the brush -- not a brush -- a comb and a handkerchief, and the keys for the house. I remember where we lived. (Russian name for street) Bolotnaya was the street, and 54 number, was the house. I still remember. Take a look.

**INT:** This is after the war, you're talking about.

**ESTHER:** I'm talking about, was the war, we was still in, we was not, we still in Siberia. We was not after the war. We still have...What I want to say, then everyone, my mother used to open up the thing (opening a siddur) say, "Here, daven." And nobody didn't know how to...

**INT:** Oh, she tested them. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Tested them, yeah. Because she know the whole davening by heart.

**INT:** Yeah. So if they couldn't do it, they were out, huh?

**ESTHER:** No. And this girl, that girl, done it to me, like everybody they check, and they didn't check **me** never, because my father told me I never shall steal, and I learned the religion, too. G-d punish you if you steal from somebody. Not allowed to steal, not allowed to kill, not allowed this. And I remember to do it, and I never touched something. If I want to sew a button, I sew the button in my house, and then I come there, buckle the thing. Other girls used to sew in there, you know? To take from there. I never **touched** nothing.

**INT:** So you were a very honest person. Which you got from your parents.

**ESTHER:** Yes. That's what my father raised me, my mother. That's the way I was. What I want to explain, then here was just like that, I met my husband, he came out, he was in the war, he signed, mein uncle signed up the Polish army, because if you're Jewish, you want to go back home, right? Not in Russia. Then you sign up Wanda Wasilewska Army, it was Anderson army. This is from England. And they helped them. And at that time, my father, I told you, I saw they were going to put him in jail. Then my girlfriend told me, and my mother gave me the money, and **I save my father**. I bought a passport, he asked me what name we shall give him. I speak good Russian that time. And they say, he can put his name, Freda. Don't say Kessler. Freda something like this. Lusa, something like this. You know, not Kessler.

**INT:** Make up a name, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And my father run to the forest, because the grandfather was dead already, and I was there when he was laying dead, and I prayed to him, you know, then he came to my mother in dream and said, "Go save your husband. He just have to push the door, he'll be outside. Bring two shawls and come and go straight to the forest." When they came to the forest, this is the family I give all the years from third grade, I give like to the end of the year, like four years more, I give her always the fifteen cents to buy bread for the parents. My father said to my mother, give him fifty ruble. Will he let me stay here a couple days? He said, "Your Esther pay for all the years she bring bread to my house."

**INT:** Huh. Look at that. That's an incredible story.

**ESTHER:** That's what I'm saying. That's the story. You know, (tears up) when my father start with my mother to crying, "How G-d give us so smart daughter? We're lucky. Thank G-d, thank G-d, we're lucky." And my mother said -- because she talked to my father -- "Because you teach her this way."

**INT:** He didn't take the credit for it.

**ESTHER:** No. He said, my mother said to my father, "You teach her that way." He always like to talk with me, you know...

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** My father used to say, "Don't ever eat by yourself." He taught me all the good deeds. He was always buying, go into the...I used to come into the store, I used to sweep up the store, my mother used to wipe up the dust from the shoes. And I say, "Mom, sit down. I gonna do it." From the school, I done it. I done it, then my father said, "How much she pay you?" About my mother. "She didn't pay nothing." "Here. Go take, help yourself money. No, don't steal. Tell me how much you're taking out." I took out ten cents. He said, "No, you worked more. Take, how many girlfriends you have?" I said, "Three." "Take out twenty cents. Then go to the grandmom. Sweep **her** store."

**INT:** Get more money.

**ESTHER:** "And the grandmom will give you another ten cents." I used to make every day thirty cents to buy three ice cream for my girlfriend. In Poland, you buy an ice cream, they give you (?), you know, like a cookie to that. And that's the way I used to do, every day. I got girlfriends, you see?

**INT:** So when this happened to your father, when he was arrested and taken to prison, and you got him out, do you know what year that was?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. This was in 1943.

**INT:** 1943. So you're still in Siberia. You're still living in the same place.

**ESTHER:** Not with us. He was in Tashkent.

**INT:** He was in Tashkent?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, all the time. I send him away, I told you. Tashkent was also belonged to Russia, no was not Siberia.

**INT:** I see, so once you got him out of the prison, he went to Tashkent?

**ESTHER:** 1946. No, he went where his sister lives, you know, like in Siberia, to say good-bye to them. And he told them I was so smart, to his sister with the family -- they got six children. "And my wife is smart," he said. "Go to them, and live together there." They came to one house with us, in the same...

**INT:** So your father had to leave, once you got him out of the prison, he had to leave and go to Tashkent, is that what you're saying? I'm a little confused.

**ESTHER:** Don't be confused. I got the passport ready.

**INT:** Right.

**ESTHER:** And I send him away. I just told him to go to a...buy a ticket and go. My mother maybe went with him and bought a ticket, and said put him in a...

**INT:** Your mother went with him?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. I don't remember. I can't remember that. She probably, she gave him the money. She was the...

**INT:** So you stayed back there with your, you stayed with...

**ESTHER:** We stayed the whole family, not my father.

**INT:** Okay. He left in 1943.

**ESTHER:** Maybe '43. Yeah, I think '43.

**INT:** And he went to Tashkent, and he was living there.

**ESTHER:** There, yeah. He was working there.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** He was working.

**INT:** But you were in the same place. You didn't leave.

**ESTHER:** I was the same place living.

**INT:** With your mother and your sisters.

**ESTHER:** With my mother and my two sisters.

**INT:** And your mother was getting better?

**ESTHER:** Oh, she got better already.

**INT:** And what was she doing?



**ESTHER:** What she was doing? She was baking...(?) mean like little cakes. And my sister was at that time nine year old, ten year old, she was dressed like a boy and selling this. That's the way we lived.

**INT:** Uh-huh. So you saved your mother and your father. You saved your mother from being sick; you saved your father from being in prison. You sent him away. And you were a little kid, you were a teenager.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. See? G-d helps us. I still say, G-d let me live. You know, I'm lucky. Because usually, when I got open heart surgery, I was not sick. When I will be working, I'm always occupied work. From a little girl, from eleven year old, I was working in a store, helping out a neighbor. See? My head is always thinking, working, working, all my life. When I came here in this country, I tell my husband, "Don't worry. I'm going to help you."

**INT:** Did you think when you were there in Siberia and you were helping your father get out of jail, and you were helping your mother get better, and you were working every day in this factory, what were you thinking about? Did you think you'd ever get out of there?

**ESTHER:** Some day it's gonna be good. Some day.

**INT:** You really believed that.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, of course!

**INT:** Why? Why did you believe that?

**ESTHER:** Because I believe in G-d. G-d will help us.

**INT:** Okay. Okay. You didn't think you would die there in Siberia.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** Did you see people die there?

**ESTHER:** My two grandfathers died, the rabbi died. He was not with us. If he would be with us, my mother said, he will be still alive.

**INT:** He stayed with your mother's sister.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah. And they didn't know how to manage, you know? I got, I'm telling you, I was little, and I got brains here.

**INT:** How did your grandfather die, the other grandfather, that was with you in Siberia?

**ESTHER:** For hungry, I'm telling you, was Jewish people staying the line for the soup, kasha.

**INT:** And they took away from him or whatever.

**ESTHER:** No. He was staying in line, he was so gentle, he never say, push himself. She went out once, she was **so** heavy! I thought she was pregnant. She was never pregant. Why? She didn't let one dish to save here for that old man. That's what, her brother liked me, and I didn't tell him nothing. He lives in Canada. He found out I got married. He the one where I got punished for that. He came over want to take me to a movie, I was seventeen year old. This was the first date with the boys.

**INT:** In Siberia.

**ESTHER:** In Siberia. I was working the end of the war, and you're not allowed to go in. Everybody was searched; not me. And he was staying, he come over, and he give me a kiss. In those days in Poland, you always kiss the hand, you don't kiss the face. You kiss the hand to say hello. He said, "I have tickets; we're going to go in a movie."

**INT:** So what do you mean, you got punished for it?

**ESTHER:** The boss wants me, "Why you kiss him the hand you? I have..." This was 1943, or '44. Yeah. '43 I guess. Yeah, '43. Or '43 and a half, something like this. And he said, I was working, and he want to put me in jail for that. I said, "Do I steal something?" "No." "What I done?" "You don't kiss boys here." I have my brother-in-law just came from the army. He (?) too late, so I wanted to marry him.

Okay. That time, I was so smart, I went out, and I say to the mother, "I want to learn English." Brains I **got**. And my mother pay 180 ruble I should go in school there. And they find out, and they want to put me in jail.

**INT:** So what happened?

**ESTHER:** They send me away. In the middle of the work, they send me, two policemen took me away.

**INT:** To where?

**ESTHER:** Because I didn't came to work. They put me away. I don't want to say the name. I'm ashamed. I was so young. Seventeen. (pause)

**INT:** What happened?

**ESTHER:** They send me away where all the bandits. Where all the...I remember, six German dogs was putting us to work. They said we weren't in the concentration camp. (crying) I was there in concentration camp. (pause, crying) Even my girlfriend didn't know it. She asked me, "Esther, they send you away. Where you was?" I said, "Don't mention, please." I never...She

said, "Tell me what was it, everybody liked you. That boy want to marry you, that boy. Everybody didn't know what's happened to you." I came back, I was so small, like I growed down, because I was hungry.

**INT:** How long were you there?

**ESTHER:** Six days. You see? Because I was right. I didn't do nothing!

**INT:** Do you want to talk about it, what happened there?

**ESTHER:** No. I don't want to talk. I don't want...I'm embarrassed. (crying)

**INT:** It's okay. You don't have to.

**ESTHER:** The name was Stansiya Yayer (?). The Americans do this, it be better for the country. America will know how to feel. They don't have to hit somebody who kills somebody. They have to put him in jail to work. Here it's different. Six months, you rape somebody, they let you out, you kill somebody. They didn't do it right here. They didn't have brains. The American people don't have nothing. They just...my husband used to say, "They have just chocolate in the head." The name was Stansiya Yayer. No, I was very lucky.

**INT:** That was the name of the place?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. There maybe three million people sitting in jail there, or maybe more.

**INT:** It was like a labor camp?

**ESTHER:** A labor camp. Yeah, yeah, yeah. They put me there, too. No, me, guess what they done the job for me? As soon as I came in, I was wearing a good skirt, good pair of shoes my father had got me, and I got from our shoes. And I wake up in the morning, I was all naked. They took off the shoes from me, the skirt, everything. I was naked. Thank G-d I was not raped. Because when my husband asked me, "You was sleeping with boys?" I said, "No." This was the first night, you know, after you get married. And I remember that. (crying) And I want to cry, and I didn't say nothing. I never tell him. He died never knowing. Then he see I'm a psule, I said, "Nobody slept with me. I can promise by the Bible." He said, "Yes, I..." That's why...

**INT:** Yeah, he could see.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, he saw it.

**INT:** So you weren't, so they didn't rape you.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** They took off your clothes while you were sleeping.

**ESTHER:** They took off the clothes to steal, to buy bread. I'm telling you. People hungry.

**INT:** So what did you do for clothes after that? What happened?

**ESTHER:** Nothing. They give me a sheet, and like...the Arabs wearing like this.

**INT:** Yeah, wrapped around.

**ESTHER:** You know, you're covering up, they wrap you around a sheet. And then was a...a Russian writer, he was there. There was always was sitting in jail, even doctors, writers, you know? They put me in jail. And they put him in jail, and they used to assign me, I shall go to clean his room. I came over. I clean, I wash the floor. And after I wash the floor and I wash the dishes, and he said, "Before you wash the floor, sit down with me, eat." He gave me a piece of bread. And he sit near me, and I was afraid, because at that time, I was so **young**. I told you, I was seventeen. And what I did, he said to me, "I will not touch you. How old are you?" I said, "Seventeen." He said, "I have eighteen year daughter. I will never touch you. And I'm a writer and I have a doctor degree. I was teaching university, and because I write a book, they put me here in jail." He told me the whole story.

**INT:** He was a political prisoner.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah. And then, and maybe he wrote a letter, I don't know. He told me, "You're going to go out. Don't worry." Maybe he wrote a letter. Maybe he did something. Because in six days, he said, he came over and said to me, "You're going..." Oh, I became at that time typhus. They cut all of my hair. I got lice, maybe, something. And he said to me, "You're going to go home in a couple hours." I said, "How many hours?" He said, "Don't worry. I gonna take you to the..." You know, I was so weak, I didn't got energy to stand up on the train to go home.

**INT:** So you got typhus in this camp?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. The six days I was with temperature, and with the temperature I was washing the floor. I have to do the job. They don't care if you're sick.

**INT:** How did you get through that, those days?

**ESTHER:** Ask G-d. Don't ask **me**. G-d wants me to live, I have to live.

**INT:** Weren't you terrified?

**ESTHER:** Of course, I was always crying. I remember, when I had my period, and I go in the bathroom, and two policeman staying watch me how I do the pee-pee. Yeah, I never forget it. Never forget it.

**INT:** It's very humiliating.

**ESTHER:** That's right. And I cry a lot. And I was healthy. I was very healthy.

**INT:** Did you cry a lot all through Siberia, or just all through the whole thing you cried?

**ESTHER:** Of course I did. I went through a lot. The grandfather died, I cried for him. Because they liked me. Then I heard my other grandfather die, and my mother cried, we both crying, we walking, we crying. When my mother, and one time, when I was here, operated, you know, I had like a vision. The time, it's not a vision, no...

**INT:** A dream?

**ESTHER:** It comes to me, it comes to me natural. The time before the war, I remember I was a kid, and I got a dream and I wake up and I cry. And my father said, "Why you crying?" I said, "Nothing." I don't want to tell him. I was going to walk and walk and walk by myself, and that's how it is. I'm **still** walking by myself. (crying)

**INT:** That was your dream.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. The war started. I never want to eat nothing. I was too, like, a bad kid. You know, too...It was too good for me. You know, everybody loves me. My grandmother always makes blintzes why I like it. The aunt makes this, kreplach because I like it. You know, everybody wherever I go, I got it.

**INT:** And then you went into the war.

**ESTHER:** And then I'm telling you more. The time from the war, my aunt always said, "Oh, Esther, you used to eat by me all the time!"

**INT:** Everybody liked you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. **Everybody**. I was, my face, I never forget. My aunt one time, she was sitting and she said, "What you put on the face?" I says, "Nothing." "Your face was like you put makeup." I never **put** makeup! I even have now no makeup.

**INT:** You still have beautiful skin.

**ESTHER:** Now look. I don't have makeup. I have no makeup. It's my natural skin.

**INT:** You have very beautiful skin, yeah.

**ESTHER:** No, I put "Oil of Olay" every day.

**INT:** Oh, well, that's what I'd better start doing, then!

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I put Oil of Olay, and I put a little eyebrow, eyeshadow, you know, and I want to look younger.

**INT:** You do.

**ESTHER:** There's nothing wrong with that. I'm still young. Nothing wrong. No, one thing I did, don't mention it, I don't want to do this on here.

**INT:** You want me to take this off [the tape]? (pause) Tell me what you just told me about your husband.

**ESTHER:** He was a rabbi's son. When the war started...he's from Solowchow. When the war started, they kill all of his sisters, with the whole family. My family, 84 people was killed, from my mother's brothers. Everybody got twelve children. You know, with sister-in-laws, and brother-in-laws. With all of this. And it was very hard. And when I met my husband, and my mother talked to him, I don't want to get married. Because my father was not at my wedding. I send him to Siberia. I send him to Tashkent. I saved his life. You see, he lived in Israel till 1970. 1948 he came to Israel, with my mother and my two sisters. My sister was fourteen, the other sister was sixteen, when they came to Israel. And they, keine hore, have grandchildren already. They married the children, and all the daughters, my one sister married all the children, and my other sister married her children.

**INT:** Tell me what happened when you came back from that labor camp that you were in.

**ESTHER:** When I come back?

**INT:** You got on a train to go back to where your mother was and your sisters?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, sure, sure. I came home. My mother bought a loaf of bread, and she cut it and give it to me to eat. And I ate the bread. My teacher used to teach me not, a little thing fell on the floor, G-d don't like it. That's the way I was trained. Everybody likes me. When I was a kid, all the girls, you know, like everybody likes me, because I always share. My father told me to share everything with them.

**INT:** Right, and you did.

**ESTHER:** All of my life, even today. Even today. Every Shabbas coming ladies to me. Friday I make Shabbas. Take a look my fridge. See?

**INT:** Oh, my goodness, yeah. You have a lot of leftovers.

**ESTHER:** Not leftovers. Everything is fresh. The way I keep my fridgidaire, clean, I'm showing you, see?

**INT:** Yeah, it's pretty spotless in this house, that's for sure.

**ESTHER:** See, here is the dairy stuff. Here you have this, here you have tuna fish, here you have (showing all the shelves in the refrigerator).

**INT:** But you have friends, you invite them for Shabbas still?

**ESTHER:** My father used to take all the time from the synagogue to eat, you see? Then I am still in the habit, they coming in and we talking. I go in the synagogue every Shabbas. And after coming to the synagogue, I take like lunch, and after lunch I take a rest. An hour I lay down on the bed. And they coming in later, 3:00. And we sit until 6:00 and we're talking.

**INT:** Cup of tea.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. We talking, we playing, and I bake strudel.

**INT:** Oh, nice.

**ESTHER:** Oh, how about something...

(Pause)

**INT:** Okay, this is a continuation of an interview with Mrs. Awruch. It's May 16th, 1995.

Mrs. Awruch, the last time we stopped talking, we were talking about your time in Siberia. You talked about the six days you spent in that very difficult place. And we got up to the point where you got back to your parents...to your mother, anyway. Your father wasn't living with you anymore.

**ESTHER:** Not living? I save him. I send him away to...

**INT:** I know that. But not living **with** you. He was in a different place.

**ESTHER:** I send him away to...Tashkent.

**INT:** Right.

**ESTHER:** I save his life.

**INT:** I know.

**ESTHER:** If he will be in jail, because for our stuff, they thought him, he steal. Because my mother put the monogram. And they said to him he stealing. He said, he never steal never in life. And they put him in jail. And my mother was crying. I came home from work. Then I said to my mother, "Don't worry. I'm going to take him out."

**INT:** Right. And you did.

**ESTHER:** And I did.

**INT:** You told us that story. But when you came back from that other place, I can't pronounce it, the place where you were.

**ESTHER:** Stanisya Yaya. Oh. I don't want to remember this.

**INT:** How was it when you came back? Was your mother glad to see you?

**ESTHER:** Oh, what are you saying? I was back like from dead, because I told you, I got there typhus. I got temperature, and they ask me to wash the floors there.

**INT:** While you were sick.

**ESTHER:** Sick. Even with temperature.

**INT:** Did you come home sick with typhus? Were you still sick when you came back?

**ESTHER:** No. When I was, came, six days I got better. I was young. You know, when you're young you fight everything. I came home.

**INT:** Now what happened from that point, when you got back?

**ESTHER:** I got back. You know, my girlfriend remind me, "Esther. Why they took you away?" "Because the boss wants me for his brother-in-law. He got no legs." I was seventeen year old! And he saw a boy kiss me. And...in a couple hours he took me away. Two policemen took me away. And I said, "I don't know, for what? What I done?" "Be quiet. Nothing." They took away, just like that, with six dogs.

**INT:** But why do you think they did that? Because he...

**ESTHER:** Because, you see, he was a Russian Jew. Not all the Russian Jews, they're good people.

**INT:** Was he a guard in the camp? Is that who he was?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** He was the boss, you said.

**ESTHER:** He was the boss there. Where I worked to making for the...



**INT:** Shirts, right?

**ESTHER:** Shirts for the...

**INT:** And he was the boss for that factory.

**ESTHER:** Factory, yeah.

**INT:** And he was a Jew?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** And my mother ask his wife why he did it to my daughter. "Because my brother came home with no legs. And we will make him legs." In those days they started making legs already. "And I want her to marry my brother."

**INT:** But why would he send you away because he wants you to marry his brother?

**ESTHER:** I said, never in his life. I told him off.

**INT:** Right. Oh, so he was mad at you. I see.

**ESTHER:** I told him. No, he said to the girl, Raya, "Write it down, she's late two minutes each day." How they gonna put me in for that? Five minutes, like I was five minutes late to work. I was never late.

**INT:** He did it because he was mad at you. Okay. But that was a **Jewish** man who did that.

**ESTHER:** Jewish. Jewish. Jewish, Jewish. And I wish...he and his children shall never have peace what he done to me. I will never forgive him. I was so young. You want to go in the bathroom, and I got the period, and two soldiers have to stay and watch me. You know, it's so shame, pity. It's like in a kah-tzet. Like I was in Germany under the same thing I went through. And that's why I never want to talk about it. And I was, I was in Germany, and I told to one doctor, because he said my heart beats too fast all the time. He said, "Heart is healthy. What you went through? You was here in Siberia, not in Germany. What you went through?" I could not tell him.

**INT:** You didn't tell him about that place, either. Did you ever tell anyone about it?

**ESTHER:** No. My girlfriend remind me. She said, "What was it? They took you away for nothing!" And I started crying. And she said, "Why?" And I told her.

**INT:** Was this recently? Recently she asked you?

**ESTHER:** Oh, she asked me recently.

**INT:** Just recently, yeah.

**ESTHER:** She never ask me all of those years, she never asked me.

**INT:** Is this Sarak [Klein] that we're talking about?

**ESTHER:** Sarah. Sarah. She never asked me. Because she didn't remember. She just remember, she didn't know why. She just remember...

**INT:** You were taken away.

**ESTHER:** They took me away.

**INT:** Did you tell her?

**ESTHER:** I told her.

**INT:** You **did** tell her.

**ESTHER:** And she know how many boys, everybody likes to go out with me. And I was still waiting for my rabbi. He was in...in Norway.

**INT:** What was his name?

**ESTHER:** I don't know the name. I know he just came and give me a kiss here (on the forehead) and my mother a kiss in the hand. After the war, he's going to learn in Norway, Norwegian. He gonna go there, 1939, and I was thirteen and a half, and he was seventeen. He's going to go for a rabbi. He come back, he want to marry me. And that's the shake with my mother the hand.

**INT:** So you were in love with him, or you wanted to marry him?

**ESTHER:** I didn't felt in love.

**INT:** No? But you remembered him, and you wanted to wait.

**ESTHER:** I remember time from the war, you know? Like you say a word, you give, shake the hand, you have to keep it.

**INT:** Oh, I see.

**ESTHER:** Then anybody, I don't want to bother. No, now, 1945...a Russian officer from Leningrad, he saw me out from the movie. With my sister.

**INT:** Yeah, you told me about that man. And your mother said no way.

**ESTHER:** No. She asked him, "You was a bar mitzvah?" And he said, [Russian]. This mean in Russian, "What is that?"

**INT:** Oh boy. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** "What is that? A bar mitzvah." Well, she said, "Oh, no. If you don't understand what a **bar mitzvah** is, then you're not Jewish." He said, "I'm Jewish. Ich bin a Yid."

**INT:** Not enough for her.

**ESTHER:** No, no, it was not enough. She told him, sit down, and he didn't know how to daven. He was never bar mitzvah, you see?

**INT:** Let me ask you, when you, you said that recently Sarah asked you this question about this place.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she always in her head, and she always want to ask me, she was afraid to ask me.

**INT:** She was afraid to ask you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she will hurt me.

**INT:** Did she...were you able to talk to her about it at all?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Yeah?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I told her. And I didn't even cry. I was like a stone.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** It's still like a stone.

**INT:** Did you ever tell anyone else about that experience? [Esther shakes her head no.] Never, nobody. Not your husband, not anybody?

**ESTHER:** No, no.

**INT:** Children?

**ESTHER:** No. Never. You can't. Because when you came to America, they ask you in the application if you was arrested or something. I said no. I know I didn't do anything. Go tell them because I didn't want to marry his brother with two legs, you understand what I mean? And here...two men want to marry me. No, one leg was also like, half a leg, the Germans cut it off. You know, like he got a...and I stay away, I say, I don't want to get married to nobody. It's 22 years going to be June the 3rd.

**INT:** Your husband's yahrzeit.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yahrzeit.

**INT:** 22 years. Could you tell me a little bit about your relationship with Sarah Rosenberg, or Klein, in Siberia?

**ESTHER:** Oh, do I show you the picture?

**INT:** You did show me the picture, but...

**ESTHER:** We was the best friends.

**INT:** Yeah, now you told me in the beginning, when you got there, that you didn't really know her that well. Even though you were...

**ESTHER:** Oh, because she was always with the kids, and they took me to work, and she was always helping her mother with the babies. I told you, her mother...

**INT:** Right. So how did you get to be friends, then? But how did you start to become friends?

**ESTHER:** We was sleeping together! We was, like a sheet was here, and there, there lived the whole family there, and we was living here.

**INT:** So what did you, what did you talk about, what did you...?

**ESTHER:** Oh, we was talking. I told her I'm going to bring some...food. I take her along. Her sister along. I don't remember -- her, or the sister. And I show her what I did. I was very bright. I just went over, opened up and took out like a kettle, and I said, "Give me bread and potatoes and milk."

**INT:** Right, and you would trade them.

**ESTHER:** And I trade them right away, and I bring to the house. My grandfather was so happy. He was...he was happy my mother cooked it. They took me to work.

**INT:** But do you think your friendship with Sarah was helpful at all to you getting through those years?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. We always met. Even, I didn't got money. When I come to the United States, she was before me she came. And her husband was working in a synagogue. He was like a...how you call this? A shammas or something. Not a shammas.

**INT:** Gabbai?

**ESTHER:** No, not a rabbi.

**INT:** Gabbai. A gabbai.

**ESTHER:** A gabbai? Maybe. A shammas. A shammas.

**INT:** Taking care of the shul.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, in the synagogue. He was teaching bar mitzvahs, this. So I remember...I used to call her every week, we used to talk. Ten cents was a telephone. And I didn't have the ten cents. Many times, I borrow by the girlfriend, she in California. She said, "Your girlfriend just called you, how you feel." She call **me**. And she said, "She wants you should call her back." Then I say, "Let me talk." And I talk on her telephone. Then I don't have to lend the ten cents, because she got a telephone in the house. No, many times, like she was not in the house, and I want to call her back, then I borrowed ten cents.

**INT:** But in Siberia, what was she like?

**ESTHER:** Oh, we was kids. Oh, she was the same like me.

**INT:** But how was that? Describe yourself. What you were like, what she was like, how you got along.

**ESTHER:** We was young kids. A lot of people die for hunger. A lot of people didn't know the mushrooms. And they pick up mushrooms, and they ate, and they never wake up. Like my mother know the mushrooms, like her mother knows, too, which one is the good ones.

**INT:** Oh, they know.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. No, like me, I don't know. You see? The mother said, "Throw this away." It's funny. My mother used to at night go with me with her sister, and her, too. We all are going till 2:00 at night, when everybody's asleep. And we're going where they're growing potatoes, and we pick up a like (?) if this is your ground, if a half a potato, you just throw it away. Then we pick it up.

**INT:** Oh, you make something, food.

**ESTHER:** My mother was making a cholent with this. You know cholent? That's it. It's funny. And I still said to my mother, "It doesn't have the same taste." It was from G-d. We put no salt, no butter, nothing. No pepper. Nothing. And came out the cholent so good. Today I put everything....

**INT:** It's not as good as it was then.

**ESTHER:** No. You know, many times, you see the honey? I always have to have honey, because it reminds me the time from when start the war, my aunt took out bread, and she put on honey, and I liked it. And I said to my mother, "Ask her. I want another piece." And my mother started crying. "I always pay you money you shall drink a glass of milk!" She paid me ten cents, ten groschen, I shall drink a glass of milk! (laughs)

**INT:** Right. But now you want to eat, right?

**ESTHER:** Now, I'm hungry. My mother cry. I said, "Far vos? Why you crying?" She said, "Because it's going to be a big war. You hungry. You never was hungry in my life, and now I see you're hungry."

**INT:** But can you describe yourself, what you were like as a teenager in Siberia? Do you remember?

**ESTHER:** I was growing up overnight. I was sitting. Everybody was asleep and snoring. And nobody was snoring in my house. Then I couldn't, I never, you know, like my father and my mother had one room, and me and the sisters, you know, another room. We was not too rich, no, we got another room. We got three rooms. And here we're always sleeping together, and we hear snoring, and everybody's sleeping, making noise, and I was sitting like this.

**INT:** With your arms folded and...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And I just say, "G-d help me, we shall come home alive." That's how I was always praying. This is always the prayer. I used to talk to G-d. "You gonna help me. Teuere Tate. Tate von Himmel. And let us come back home all alive." No, it's not happened how I want it. No, thank G-d...

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** Medicine. Yeah, we came there. My mother was still bleeding, she was forty year old. Why? Because they killed the cousins.

**INT:** Right. You told us.

**ESTHER:** They shot them both. No, one was still alive, he lives not far from Tel Aviv.

**INT:** But you said, you "grew up overnight." What did you mean by that?

**ESTHER:** Overnight I became like my mind was like I'm a grown-up lady already. I'm telling you. I was acting like I'm the boss.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** And I went over, didn't ask anybody. Like I done everything. It's just...G-d gave me brains, I'm telling you.

**INT:** You think that's where it came from.

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. I feel it. I feel it.

**INT:** But don't you think you were kind of a leader, a little bit of a leader as a child, too, before the war? You were...

**ESTHER:** In the time from the war, I used to come over to the grandmom, I want..."Smelled so good, Grandom. Was make bei dir gut?" Sagst sich, gemacht blintzes. Ach, this auch lieb." I call in my cousins. You saw her, my cousin, with the blonde hair? This is my cousin, she lives in Herzliya. I'm six months older from her. And we used to sit down with her brother. You see, we always kept together. It was like...

**INT:** But were you the leader of that group, do you think?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. Yes. I'm always. Whatever I say, everybody listen to me, because they figure I'm smarter, I don't know.

**INT:** Mm-hm. And this continued in Siberia, or even more so?

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. They was not together with us. No, later, when I send away my father, and the aunt sent the three children to us, because they was hungry. And my father said, "Mein Esther, she's so smart. She brings food so nobody's hungry." That's why she send her kids to me.

**INT:** Could you describe what Sarah was like? What was her personality like? Was she similar to you, different from you? How...

**ESTHER:** I didn't...her father...keeps, you know, like, she was working on the...selling stuff, you see? And me, maybe because he was Hasidic. Because me, they grab right away to the work. I shall sew the blouses for the soldiers.

**INT:** But Sarah didn't have to do that, that you know of?

**ESTHER:** She didn't done this. No, no. They went to a bakery, and maybe she helped, I don't know, maybe she sweep up, maybe she did something, I don't know.

**INT:** But what was her personality like? What was she like? Was she the same as you, or different?

**ESTHER:** It's different. Different.

**INT:** How? How different?

**ESTHER:** I will explain. It's a lot of....maybe that's the way she was raised different. See, different. We came from a different city, also. It's...it have a lot to do with the personality. She was always busy with her mother with the kids. And by me, my mother just got the three girls. I have to help them out to make sure the food's in the house, then I was like the mother for everybody.

**INT:** But so was Sarah, it sounds like. She was also like a mother.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Sarah's sister, she already went out. She got right away, like a friend. And...she went through a lot, too. She got married there. I don't know why they marry her so young. And the man, he was looking for other women.

**INT:** Yeah. This is Sarah's sister, Ettel?

**ESTHER:** Ettel, Ettel, Ettel. Yeah. Ettel.

**INT:** But...did she have a sense of humor, was she sad all the time, was she happy, was she...what was she like?

**ESTHER:** No, they come from, I told you. It's from day to night. Because my house, Friday night, my mother serve food, we never go eat without kiddush, you see. And I will never forget this. And Saturday night, yeah, and Friday, my mother took out the "Tzena Urena," used to say "Tzena Urena," and my father liked when my mother read this. And later my father said -- I was nine year old or ten, my father -- I told you, when he was sixteen, they took him to Austria. He was Austria, they took him to Russia. And he was modernized, you see? And he know how to dance. Then he taught me dancing a waltz, a tango.

**INT:** But what was different about your family from her family?

**ESTHER:** They was...

**INT:** They weren't as happy? Or they weren't as lively?

**ESTHER:** No! No, no, no. It's difference. We was Hasidic, they was Hasidic. No, we was...



**INT:** A little more modern, maybe?

**ESTHER:** My mother wear a sheitel, with no hair. She, I never know she have...

**INT:** But she wore a sheitel, too, your mother.

**ESTHER:** My mother got four sheitel.

**INT:** Right. So what was the difference? I'm trying to understand.

**ESTHER:** The difference? We was in business, and her mother never was in business, because she always was pregnant. Each time with another kid, I'm just telling you. But my mother was different. She stayed in the business with my father, to help him out. See, it's a difference. Her grandfather was a shochet. Her...not her father. Her father was a ...okay. Enough.

**INT:** Okay, you didn't like her father.

**ESTHER:** No, no, no! He didn't do anything. I don't **know** what he was. He was just a Jewish man. That's all.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Okay. But I'm still trying to understand how she was different from you, or the same from you. In her personality. What was she like? See, you're...

**ESTHER:** She is a very kind girl.

**INT:** You're the only person we know who can tell us what she was like back then. That's why I'm asking.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She was very kind. She never done anything without her father.

**INT:** Oh. She did everything her father told her to do? Is that what you're saying?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah, I guess so. And me, I got all the freedom always.

**INT:** Mm-hm. You were a more independent person.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, I guess so. When my cousin put...polish on the nails, I think I told you. And I came home, and I ask my father, I want to make too. Can I buy it? It doesn't cost too much. Fifty, like a half a dollar. And he said, "Why you need it? You're too young. It's not nice," he used to tell me. And I said, and I give him a kiss, I said, "Can I have it?" He said, "Go ahead. Take the money and go."

**INT:** (laughs) How old were you?

**ESTHER:** Eleven.

**INT:** Yeah. So he would give in to you. You knew how to get around him.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I used to be smart. I used to come right away, and wipe up, the shoes shall shine. When you come to buy shoes, you see shiny shoes, you like them, you buy them.

**INT:** So you think Sarah's father was more...not so good-natured as your father, or he was more strict with her, or...

**ESTHER:** It's a different life. Different world. And they was also Hasidic. My grandfather [grandmother] also a sheitel and everything. No, my grandmother, she always, she got nothing to do, she always looks aside, nobody shall steal nothing. When she saw somebody goes and holds, like begging, she used to go outside, bring him the coffee and a piece of bread. And one time I came over, I told you. I wanted the same way, to make for her, give it to me. Because I felt I want to taste it. See, I was smart already then.

**INT:** Okay. So you're saying that maybe you were a little more independent than Sarah was.

**ESTHER:** My grandfather was rich, yeah.

**INT:** And your grandfather was rich. So you had different backgrounds.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Different.

**INT:** Very different.

**ESTHER:** Of course. He was rich. And never took for something, if he lend you money to buy a house, he never took a penny from you. In Jewish tradition, you're not allowed to take interest. And she was, and many people don't give it back even.

**INT:** But what did you...

**ESTHER:** All the, excuse me. My mother told me like this: Because of my grandmother, my father's mother, we're alive. That's what she always tell me after the war.

**INT:** Because she was a real tzaddekis.

**ESTHER:** Because she was giving everybody, all the poor girls, like have no parents, like no father or no mother, she helped to marry them off.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** And because of her, we're alive. My mother told me, and I never forget it.

**INT:** Right. Do you believe that? Do you believe that it was your grandmother?

**ESTHER:** I believe it, yeah. I believe it. Because she always watch me, I shall eat. And my mother said, "She don't want to eat." She said, "Don't worry. She comes to my house, she gonna eat." We lived like Italian people. Here the grandma lived, we lived here, and the aunt lives here, you know?

**INT:** Yeah. Yeah, it's nice. Close family.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** Is there anything else you can tell me about your relationship with Sarah during the war?

**ESTHER:** I'm just mentioning to you. She was...everybody was poor. Nobody got to eat. And when I bring potatoes and everything and the house was full, we got food. Then they ask my mother, "Where you got it?" She said, "Esther bring me." Then I, when I go, I said, "Come with me. I show you. I go in this house, and you go in the other house." And I told her what to say. I learned the language so fast. I spoke to the Germans right away.

**INT:** What about your belief in G-d all this time, when things were going so difficult, and everything was...

**ESTHER:** Oh, I always believed. I got, you know, I got a dream. Before the war, maybe a half a year. I never think about it. No, sometimes I'm laying by myself. I gonna walk and walk alone. See, I'm still walking alone. (cries)

**INT:** You had that dream before the war. (pause) But you always believed in G-d. That was always very strong.

**ESTHER:** Oh, I'm not allowed to go...I have to say "La Menatzeach" Shabbas. I have to "Ritzei" right away. You know, the davening. I remember everything.

**INT:** Didn't you wonder where was G-d when all this was happening?

**ESTHER:** I learned, yeah, I learned. I learn in English, in Polish, and you learn, in 1937 used to be, till '37 was a Jewish teacher, a Hebrew teacher, in school. She taught us "Shedovska Historia." This mean, she explained the whole thing in English. Not in English, in Polish. And it was written in Jewish. And she explain us.

**INT:** No, but I'm saying to you...did you ever question G-d? Like why, why were all these things happening to the Jewish people during the war? Where was G-d? Why was He not saving all these Jewish people?

**ESTHER:** No. The grandfather prepare me. We not allowed to ask G-d questions.

**INT:** Your grandfather told you that.

**ESTHER:** Yes. And I always study in his room, you remember I told you? And he used to say, "It's a shame you're not a boy, because you could be a rabbi later. You're so bright." I liked to listen how he is say the Sedrah. He's davening. And the niggun, you know, like a chazzan.

**INT:** It stays in your head.

**ESTHER:** Oh, I always, when I was sitting there, I came in school, I got a A, because everything came in my head. The song, my grandfather was singing this. You know, the Haftorah, the everything, came in my head right away. Even today, I go into the synagogue, and it sounds like the voice, like I hear my grandfather's voice.

**INT:** So you never questioned G-d.

**ESTHER:** Never questioned.

**INT:** In all those war years and...through the war.

**ESTHER:** No, the grandfather used to say, you're not allowed to question. Just, you have to thank G-d, accept everything how it's coming. And thank G-d for every day. And that's what I'm doing till I had to like die.

**INT:** You're still doing that.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I lehn Krishma before I go [to sleep].

**INT:** You still believe in G-d, and you still don't question.

**ESTHER:** I always, always gonna do, sure.

**INT:** So now tell me after the war what happened.

**ESTHER:** And when I go to sleep, I even pray, I pray for my girlfriend she shall get better, and she die, I felt bad, I could not sleep that evening. Night.

**INT:** So G-d has His reason why your friend died, and you can't ask?

**ESTHER:** It's...I will tell you, it's...the grandfather used to say like this: When one big person do wrong, ten children suffer. He used to be very religious. He was...the Belzer Hasid's...

**INT:** Follower? He was a follower of the Belzer Rebbe?

**ESTHER:** The follower, yeah, yeah. He was his chaver, you know, like...

**INT:** Hasid.

**ESTHER:** Not chazzan.

**INT:** Hasid.

**ESTHER:** Hasid, yeah. Hasid. Yeah, yeah. And he used to say, because G-d's will, that's all. G-d's will. You're not allowed. Because if you say something, it's an averah. You're not allowed to ask G-d a question. Maybe that's bashert. I always, that's why I was raised that way. I was raised, I cannot be different.

**INT:** But some people **did** change.

**ESTHER:** And a...

**INT:** Some people changed after the war. They stopped believing.

**ESTHER:** I know, I know, I know. It's nothing to change. That's the way G-d want it. You see? G-d want me to live. Thank G-d I got an open heart surgery eighteen months ago. August the 26th gonna be two years I was operated. And I couldn't breathe for no reason. I baked Danish. I baked a cake for somebody from the synagogue. An older man. He said, "Esther, it's three weeks till the holiday. Would you bake me a cake for the holiday?" And I said, "Why do you have to wait for the holiday? I'll bake you now. For the holiday, I'll bake another one." I didn't bake another one. I just baked the one, and I called him up and I said, "Your cake is ready, come pick it up." He came 11:00 pick it up. And about 5:00, and then my girlfriend call me up. And I said, "Come over." And she comes in, it smelled so good, I baked Danish. And I gave her two rolls, and her husband two rolls. And...saw that they were drinking, because it was hot days. And later they said, "Come to the Russian store. They have two plums for a dollar." And I went to the car, and I can't stand up, and I said, see? I didn't even know the symptoms.

**INT:** You didn't even know you were sick?

**ESTHER:** No. I was just tired. And I said to her, "Here is the dollar, and buy me two pounds the plums. I don't know if I'm able to eat it." That's what I told her. "I'm too tired. Would you take me home?" Took me home, they went home, they didn't realize nothing. And I lay down on the couch, and laying on the couch, I couldn't catch my breath. And I, this and that was like, shocking. And I start crying, and that's why, I was crying, "Help, help, help, help!" The air conditioning was in the house, the door was locked, how could somebody gonna help me? See? Then I talked to G-d. "Send somebody to help me." I **feel** it. It's in **me**. Because my whole heart is with G-d, and I call up the neighbor, and I said, "Marsha, call 911. I'm afraid, tell them I'm getting a heart attack." "What's the matter, you crazy? The whole house is smelling from your cooking, baking, and you say you're getting a heart attack? You're not normal." The neighbor, across the street. I said, "Please, don't...I can't even walk to make you a **telephone**." It's the truth. I was walking like a kitten on all fours, and I stand up with one leg here, and one hand, I make the telephone, and when I talk to her, my telephone fell out from the hand. I couldn't hold the telephone in my hand already.

**INT:** So did she call somebody for you?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They didn't call from **her** house. They came over here. No, my brains was working so hard, so good, then I went over, with all four, open the door, because it's locked, and they came over, said, "Why you call me?" I said, "Call 911." He said, "I don't know your telephone." Then I remember it and I said, "338-7374. 2312 Oakmont Street." Oh, and I spell it for him. And I collapse. Then I got a heart attack right away.

**INT:** Hm. And somebody came then.

**ESTHER:** They came in six minutes. See? I have to live. In six minutes, and gave me right away an injection here (in her arm) something in the veins, I guess. And then he gave me an injection here. The pulse was working very slow. Like I'm dying out, or something like this. And he said to the lady, "Lady, this is her pocketbook? You take it to your house, because we have to take her in the hospital. Her pulse is going very low, and we want to save her." It's like two policemen. The 911. And they took me to Nazareth, and Nazareth was four doctors already waiting for me. They call up...

**INT:** Did you go to surgery right away?

**ESTHER:** No. They cannot make surgery. They make the next day, they make me a catheterization. And they saw, I had no choice.

**INT:** You were all blocked up.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Then he...I speak English with a German accent. Then the doctor said, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" I said, "Ja." "Was is los?" "Bitte, my heart is so schwach." "Oy, sprichst du Deutsch! Ich bin geboren in Allentown." The doctor is born in Allentown in 1932. He was born in Allentown. His parents run away from Germany. He was Jewish.

**INT:** Oh, so he knows German.

**ESTHER:** He was Jewish. And his father, she went to college, and she met an Italian guy. Was doctor...Capone. And Capone, you watch television, Capone is the...

**INT:** Italian.

**ESTHER:** Italian, the gangsters.

**INT:** Mafia, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Mafia. And he said, "Don't worry, I'm a Jewish boy. I'm not a Mafia. I go in synagogue Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. A whole year I'm working."

**INT:** So you still pray to G-d even now, when you're having a hard time.

**ESTHER:** Oh, all the time.

**INT:** Is there anything else you want to tell us about the war years before we move on to liberation and after the war? Is there anything else you would like to add to the tape about your life during the war?

**ESTHER:** Was very rough. Was very rough. Especially when I have to send away the father from me, you know? I was worried. And my mother was baking those, like knishes like this. And she was baking everything. Because my sister was selling, she was eleven year old. She was selling this. This way we have money to buy bread. See? And that's the way we went through.

**INT:** What happened at the end of the war? Did they...

**ESTHER:** The end of the war, we came back 1946. I was already four months pregnant. Three months pregnant.

**INT:** Wait a minute, how'd that happen? So wait a minute. How did you meet your husband, then? You met your husband before the war was over?

**ESTHER:** Oh, the war was over already.

**INT:** Yeah, so tell me what happened when the war was over. Did you leave Siberia?

**ESTHER:** He was in the Russian army, and he was, before, he was in the Polish army. Then the Germans took him. And they want to kill him, and they shot him. Three times. He was an officer. He saved another Polish officer. The Polish officer give him money to run away from Treblinka. He run away. He got it, right?

**INT:** You're going to have to tell me the whole story. You're going to have to tell me your husband's...tell me your husband's name, and tell me how you met him, and then tell me a little bit about what he was like.

**ESTHER:** Oh, we met, he came out from the hospital.

**INT:** Where? Where were you? What hospital?

**ESTHER:** In Siberia.

**INT:** In Siberia.

**ESTHER:** Because he was injured.

**INT:** Okay. As a soldier.

**ESTHER:** Soldier.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** He was injured. Because at that time, the Americans, and all the kind united together. And all the Jews went to save, to beat back Hitler, you know? And at that time, he was injured, and they took him to Siberia. He was three months there in hospital. And they didn't took out the shrapnels, they didn't took it out. They just, heal it on top.

**INT:** Yeah. Where was he wounded? On his hand, his arm?

**ESTHER:** No. In legs.

**INT:** Oh, in his legs?

**ESTHER:** The legs. They shot him. You know, it's...

**INT:** How did you meet him?

**ESTHER:** He saw me there.

**INT:** In the hospital?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no! After he came out. He was free to going home. And he said, "Where is a Yiddishe Kehillah? Where's the Jews?" And my girlfriend's father said, "Oh, she's my daughter's girlfriend. Come to our house, and my wife will make you a little tea or soup, and we're all going to eat." That's the way the Jewish people, yeah. And right away, he don't let, I was with my cousin, she lives in Hadera. She's with a sheitel. And everybody, he said, just me. He don't want nobody else, just me.

**INT:** Oh, he liked you right away. Did you like him right away?

**ESTHER:** He's a handsome man.

**INT:** What was he like? Yeah, what was he like?

**ESTHER:** A rabbi's son.

**INT:** A rabbi's son.

**ESTHER:** Son, how he is, smart. Even the Germans didn't kill him. The Germans said that G-d wants you should just arbeiten. The Germans told him.



**INT:** How much older than you was he?

**ESTHER:** Twelve year old.

**INT:** Twelve years older.

**ESTHER:** And I don't tell he's twelve year older. I felt like he's the same age like me.

**INT:** Yeah. How old were you when you met him, do you know?

**ESTHER:** Twenty.

**INT:** You were twenty. Okay, so he was 32. And did he have a family before the war?

**ESTHER:** All got killed. His family all got killed.

**INT:** So tell me what happened. You met him, he came to your house, and you fed him, and you liked each other right away. Or he liked **you** right away. Did you come to like him later on a little bit, or you just...

**ESTHER:** I got, you know, like used to him. Because...it was the war time.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** It's different.

**INT:** What's the difference?

**ESTHER:** I don't want to get married right away. I want my father shall be at my wedding. And he was in Tashkent.

**INT:** Oh, he was still there.

**ESTHER:** And my husband said -- he's Hasidic, he cannot be in the same room with me.

**INT:** Uh-huh. Your husband was very religious?

**ESTHER:** His father was a rabbi. Hasidic.

**INT:** So he wants to get married right away.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, not supposed to.

**INT:** And you wanted to wait for your father to come back.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** So what happened?

**ESTHER:** Then he spoke to my mother, and they make up in five weeks, there would be the wedding.

**INT:** Without your father?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Oh.

**ESTHER:** Look, I got a choice?

**INT:** How did you feel about that?

**ESTHER:** I felt bad. I got no choice.

**INT:** Why didn't you have a choice? Why couldn't you say, no, you wanted to wait?

**ESTHER:** If I would not marry then, I will not be married ...to him.

**INT:** Why do you say that?

**ESTHER:** Because.

**INT:** Oh, he was saying, "Now or never?"

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. It was not that...point. I don't know why. They said all the Jewish boys got killed in the war. Was nobody left anyhow.

**INT:** Oh, I see. So he was a good candidate to get married to.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I just didn't even **think** about it. At that time, we don't think. I don't know.

**INT:** So you weren't in love? You just...

**ESTHER:** No! It was no love!

**INT:** What was it?

**ESTHER:** It was nothing. We just met a guy. I remember, I never forget the first night. Was till 1:00 after the chuppah. And we supposed to go in bed. And I said, "Wait for tomorrow." He said, "This is not the Jewish way. Not supposed..."

**INT:** Oh, you wanted to wait till tomorrow? (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Yeah. (laughs)

**INT:** (laughs)

**ESTHER:** I was not ready. I never slept with men.

**INT:** Yeah, yeah.

**ESTHER:** I was, you know, from a Hasidic family, you never touch...

**INT:** Yeah. So you weren't ready for this at all, huh? So did he let...

**ESTHER:** No, in the morning my cousin and my mother came to see if I'm a psule.

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** I was mad at my cousin, let her rest in peace.

**INT:** What do you mean, they came to see? Oh, they came to like look at the...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Asked my husband if I was a psule.

**INT:** Is that a custom? Is that a minhag, or...

**ESTHER:** I guess. It's...a stupid custom. I don't know.

**INT:** That's embarrassing.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, embarrassing, that's right. Then...he asked me, "Did you ever slept with anybody?" I said, "Nobody touched me. Even the Germans didn't got to touch me. Nobody touched me." And he was surprised.

**INT:** Oh, he thought that somebody had, or...

**ESTHER:** No, he asked me just. He ask me.

**INT:** So why do you say he was surprised?

**ESTHER:** No, because I went out, I was talking with, I went out with a lot. You know, like I always go out...

**INT:** Yeah, you were popular. Boys liked you.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. You can ask Sarah. Every man saw me once, they want to go out with me.

**INT:** So he thought maybe you were fooling around a little bit?

**ESTHER:** I never did. I never did.

**INT:** But he **thought** you were.

**ESTHER:** No. I...I don't know. No, they know I was from a Hasidic family. Nobody touched me. No, no, no, no, no, no.

**INT:** So you weren't really in love with him. You just married him...why did you marry him? Because...your mother wanted you to, he wanted you to?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. My mother passed out. Because she saw he's an older man.

**INT:** What do you mean, she "passed out"?

**ESTHER:** When I saw her, "I just met that man. And what do you think, Mom?" In his face I told him, just like this. I asked my mother, because anybody I want to go out, she don't let me.

**INT:** Right. She didn't like, right.

**ESTHER:** She don't let me.

**INT:** **You** wanted to, but she didn't want you to.

**ESTHER:** That's right. I liked the Russian. See? The Russian people, the Jewish people, they're still nice people. He was a doctor.

**INT:** Yeah, you liked that guy. You liked him a lot.

**ESTHER:** A whole month we went out. And he's a doctor. 23 year old. And I was at that time 18. Do you know...he just kissed me in the hand, even not in the face.

**INT:** He was very respectful.

**ESTHER:** So respectful.

**INT:** Did you love him? Were you in love with him?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, we...we like each other. We went out a month. And when my mother said no, he cried. A man cries, it's very pity...

**INT:** Did you ever think you'd go away from that? That you'd go against your mother and say...

**ESTHER:** Oh, no. Oh, not in my book. No, no, no, no.

**INT:** It doesn't work that way, huh?

**ESTHER:** No, not in my house. My father raised me, my mother, I shall always be honest, never lie. I remember from a kid. Always say the truth, never lie. If you want anything, ask us.

**INT:** Yeah, but you can't make a decision yourself about who you're going to marry?

**ESTHER:** Oh, that kind of decision, my father was not there. Who I gonna talk for decision?

**INT:** Your mother.

**ESTHER:** My mother? My mother was crying always, I hope the father will come back alive. Because who knows what is happening? I send him away. I send him away to Tashkent. It's like a different country. It's Russia, no it was not Siberia. It was different. And anything my mother sold, like a bracelet or something, and she send the money for the father to survive.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** See? We have to help him out.

**INT:** But with all the boyfriends you were bringing home, she didn't like any of them.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** This one she liked.

**ESTHER:** Right away he opened up the [siddur]...for my mother.

**INT:** That was what she wanted.

**ESTHER:** And she hear the way he said the Haftorah...

**INT:** That was it.

**ESTHER:** That's...

**INT:** That was her one criterion. He had to be religious, the guy.

**ESTHER:** That's it. That's all, yeah. My father told me all the time. My father never got a beard.

**INT:** Yeah, right. But he's still religious.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He went davening in the morning before he opened the store. And at night, too. You know, like minchah/maariv, he went davening. Always Hasidic. Then he always spoke to my mother Hebrew, you know like...

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, like, "Give me lechem, bevakasha." I still remember those words, what he was talking. "Give me...melach, bevakasha." She should give him melach is salt. "Give me the salt." And something, they was always speaking Hebrew. Yeah, those words came in my head, never goes out, you know? I remember this. I came from a very happy family.

**INT:** Yeah, so you **wanted** to do what they wanted you to do?

**ESTHER:** My mother, my mother was singing, and the father was dancing.

**INT:** Right. They were happy. They were happy together. But did you want to do what they wanted?

**ESTHER:** We was a happy family. Take a look, was living in one room, and was very happy and clean. My mother keeps it clean. That's what I learned from my mother.

**INT:** Yeah, you certainly do that.

**ESTHER:** She was keeping, she wake up 4:00 in the morning and bake challahs. She baked everything. And my father, he loved her. Oh, yeah.

**INT:** But I'm asking you, with this choice of marriage....

**ESTHER:** He used to come over to my mother in my face and take my mother and give her a kiss, and I saw that. Then I give my father a kiss for that.

**INT:** Mm-hm. It's nice to see that.

**ESTHER:** You see? Because I saw a happy family.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Yeah. But did you want to do what they wanted you to do? As far as a choice for marriage?

**ESTHER:** Nobody told me what to do.

**INT:** They **didn't** tell you what to do.

**ESTHER:** Nobody told me. As a matter of fact, my uncle, let him rest in peace said, "My daughter is 22, 32, and your daughter is just twenty. Why you rushing her to get married? He will take my daughter." And my mother got mad. She told me that story.

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** It was just me. Me and nobody.

**INT:** Mm-hm. So how did you come to this decision?

**ESTHER:** It was bashert. That's all.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** Because I raised beautiful children. You saw my children?

**INT:** Yeah. Lovely. And grandchildren.

**ESTHER:** And my daughter-in-law, G-d bless her. She's so wonderful. She called me last night 11:00. "How you feel, Mom?" I said, "I'm fine." "I don't like it when I heard your voice. Are you all right? Are you..." 11:00 at night.

**INT:** She's worried about you.

**ESTHER:** Worried about me.

**INT:** Yeah. That's nice.

**ESTHER:** You see? Why she's worrying? Because she likes my son, she likes me. Because I never make any...arguments. I don't want to...to start arguments. I said to my son, "She don't know how to do it. I'm going to teach you to cook. Help her. Your father helped me." He helped me to diaper the kids, to bathe the kids.

**INT:** Yeah?

**ESTHER:** I didn't know in the beginning. He show me. "Then do it for your wife, too." I told this to my son. What mother-in-law does it? Me. Like she didn't know how to cook. I said, "Sammy, you saw how I'm doing the chicken. Wash it up, then you put salt and pepper and garlic. Put it to make ready, and cook it, and sit down and eat together."

**INT:** That's good. You teach him to help a little bit around the house, too.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And on Sunday I said, "Do the wash for her. She's going to like you better. You know, it's going to be more love together." She's working, he's working. I said, "Your father used to peel the potatoes till I come home. I used to work."

**INT:** That's nice.

**ESTHER:** Then I told him, we take a business, and I was working in the business. Then, and it was kosher, everything.

**INT:** Well, let's get back to when you met your husband. Could you tell me his name, and a little bit about his background, and where he came from?

**ESTHER:** I didn't know in the beginning. We know each other eight days, and we became engaged like in eight days.

**INT:** Oh, my goodness. In eight days?

**ESTHER:** In eight days. We just [Yiddish] In eight days, we [Yiddish]. And five weeks, we...because I got the period, you know?

**INT:** You got married.

**ESTHER:** Five weeks the wedding.

**INT:** Wow. That was fast.

**ESTHER:** I didn't got a white dress. I went over to a neighbor, and I said..."Lend me a dress to get married." And her father was like a general. He came back from Germany. He bring so many dresses. Then I grabbed like a dress, flowered dress, you know? Like all the flowers. I put it on. Was a good bride, too!

**INT:** So that's how you did it, huh?

**ESTHER:** That's it.

**INT:** But can you tell me about his background, what was his name, and where was he from?

**ESTHER:** Oh, background. I never know him before. Just, we met. And you can, when you speak to him, everybody will see he's an intelligent person.

**INT:** Where was he born?

**ESTHER:** In Poland. He was born 1912, March the fifteenth.

**INT:** Any brothers or sisters, do you know?



**ESTHER:** All got killed.

**INT:** But how many brothers and sisters did he have, just for the record?

**ESTHER:** He got like six. They all got, the Germans killed the whole family. His parents. The father they kill right away. He took out from his shul two Torahs, two scrolls. And in one scroll they gave him by the head, and he die right away. He was sixty year old, his father.

**INT:** His father was a rabbi?

**ESTHER:** His father was a rabbi, yeah.

**INT:** What was the name of the town?

**ESTHER:** Solochow.

**INT:** Solochow. In Poland.

**ESTHER:** In Poland, yeah.

**INT:** Six brothers and sisters.

**ESTHER:** Oh, he got four sisters.

**INT:** Four sisters. Was he the oldest, the youngest, do you know?

**ESTHER:** Oh, he was almost the youngest, yeah.

**INT:** So what happened to him during the war, do you know?

**ESTHER:** He was, in 1937 he was in the Polish army. 1937, I was still going in the fifth grade, and he was already in the Polish army. He was 21 already.

**INT:** How did he get into the Polish army? Why did he do that?

**ESTHER:** Not he got in.

**INT:** Was he drafted?

**ESTHER:** That's the way it's supposed to. They came like here, you're 21, they take the draft, and...

**INT:** Oh, okay.

**ESTHER:** And it's supposed to be two years.

**INT:** Yeah. And the war came.

**ESTHER:** And the war came. And they wrote him a letter, "We cannot go back home, because we're in war." And that's it.

**INT:** So he stayed in the army.

**ESTHER:** He stayed in the army. And then he was an officer. Then he's a good swimmer. And he swim and helped the officer, the Polish officer, with his horse, and they swim with him together, and save both them life. When he was in Treblinka, he came and said, in Polish [Polish] "You're still alive? You, tomorrow, will no Jew, one Jew will not be on the earth. They going to kill **everybody**. Then here, look on left. I throw you 300 zlotys. Change for a lady. Buy a wig."

**INT:** Who was telling him this? The same guy that he saved?

**ESTHER:** The Polish officer who, he save **him**.

**INT:** Oh. And he wound up in Treblinka? How did he get to Treblinka? What happened?

**ESTHER:** He was working. Making crematorium.

**INT:** No, no, no, but how did he **get** to Treblinka? How did they arrest him and put him in Treblinka?

**ESTHER:** Not they arrest him.

**INT:** He was in the army. No? What happened?

**ESTHER:** They took all the Polish, the Jewish officers, and they start killing them.

**INT:** Oh, okay.

**ESTHER:** Nu, when they shot him down, everybody's on the floor, like on the ground. And then they going around and shooting this way. They want to shoot everybody. This was 2,000 Polish Jewish officers.

**INT:** What year was this? And where was it, do you know, where it happened?

**ESTHER:** This was, I was not there.

**INT:** I know, but did he tell you?

**ESTHER:** This...the war started 1939, this was 1939.

**INT:** 1939. So he was with all the officers when they were shooting them?

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** So what happened to him? He got shot, or he..

**ESTHER:** He got shot in the finger, and maybe in the leg. And then he saw a light, they going right away there, they shall put a bandage or something. The lady give him a glass of milk with a piece of bread. And her husband was the SS.

**INT:** But where was this happening? In Poland?

**ESTHER:** In Poland. Germany took it over, I just said. Germany took it over.

**INT:** So they were being shot in the woods or something?

**ESTHER:** Yes, yes.

**INT:** And he was alive.

**ESTHER:** He was alive.

**INT:** And saw a light, and he went to the house?

**ESTHER:** Three people was alive, from 2,000.

**INT:** Oh, my gosh. And he was one of three people?

**ESTHER:** He was one of three people, yeah.

**INT:** And they all went to this house?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Then one name he told me, he's from Lodz. And his name is...he told me...I just keep forgetting, too. Every time I go to Israel, I forget his name. I can't remember this second. Yeah. And he said, to me, "Wherever you gonna be in Israel, look that man [up] and tell him, give him a message, you're my wife." Something like this.

**INT:** He was one of the soldiers that survived with him.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** So the lady took care of him in the house?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** She gave him milk and bread.

**ESTHER:** Her husband, she gave him, he just give one sip, and the SS man is a German. With a gun. He want to shoot him. Then he said, he spoke good German, you know? He's very bright. He said, he shot him three times again. And he said, how G-d wants him to live. "G-d wants you to live longer." He said this in German, you know? And my husband told him he can do electric, he can do anything. "Let me work." That's why he was alive. No, he run away. When he give him the 300 zlotys.

**INT:** Wait, now wait. So then he wound up in Treblinka after this time? And he was working there. How long was he in Treblinka, do you know?

**ESTHER:** I don't know. I don't know.

**INT:** And he saw the Polish officer.

**ESTHER:** Oh, maybe till...the Polish officer came and tell him, "Run away."

**INT:** Pretend you're a woman.

**ESTHER:** "Because tomorrow gonna be nobody, nobody gonna be alive." The same is with my brother-in-law, he lives in Israel. His family all got killed in Warshawer ghetto. And my brother-in-law was six year old, and the father was a tailor. Then...he was from talleisim, he done blouses, you know, like something on the head. He make everything. And one day he went, he was crying, and he said, "I'm hungry, and I want to go with you." When he come back, there was no more, everything was burning. Was a fire. The Warshawer ghetto became on fire. Everybody died.

**INT:** So how did **he** survive, the little one?

**ESTHER:** He was with the father to buy, the father took him along, he was crying, I just said. He was crying. He don't want, he's hungry, he want to go to eat a piece of bread.

**INT:** So he missed the whole...

**ESTHER:** That's why he's alive. He's now the second-hand to Moshe Dayan. He's a (?). They're learning there. After the war, he was like sixteen or twelve year old. You know?

**INT:** Yeah, real young. Sure.

**ESTHER:** No, he was sixteen already and went into the army. And there, they told him, he wants to be in the army, he said. He wants to make a profession. He helps build missiles wherever they need it. He's very bright.

**INT:** But your husband, he...the Polish, when he was in Treblinka, so the Polish officer that **he** had saved earlier, in the water, told him, "Take this money."

**ESTHER:** "And look on left, and leave everything and run away. Run away. Don't see nobody. Don't see me, too." He didn't talk like I talk to you. He just look like this and talk [looked away, down on the ground]

**INT:** Yeah, so nobody will see him talking to him.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And he ran away. Where did he go, do you know?

**ESTHER:** He run away. He go back to the Russian side. No, the Germans didn't check him. Didn't catch him. No, he came on the Russian border. They check him right away, and they put him...to Lvov. To Lvov. You know, like they have bragidkes (sp?). This they call, like in a jail, you know? And there, they send him away to (?) to labor camp. And there, he was there like a year, and the Wanda Wasilewska, or Anderson Army, they say, "Who wants to fight for Poland?" And he was still there with Polish officer, they see he is a officer. They said, "Yeah, you are an officer. Come, come."

**INT:** He went back into the Polish army.

**ESTHER:** The Polish army.

**INT:** I see. That's how he survived the war.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, that's...

**INT:** And then he got wounded again, and wound up in the hospital, and that's how you met.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And that's the way we met. After he came out from the hospital.

**INT:** Do you know how his brothers and sisters were killed? Do you know how that happened?

**ESTHER:** The Germans killed them all. Yeah, killed them all.

**INT:** Because very few people survived Treblinka. That's...very rare.

**ESTHER:** That's what I was telling you. That's the officer saved.

**INT:** They would have killed everybody.

**ESTHER:** Sure, they was killing everybody.

**INT:** Did your husband talk to you a lot about these experiences over the years, or...

**ESTHER:** He used to talk to my son a lot. And we came here, the little boy was not four year old. And you know, we came in December the 29th, 1950. It's two days before the New Year's. This means, we just '43 and we came. Not '45. You understand, not '44, because two days is a whole year. Then the Italian people always shoot with guns something, making noises. Then he said, I spoke to the children in German. They said, "Daddy, Daddy, the Germans are here! They're coming here to us."

**INT:** Oh, boy.

**ESTHER:** That little boy. Yeah. I never forget. When my girlfriend, they bought a television. And I took the children there to watch television. I could not afford it to buy a television. And one time was playing "Hopalong Cassidy." You was too young to remember this.

**INT:** Yeah, I know "Hopalong Cassidy."

**ESTHER:** And with the guns. Then he came over and said, "Daddy, Daddy, they're going to shoot Tarushka's husband! Come, we're going to save them." A kid, four year old.

**INT:** So your husband was telling him stories when he was that little?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah. Because...he got a lot to talk about.

**INT:** Yeah. Did he talk to you a lot about it?

**ESTHER:** No. We got same thing. I didn't got a chance to talk.

**INT:** Were you able to talk to him?

**ESTHER:** Oh, we was talking all the time. Like we always sit down by the table and talk together, what we gonna do. And I told him I like the children. I gonna work hard. I gonna help you.

**INT:** No, but I mean about the war. Were you able to talk about the war, or he was...

**ESTHER:** Oh, he always talk about the war.

**INT:** He did. He talked about it with you?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yeah.

**INT:** What about you talking about it with him? Did you ever...

**ESTHER:** I never mention I was in Stansiya Yaya. I never say.

**INT:** Right. How about the other part, the rest of it? Did you ever talk to him about Siberia?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, he know I was in Siberia, yeah.

**INT:** Was there anyone that you could talk to about all that? Girlfriends...

**ESTHER:** As a matter of fact, my children got married, and any time I opened my mouth, and I want to say what I went through, and the American-born Jews, they're the meanest people.

**INT:** Yeah, you had said that. They don't...

**ESTHER:** I told you. And right away they shut me off. Then I never talk to them. A couple years, two years ago was her birthday. 82 birthday.

**INT:** Whose birthday?

**ESTHER:** My machetanestah. Yeah. Her husband, she's a month older from her husband. No, you have to have luck. And she said..."Esther, don't talk about it."

**INT:** Still.

**ESTHER:** And now, she's a librarian. She's intelligent. She has two master's degree. And I give her one time an answer. And I said, "That's what they learn you in college? To be rude?" You know, the Americans, you have education, you have nothing. I told her. I told her. I said, "You have education, your education's worth nothing. I have no education. No, I have knowledge. I have more in my head what you have all the education you went to college."

**INT:** These are the parents of your daughter-in-law?

**ESTHER:** Yes, yes.

**INT:** You don't get along with them too well.

**ESTHER:** No, it's not to go along. I'm explaining to you.

**INT:** They don't want to hear it. They don't want to hear it.

**ESTHER:** No, never. **Never.**

**INT:** They're American-born?

**ESTHER:** American-born. As a matter of fact, they're jealous on us. How come she met my son and he bring her into the house, and my husband love me so much. Whatever I say, it's

done. I said, the house we bought, we saw. We didn't got money. We lend by the neighbor \$200 just to put the deposit. And later we took out \$2,000 to give another deposit. You know, he lend it. The question is, we worked together. I didn't spend money for makeup. I just, I'm telling you what we done.

**INT:** You worked hard.

**ESTHER:** Just worked hard to save the children for college. We both, the two children went to college. My husband was alive when my son finished the four-year college. And he went for more four years. And then two more years my husband was alive, and then he died two years before he became an optometry doctor. I got him through. My husband never lived to that. He was sick. What I want to say, and my son...helped my daughter-in-law to go in college. He pay for her. They're born there, and they never pay for the daughter for college, for anything.

**INT:** But your son did it.

**ESTHER:** I guess he loves her. He's six year older from her.

**INT:** So you're very different. You're very different.

**ESTHER:** Of course. Very different people. They are so stingy. If she comes to my house, I always used to invite her for dinner. No, lately, after my open heart surgery, my daughter said, "Stop the music. Because they're not considerate for you, never. Then play cool." My daughter. She's right. She's educated girl.

**INT:** I think we're going to stop here.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, sure.

(Pause)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with Esther Awruch. It's June 12th, 1995.

Mrs. Awruch, the last time we were talking we got to the end of the war, and you were talking about how you met your husband, and you told me a little bit about his background, and what his experiences were in the war, that you knew of. And I'm wondering if you could tell me now, what were your reasons for marrying him? What attracted you to him, and why do you think you married him?

**ESTHER:** That's a very fine question. The time from the war, they said there's no Jewish men left, you see? And in 1939, I was like thirteen and a half, I was not so...a rabbi's son came over and give my hand, and he saw me. He was a nephew of my mother's sister.

**INT:** Right. You had told me about him. He wanted to marry you.



**ESTHER:** And he saw me, and he came, and give me, that's the Jewish tradition, the Hasidic, he give my mother a kiss in the hand, and for me, he give a kiss here. He said, "When I come back from Norway, and I'm going to be a rabbi, we're going to get married." He shook the hand and go away, I never saw him **again!** And I don't want to go out with nobody. My mother will not allow me, even I was thinking.

Finally when I was seventeen year old, and my mother went, she sold something, a ring or something, and she bought me a pair of shoes. She said, "Just be nice. Go listen to music." Because I was working, in Siberia I was working there in a factory for the Russians. They didn't pay me money. They didn't give me anything. They just claimed, "This belongs to the country, it's a war," I have to help them. But they didn't help **me**, they just give me the house, where to live. Four Polish people was living in the same room. We was living in the kitchen, and they was living in the other room. That's all. That's the way it was built. There was no toilet, you have to go outside.

**INT:** Was this after the war, or...right after the war in Siberia?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. This is still...oh, I was married after the war. This is after the war. No, they don't let us out. You cannot go out. We went out 1946.

**INT:** Okay. But you told me about meeting your husband in the hospital.

**ESTHER:** That's where I **met** him! That's where I, oh, he came out of the hospital, he came, he said, "Where is a Jewish..."

**INT:** Kehillah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And I didn't talk to him. My girlfriend's father talked to him. He said, "Come to my house, my wife make a good soup, or a piece of bread, and we're going to talk like this." And when he walked by, he saw me staying, with my girlfriend, and this, with her father talking with him, he noticed **me**.

**INT:** Was this Sarah's father, by any chance?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no.

**INT:** Oh, it was somebody else.

**ESTHER:** Not Sarah's father. He never was nowhere. Just sitting with the wife in the home. And helping her with the children. She always, I told you. Even in the war she got children. Okay? Let her rest in peace. And she died like that. She was pregnant. I never asked her. I know, I came to her house. Even the sister got pregnant, got married and got pregnant. And she got a baby. The sister, Ettel.

**INT:** Ettel, in Siberia. She got married, yeah.

**ESTHER:** She got married. He was a nice boy. I don't see anything wrong with him. No, they keep their boy like this, a clam, you know? They didn't give him freedom. Right away, they got married. Where they put them? In the same room, and the same thing, I didn't understand how people living. This is Hasidic?

**INT:** Because they were all living together in one room.

**ESTHER:** Not in my book. All right? Okay? What am I going to say?

**INT:** So her mother died because she was pregnant?

**ESTHER:** Don't say it. She was so **young!** She was like 43 or something. Of course! If you're having babies every time. I remember when I was pregnant, and the doctor said, after I got the two kids, I done mistakes too. Oh, let me talk for me, not from somebody.

**INT:** Okay. But let me ask you. So you had told me before about how you met your husband and everything.

**ESTHER:** My husband, I met him.

**INT:** But why did you marry him?

**ESTHER:** I'm explaining to you. He just said he's a rabbi's son. And I'm supposed to marry like a rabbi. My father always in my mind clicked in. You're not allowed, from dor, dor, dor, it's always from rabbinical you come. You're not allowed to marry like a shoemaker or something like this. You have to marry...my father told me. He's not Hasidic. He was a fine, good-hearted man, my father. No beard, he was just...nice modern. Got a good heart. And he was modern. Very much modern, because they took him, his father was wearing a beard. You see? Not his brothers. You see, he was just like Mizrachi, you know?

**INT:** But he wanted you to marry a rabbi's son.

**ESTHER:** Always.

**INT:** Yeah. And your mother did, too.

**ESTHER:** He was not there at the wedding.

**INT:** I know, he was in Tashkent.

**ESTHER:** I sent him away to save his life. They put him in jail for nothing. You see? They put him in jail, he was six days, four days or six days, and they didn't close even the door. They make special he can walk out if he want to. But they didn't told him. And when the dream came to my mother, the grandfather, who I was always giving food, and when I was sick twice with

malaria, he cry, he said, "I want to die. Let her live." And he was praying and crying, he wants I shall get better. Because this child save our life. I was going at night. I came, worked the whole day, and I came at night, I was not afraid from **nothing**. No light, it was dark. You walk in the woods in darkness. Today, you give me a million dollars, I won't walk in the woods in darkness. Over there, I walked, and I just grabbed like a kettle, and I said, "Give me bread, potatoes, and milk." And that's all I bring home, and my mother got right away to make everybody food.

**INT:** Right. So how old were you when you met your husband after the war?

**ESTHER:** I was not quite twenty.

**INT:** Not quite twenty.

**ESTHER:** No, because...

**INT:** And he was twelve years older.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I don't know. I saw he was older, and he said, he left a family in the home, no, he thinks the Germans killed everybody.

**INT:** His wife? Was he married before?

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** Oh, he was. He was married before.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Did he have children?

**ESTHER:** A little girl. He just told me, he got a family at home, I hope they're alive. He didn't tell me exactly the thing, you see? And I'm the kind, I don't like to fight. I didn't understand. I thought everything is like, he just told me, "Did you ever slept," before we got married.

**INT:** Did he know for sure, did he know for sure that his wife and child had been killed?

**ESTHER:** Yes. He got a letter from the cousin. After...he was in 1946, he came out from the...from the hospital. He was three months in the hospital, and they never took, make operation to took out all the splint from the bullets. All the bullets was left. And they make him here in the United States seven and a half hour was the operation.

**INT:** To take it out?

**ESTHER:** To take out, to cut up. They make so many stitches, they cut them out, and he could not walk. He was three months laying in bed. Both legs, yeah. Of course. And...

**INT:** So his wife, so he had heard that his wife and child were killed?

**ESTHER:** He got a letter from the cousin. The cousin, they live in New York now. No, that time, they got news. They kill everybody, nobody's left. No, when they start to taking to work, she was holding the baby on the hand. The baby was three and a half year old. See? And when they killed her. The baby was wearing like, I read the letter. He didn't show me the letter. I find the letter before Rosh Hashanah. I'm looking for a siddur to prepare to go daven.

**INT:** Just recently?

**ESTHER:** Not **now**. I'm talking from **then**. After I got the babies already. Then I find it out. He got a little girl.

**INT:** You didn't know before then.

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** But he told you, you said...

**ESTHER:** He got a family.

**INT:** But he didn't say anything about it. I see.

**ESTHER:** Not at all. He got a family, and I didn't ask him what kind of family.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** I assume if I remind him he will cry, because everybody he lost. He lost his whole family.

**INT:** So you didn't want to ask him.

**ESTHER:** I don't want to hurt his feelings...I was, you see, a kind person. I know I'm hurt, and when I was fourteen, even the war started, when we was running like...like...like rats, you know? Running around to hiding places. And we went, and I saw my cousin laying, and I thought he's dead, and I pick him up and he was shaking. And I took his head on my hand, and he die on those hands. And he was looking, open the eyes. Look on me, close the eyes and die. See? And then the Germans came, and saw me holding the hand, he die on my hand, he took out the bayonet from his, he cut him. And he took this out, because we're going to bury him with the knife, you know? He took it out, and he slapped me with the other side. See this (shows scar on side of face) I never even apply they shall give me back money what they done it. Because at that time, my mother, nobody, my cousin saw. She lives in Hadera. You know, all the Hasidim, my cousins, they're wearing **wigs**.

**INT:** Yeah, yeah, you told me.

**ESTHER:** They're all Hasidic people. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

**INT:** So you didn't want to ask your husband about his family, because you didn't want to hurt him.

**ESTHER:** No, I didn't want to hurt his feeling. I understood they got killed.

**INT:** Could you explain what his personality was like? What was he like?

**ESTHER:** Wonderful person. He was so smart, very smart.

**INT:** What was his name?

**ESTHER:** Gedalia.

**INT:** Gedalia.

**ESTHER:** Gedalia. He was so smart. After all, I'm telling you, his whole Torah was in his head. He was so very smart, when the Germans shoot him, and when he was an officer, he was a Polish officer. And when they shoot the 2,000 Polish officers, he was there on the bottom with two others. And one man went out, he was, the other was, he heard something coming out from the grave. There was just three people left from 2,000. He was, my husband, and at that time was not my husband. He was young. This was like, and it was (?). He said, Abram (?). He told me, he always said, after the war he's going to go to Israel. And this was the war time, you know? He got enough this, he's going to go to Israel. He want to be a chalutzah, or something like this. And maybe he went after the war to Israel. No, a lot of...after, from the kah-tzet, yeah, he went in, and the German lady, she give him a glass of milk, like with a piece of bread or something, and he took the first bite, two SS men came in, that's what he told me, and he said to him, "Come to the (?). We have to kill you." And he said, "I'm so young. I can do electrician. I know my whole Bible by heart, and everything what's in the Bible, everybody learns from the Bible," he said to the Germans. He was not afraid. If they kill him, they kill him. What he gonna...he said, "I can build houses, I can do anything you ask me." And they let him.

**INT:** So he was smart. He talked his way into...

**ESTHER:** He talked his way out. And he was there for two and a half years in Treblinka.

**INT:** Yeah. Two and a half years he was there?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. The German...he saved the Polish officer before, when Germans came in, they run all the battalions going to the Wisla (Vistula River), through the Wisla near Warsaw, they was drunk, everybody didn't know how to swim with the horses, and they die. And he saved his horse, the...

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** His life. Then, then they went through, and the Polish officer, it's no more Poland, you see, then right away the Germans grab him and they took him to the...they was in a ghetto, he was Lublin ghetto, and there he saw mothers with kids crying, hungry, nobody give them nothing. Then he got like a soldier, they give, he was in Polish uniform. They got like a piece of bread they give him. He throw his piece of bread to the ladies to give the children. And he was smacked, maybe for that. I don't know. He didn't told me. He said, "I went through a lot." That's all.

**INT:** Did he tell you about Treblinka, the time in Treblinka at all? Did he tell you anything?

**ESTHER:** Yes. He was building the crematorium! He was building. That's what he said. He was not inside, he was just building and working. And then the Polish officer said to him, "If you..." Oh, because when he took a bath, they recognize he's a Jew. And he said he's not a Jewish man. And he was like, he speaked a very well Ukrainian. That's why a year and a half he was hiding, and nobody know.

**INT:** As a Ukrainian, I see.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, Ukrainian. And then when they noticed, they want to kill him, he said it again. "Don't kill me. I can do anything you wanted." He said the second time for this. "I gonna do everything." And then the Polish officer heard everybody gonna be, it's two years already passed by. Two and a half. And he said, "Tomorrow there will be no more Jews left on this earth." They got a map like they're going to do everybody, to kill. And...the only thing he did, he said, "Look." In Polish he said. "Look on left, I throw you 300 zlotys." The money. "And buy a wig and change for a lady, and go out." He went through the two German posts, you know, like checking? And they didn't recognize him.

**INT:** That he's a man.

**ESTHER:** He's a man. See? He was, he got nice young man, he got a nice face. Yeah, when I met him he was nice, very good-looking. Yeah.

**INT:** So he survived, how do you think he survived?

**ESTHER:** What he survived. (laughs) I'm explaining to you.

**INT:** He was smart.

**ESTHER:** That's right. If you have to live, G-d gives you vision. Then he was going by to the Russian border, near Lvov. And they catch him. They said, "You're a shpiyon." Why?

**INT:** What's a shpiyon? What's that?

**ESTHER:** A shpiyon is a Polish word. This is like...

**INT:** Spy?

**ESTHER:** You're a spy. You're a spy. When he went to the army in 1937, he was 21 year old, his father give him small tefillin. And he shall keep it for a...you know, he shall keep this like a...like a (?). Is a Jewish word, (?). And like here. And nobody even noticed this, you see? He was all the years, he was taking showers, he didn't took it off, never. The father told him.

**INT:** He hid it on top of his leg somewhere.

**ESTHER:** In one leg, yeah, and he was hiding this there, and nobody saw nothing. No, when the Russians saw, they caught on. And they said, "You're a shpiyon." Then they want to shoot him. And he speaks Ukrainian **wonderful**. Because his city is near...

**INT:** In the Ukraine?

**ESTHER:** Ukrainian living. Yes. In Poland, a lot of...living there. They was helping the Polish people to kill, the Germans to kill the Jews.

**INT:** The Ukrainians weren't too good.

**ESTHER:** Of course. Then he spoke good, and they let him live, and they send him to Siberia, no, it's a different part of Siberia. This is...where they cut stones. This is ...oy...Ural.

**INT:** Oh, the Ural Mountains?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no, Ural Mountains, yeah. And there is stones. Cutting stones.

**INT:** Stone quarry, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And he worked there a half a year.

**INT:** Oh, boy.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And then came, this was three years, 1943. And then comes in from England, Wanda Wasilewska, and Anderson army, and they come over and they said, oh, and they saw, "You're a Polish officer!" Because he was still wearing the uniform. He was washing it out and put it on.

**INT:** Yeah, he didn't have any clothes, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And he was still like this, then he said, "You want to come to the army? You're going to be free. We're going to free you right away." He said, "Of course."

**INT:** They didn't know he was a Jew. He was still hiding.

**ESTHER:** Oh, **yeah!** He told...

**INT:** Oh. The army knew?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He told them, "I'm Jewish." It was, I told you, it was 2,000 Jewish officers in the Polish army. Because the educated people they took. And that's how it was. They let him go to the Polish army, and he was like an officer again. He speaks Russian, he speaks many languages. And what I want to say, when they came, they was fighting, they put him right to fighting. And he was fighting, and then almost before the war [was over], he got again, he was in like, they put him in the hospital to Siberia. They bring him there.

**INT:** He was wounded?

**ESTHER:** He was wounded. He was wounded in stomach. He got something in his stomach, and they operated there. And they didn't look for the legs. They just operate on this, because he got like wounded here.

**INT:** In his stomach, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. In his stomach. Wounded here, and he was alive. And three months be there, he came out. He saw me staying there, and he recognize me.

**INT:** Now what year was that? Like 1945 already?

**ESTHER:** '44. I'm talking '44.

**INT:** '44 of the war, still.

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. '46. I want to say '46.

**INT:** Okay. The war was over.

**ESTHER:** The war was over, yeah.

**INT:** Okay. So that's how you met him. Wow, he went through a lot.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And it was like bashert. Before anybody wants to talk to me, to go out with me, and he have to come to the house, and my mother have to open up the siddur and ask him if he is...



**INT:** Yeah. If he can read it, and if he's...

**ESTHER:** No, no, if he know the Jewish tradition. And my mother used to give him a siddur. And some, they daven just like a little. She was not too happy. No, when my husband open, that time it was not my husband, it was just... We open up the...the sefer, my mother got this, and he open, he said, "Show me a sefer, I'm going to do it." And he start saying, you know, the Jewish prayers.

**INT:** She was convinced.

**ESTHER:** She said, "Oh." She went over to him, and she said, "You're going to be my son." She never called him "son-in-law." "My son."

**INT:** So how did you feel about this?

**ESTHER:** It was nice, talking to him. He was a very friendly person. I didn't want to marry him right in the beginning. Because I felt I am too young, and my father was not here. I told him. "My father I sent away to Tashkent, and I loved my father so much. Then I want he shall be for the wedding, and if you want to see me, good, you can live some place, and see, we're going to go out. And when we go home, the father is going to be back, then we're going to get married." I told him. No, he said to my mother, he's a rabbi's son, and "I'm not allowed to sleep under one roof with you all together. I'm also Hasidic," he said. "I'm not allowed. Then the only thing, let's talk about marriage." He got nothing, and I got nothing. See? Comes out better from somebody have something. If you're, know the expression, "Nothing from people, from...is better nothing from..." No, not like this the expression comes. It's better...something from G-d. Like from people. You see? A little bit from G-d...

**INT:** Is better than...

**ESTHER:** Is better from a lot from people. But the people give you and don't have bought things, you see? And nothing from G-d is better from something from people.

**INT:** So how was your marriage? How was it?

**ESTHER:** We never got any arguments. Not anything. Just, I was confused when he told me the secret. "I got a letter, they kill my wife and the kid." And I was like, and we're supposed to go to sign up, we got married just for a, the man was a shochet, and he give us the marriage, you know, like a chuppah. Okay. He wrote the kesubah and everything. Do you know, and then the Russian people, they're honest, too. If I didn't have the marriage, like the (?) like when I was born, I was looking with no lipstick, I look like sixteen year old. See? I didn't wear high heels, I didn't got nothing. Then...when I come over with him, we was married three weeks already. Probably I was three weeks pregnant already, maybe. And...I went to the mikveh. And...and he said to me, "You know, I got a letter. And she wrote me I shall get married. Because I, my whole family is wiped up. Nobody is alive." That's all. He told me the secret, and my mother was very bright, and she overheard that. She was a little upset why he didn't say it loud she shall

hear it. See? And I say to him, "Well, you're here, we're married. It's nothing to talk about it." See? I didn't want to discuss this. No, finally, it was difficult. He got a little girl. And when I told him, "I wish I have a little girl," just like that. I thought it will take the place from the other girl. I meant well. I didn't mean anything to hurt him. He act like he was hurt. Went over on the side, and I saw he cry. I was just like that, I said, "Oh, oh, now I got a ruined life. Because he will always think of the girl." No, when I was pregnant, I was passing out, like you know, I got no food, and I always feel like vomiting.

**INT:** You got pregnant right away?

**ESTHER:** Right away pregnant, yeah. Yes, you see? Yeah, I went to the mikveh, come back.

**INT:** You were in Siberia when you got married.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. There was a lady built a, it's a big story. A lady built, she was very rich, she left the kids in hiding places, and she pay off money some people. Some people have luck. Oh, and a Polish boy, he fall in love with her. She left him by her, by his parents. And he was holding her off like he saved her. He want to marry her. See? I'm an honest person, she shall let them get married. She invite him to Israel, and she went to buy a dress with her, a wedding gown. Okay. He, to the Polish guy, he was there a couple days there, and she bought him, she said to him, my mother told me, "Let us buy you stuff, you will go home to Poland. You will have for your parents to bring some good presents." A Polish guy, didn't understood. He listened. The next day, she bought him a ticket, and she said, "Go home." The daughter was maybe still asleep. She didn't tell her. She give him \$10,000 he shall not write to her.

**INT:** She paid him off.

**ESTHER:** She pay him off. And this was a crime. See, I write it, and this is a true story. I don't remember her name. My mother used to say her name, I couldn't remember, so many years. And this girl suicide herself.

**INT:** Oh, no.

**ESTHER:** And when he heard, he came back for her, like we slept in there, in my house all the time. He said, "Why, what do you want?" "She's my wife. I save her." And you know, my mother said she did wrong. She suicide. She find a suicide...note. "He hold me, he give me food, and he saved my life." Even how she send him away, "because I love him." He was a young man. He was not an old man.

**INT:** Because he wasn't Jewish.

**ESTHER:** Because he was not Jewish. Why she didn't ask him he shall convert? Maybe he will convert, maybe something like this. She didn't ask him. That's my mother told me.

**INT:** That's a terrible story.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, and I know the people yet. The lady built, she was so rich, she built the money, she built everything. When she will find the daughter or the son alive. And the daughter was alive, he save her! Why you doing this? Even my mother said, my mother was a Hasidic lady. And she said she done an averah. Because he save her life. Even G-d will say, Moses took a galusah daughter, because he supposed to save his life. This was the way you save your life. We're all G-d's children. We believe in G-d. They're G-d's children, too. G-d don't want you shall hurt them. See? And she was a young girl. She was like 22 year old, because she was a little baby when she left her.

**INT:** That's so sad. That's a sad story.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, my mother told me that. Here, let me finish with my husband. You want to ask me. I was in the middle.

**INT:** You got pregnant right away.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And your father couldn't come to the wedding.

**ESTHER:** Oh, no. My mother give him, send him the 300 ruble, you know, he shall buy himself food to eat. We always send him. I worked, my mother worked.

**INT:** When did your father come back to the family?

**ESTHER:** To...to Poland. When they send out all the people back. The Russians did not a mistake. I wish they saved more Jews. All the Jews left from Russia, they're alive. Families, too. Not all families. Some die, like my two grandfathers died there, from hunger.

**INT:** But the only whole families that survived really were in Russia.

**ESTHER:** The younger people survive, yeah. Who was working, survived.

**INT:** So tell me the chronology how it happened. So after the war you married your husband in '46. It was about 1946. When did you...

**ESTHER:** Oh, I got married December, listen. December the 26th, 19...it was like '45, yeah, four days before the war. 1945.

**INT:** 1945.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I met him in five weeks, you see, right way he asked my mother, he wanted to marry me, and when I got my period, they count up five weeks, you know, that's it.

**INT:** Yeah. What about, when did you see your father again? What year was that?

**ESTHER:** Oh, 1946. In Sczezin. We came to Sczezin the same with Sarah, the whole family, we came. No, everybody came there, you...everybody goes in a different room. You didn't have to go in one school like in Siberia.

**INT:** So everyone, you went with Sarah's family to Sczezin.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. The whole thing went together.

**INT:** I see. Can I ask you just a question, just a little side question? I'm wondering, how was Sarah after the war? How was she doing?

**ESTHER:** Her mother **die**, I'm telling you! We came to Sczezin, she was sitting shiva, and I find out the next day. They just came like two days before, was a storm, and Sczezin was a big city, and the Americans make the city, bombed it so much, because the Germans, you know? They was hiding there. And...the whole thing was like shaking. You go into a building, everybody go into a house, you go into a house, and half the house is broken, half a house, you're still...

**INT:** From the bombs, yeah.

**ESTHER:** From the bombs, you're still living. You know, that was. And we remember, I was pregnant like three months pregnant, and no. Sczezin? No, I was, yeah, I was three months pregnant. Do you know? The Russian soldiers, they're very nice people. They're nice. Sometimes they're nicer like the Americans. You know, they didn't kill nobody, you know? They will not do it. Not like the Germans kill. And...I was pregnant, and I was carrying the blouses to sell, what I was sewing. Somebody gave me to sell. Like I'm going to make a mark, a ruble on the mark, and buy a piece of bread. I just got married, I was pregnant. And I was...it was slippery, and I slipped, and I fell. Three soldiers went by. They saw me, they saw me falling, they went to pick me up, and to hold me by hand, and they give me a napkin to wipe up my face, and just helped me go out from the...street, you know, and they let me go, you know, like. And when they opened up my pocketbook, I'd be in jail. I got three blouses, somebody gave me. I didn't pay it, I didn't got money.

**INT:** So they were nice to you.

**ESTHER:** That's what I'm trying to tell you. This is everything from G-d. Because they could open up my pocketbook and look what I got there.

**INT:** So you see this as like a miracle.

**ESTHER:** Everything. To me, the whole **life** was a miracle. I went 2:00 at night with Sarah, with Sarah's sister, not her mother. And we used to pick up, what's left on the field, potatoes, and they was frozen. And we bring home, she bring home. My mother make a cholent from this.

Her mother do something, too. Or she...you know, she cooked it maybe. I don't know. There was nowhere to cook even. You have to go outside and put it on the thing to cook on fire. It's wintertime. We lived through a lot.

I sign up, maybe they're going to give me hardship fund; maybe, they're going to give me. And then my two children are born in Germany, because you know? Lager Poking Waldstadt. I came there, I was already, I was in (?) I was seven months pregnant.

**INT:** Wait a minute. So you came from Siberia with your husband and your whole family to Sczezin?

**ESTHER:** Not together.

**INT:** Not together.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah, we came together. No, they left in that camp, and my husband took me to Gleibitz.

**INT:** Gleibitz? In Germany?

**ESTHER:** This was Poland.

**INT:** Poland.

**ESTHER:** Poland. Back to the city Poland.

**INT:** Why? Why did you go back there?

**ESTHER:** Because he want to see his cousins. He didn't see them for the war.

**INT:** That was his hometown or something?

**ESTHER:** No, not his hometown, his cousins. Yeah. And his cousin, they told him, they got two sefer Torahs. They saved from the synagogue. And they will give it, they came to Gleibitz, they give right away one synagogue they put there. And then they're going to go to Israel. Everybody was planning to go to Israel.

**INT:** Yeah. Nobody wanted to stay in Poland.

**ESTHER:** No! 6:00, they are giving on the radio you're not allowed to walk 6:00, because the Polish people, they're so anti-Semite. You're 6:00, a woman to a man, they will kill you anyhow, wherever you, even in the bus, in the tramway. They didn't got buses, they got tramways. If you go in the tramway...

**INT:** Is that like a trolley or something?

**ESTHER:** A trolley, yeah. They're going in tramway, if you're going, and they recognize you're Jewish, they stab you right away.

**INT:** Really.

**ESTHER:** And they're not afraid somebody will see they're doing this.

**INT:** How did you feel about going back to Poland with him that time?

**ESTHER:** Oh, we're going back home. That's how we felt. We're going back home. We didn't know.

**INT:** You wanted to go.

**ESTHER:** Everybody want to go back home. If you die, you want to die in your home. It was no more home. The place where I was, you cannot see it.

**INT:** Did you go back to your hometown?

**ESTHER:** No! You can't. Oh, two people went back, they killed them. It was two officers. That's, we got a letter in 1944 from my cousin.

**INT:** Oh, you told me.

**ESTHER:** He wrote, I told you the letter. Everybody was killed, and two soldiers, officers, he was also an officer. And he said, they went back to see in the houses, there was killed near their houses. That's why he was afraid. He said he will not go. The Polish people said, "Don't go. Somebody going to kill you."

**INT:** But did you know that before you went to Poland with your husband? Did you know the Poles were killing Jews after the war?

**ESTHER:** Yes! Yes. We know. The cousins told in a letter. We will not go to see the houses. We will not go. We didn't go to Poland. We went to the German side, where the American...

**INT:** Gleibitz was in...

**ESTHER:** No. It was everything, Gleibitz was...Poland. Everything under American.

**INT:** Oh, okay. All right.

**ESTHER:** See? Under the American rules.

**INT:** Okay. So it was safe there.

**ESTHER:** There you have a Jewish, right away they open up a Jewish place where you come in, you sit down and eat, they give you food. And if you want to belong to a...I was there, and if you want, if you want to live in a decent place, you go in a kibbutz. And I was pregnant, and I was by my cousins when we came. At that time, I was just the beginning. I was like, I held the baby, I was four months pregnant. Four and a half maybe, I felt the baby's movement, and my husband said to me, "We will go see my..." He went before to see the cousins. He met them. And they gave him some money. I don't know how much they give him. Then he shall have carfare to take me to Gleibitz, pay for the tickets. Yeah, and we went there, and I was tired, you're driving so many hours, I fell asleep. And his cousin said, he's dead, let him rest in peace, he said to my husband, "Oh, she's pregnant?" My husband says, "Yes, four months. She's feeling the baby." And he said, "Take her out from the bed! My daughter's twelve year old, and she have measles. If she has measles, then the baby can..." You see? The Jewish people are smart. They know, the religious, special, they know, the Bible said probably. Maybe they learn it from the Bible. That's where they know it. He said, "Oh, the baby will get, it will be born blind." He said, see, my husband got so scared, he took me out to the cousin, to another cousin, and we was there, and they were so stingy people, so mean. Then the uncle said, my husband's cousin, husband, yeah, she was the cousin. He was also a cousin, the husband. He said, "You go to the Jewish, they have a Jewish thing." I forgot how you say in English. Like a Board of Education in Jewish, you know? Everything. You go in, they give you a room, they give you something to dress, you know, to wear something. They help you out. Jewish Family Service. It's all over the world like this. And we came over, and they said, "We just have left the...(?). They Jewish, not they're not Hasidic, they're not...you know. And my husband said, "Who I care what I am now? I'm the war. She's pregnant. At least she's going to have a room where to sleep by myself."

**INT:** Oh, gedanya means not religious Jews?

**ESTHER:** What, gedanya?

**INT:** What is the word you just used, galdanya? What does that mean?

**ESTHER:** No. What you say?

**INT:** Yeah, you said all they had left was...galdanya.

**ESTHER:** Oh, galdanya! Not gardanya. Galdanya. This is like a Mizrachi. The name from the organization. Like in Israel have 24 organizations, do you know that? 24 parties they have. Why they need 24? They're crazy!

**INT:** Because they're Jews, probably. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Right. Everybody want to oversmart you. I want to be smarter from you. Even you're educated. That's the way it goes.

**INT:** So your husband wasn't going to be particular, and he said, "I don't care. I just want a house to stay in."

**ESTHER:** He daven anyhow. What do you mean a house? You don't have a house.

**INT:** Well, whatever. A place to stay.

**ESTHER:** You just...you just come in, you eat together, and some people, like he was a shomer. He was an officer. He know how to hold the gun. He was still wearing the uniform, and they can see he's an officer. They give him right away he shall protect, staying outside, don't let in nobody to our building. You have to watch the building. Four people was watching.

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Because the Germans still there. You didn't know, they're dressed like Polish people. You don't know. There can be a German killer, or Ukrainian. They can kill you, too. Because Gdansk, you see, it's a Polish city. And there was all the anti-Semites, right from the beginning.

**INT:** Is that where you were, in Gdansk?

**ESTHER:** No. I was not born in Gdansk.

**INT:** No, no, I know. But...

**ESTHER:** No, the Gdansk people, they came to every city, and they doing...they doing killing, and every city, when they see the Jews, they recognize their faces.

**INT:** So this was very common, killing Jews after the war.

**ESTHER:** Oh yeah! This is Gleibitz, and this was the Polish people from Gdansk.

**INT:** Can I ask you something? Do you know anything about...

**ESTHER:** I can vouch for this. I was there when they was killing.

**INT:** Can I ask you something, do you know of any Jews who took revenge on Poles after the war? Did you ever hear about Jews who...

**ESTHER:** Oh, they never got a **chance**! If they're going, like you're taking, you're going to a little...a little town, it's like...like, how you say in Polish?

**INT:** Shtetl?



**ESTHER:** A small, yeah. Like something...like you go to Bensalem. It's not a big city, it's a little thing.

**INT:** Yeah, a little town.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And they look on your face and see Jewish, and you want to go, you're carrying a pair of shoes you bought old shoes in the market. You bought shoes by somebody. And you want to sell it to bring home bread, chicken, milk for the wife. I know a girlfriend. They kill her husband. She was pregnant two months with a baby. And then she was...the husband never came home. They killed him.

**INT:** But you don't know of Jews taking revenge on Germans or Poles after the war?

**ESTHER:** They didn't got a chance. I'm explaining. The Jews never take revenge. The Jewish people, the kindest people. They want to just like they took...shoes or boots or something, to change for bread, for milk, for something. Like I done this in Russia. And that's the way they kill them. They pull them into the house, and take away his possession, and they killed him.

**INT:** So how long did you stay in that place in Poland?

**ESTHER:** There? In Sczezyn I was like three weeks, because my husband went to see the cousin. And then I was in Gleibitz, I was like six weeks.

**INT:** Okay.

**ESTHER:** And then they say that a lot went to Israel. There was no Israel then.

**INT:** Right, Palestine.

**ESTHER:** "Palestine." The England was giving ammunition for the Arabs, and the Jews, they have to buy their own ammunition from the Czechoslovak. You know that. I'm talking, let the whole world know what they done. And the Czechoslovak was under the Russians. This mean the Russians helped the Jews, not...anybody else. Even not America didn't help Jews. **Nobody** helped the Jews! The Russians the first helped the Jews. That's why I'm still saying: All the Russian Jews should come to safety. They should not be killed anymore. It's still now dangerous to living there. Because many, the Russians, they became born anti-Semites. Because maybe the grandfather was from the Ukrainian...

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE)

**INT:** Where did you go after that?

**ESTHER:** We gonna go to (?), to go to, on the border, to the German border, to go to the camps with the Americans. We went to the Americans. And this was better.

**INT:** DP camp?

**ESTHER:** DP camp.

**INT:** What was the name of it, do you remember?

**ESTHER:** Yes. I remember all the camps. We was three years in Lager Waldstadt Poking. My two children was born there. My two children.

**INT:** What was it like there?

**ESTHER:** You know, they was...they put the Jewish people to work. To come, you come over, they give you a pound beef, you know, meat, for a week, and they give you bread every day, and you go into a kitchen to buy food. Not to buy, you didn't have to pay money. They give you something to eat. And I was pregnant. And whatever...I vomit. I was sick all the time.

**INT:** You were nauseous all the time.

**ESTHER:** All the time. I was hungry. I was passing out. I remember I was seven months pregnant, and comes an oblakover (?), he was from Czechoslovakia, he's Jewish. And he said, "Who wants to earn an extra roll?" You know, like an Italian roll? I call it Italian roll, but it's German bread. And I said, "Me." I was pregnant, and I was so small pregnant, he didn't recognize I'm pregnant. And I was peeling thirty pounds potatoes alone. And there was sitting another lady, my cousin, my husband's cousin. They was sitting with two girls, they were like twelve year old, thirteen, and they was all three making the thirty pounds. I was faster from them. They saw I still got time, the man. He was a Polish Jew. And she was a Hungarian Jew. The Hungarian Jews, they was not very polite people to our Jewish people. I wonder why. We same people from G-d. Now you wonder why the Germans hate us? Our own Jewish people do this. It's a lot of talking. If you want to talk more, I gonna close the thing. I don't want them to hear. [pause] I don't want they shall know about this.

**INT:** Yeah, I understand. Okay. So you were working in this Poking, in the DP camp.

**ESTHER:** Oh, wait a minute. I was cutting the potatoes. Nobody paid me nothing. No, the man told me he's going to give me another extra bread, and I told him, yeah, and a container soup. I bring home this, and my husband was looking like, you know, he will eat it. No, he told me, "Give me an extra," and I bring home two. See? I deserved one, and he gave me another one. Then the next day I was working a couple, six weeks or something, every day. No, one time I was very mad on his wife. She was two months pregnant. I don't know it. And he said, you can...she saw how I worked. And she was watching me, how fast, I'm always doing fast. Even this country, I went to a shop. Selling a shoe factory. And people was working the shoes, and they was doing like this, and by me it was just done like this. My father show me once, and

I done it, and I was sewing. I was sewing this on the side (of the shoes) and I was making holes here.

**INT:** The holes for the shoes.

**ESTHER:** And I was making the holes so fast, and I still remember how I did it. The Daddy showed me. 1940. He said, "You're fourteen. I have no boys, and you have to help me." You see? Like I sewed the (?) on the boots, on the soldiers from the Russian people. They was at war with Finlandia. And they came in. They bring like a bottle oil for the...all the Jewish...my father used to take him home Friday for supper to us. That's a tradition, Polish people, they're still doing, you know? And my father used to bring home two soldiers, one soldier.

**INT:** Yeah, you told me.

**ESTHER:** And each one used to say, "We're going tomorrow. Monday we're going Finlandia. G-d knows if we're going to be alive." And one time, I remember, it was before Pesach, he bring us two bottles oil. Then my mother give one for her sister, you know? Whatever they give us, we share. We always...my uncle was with us, my mother's brother. And he was 33 when...that's why my mother was mad on his wife. His wife was my cousin. Was my mother's sister's daughter. My mother said, "I don't want he shall marry your daughter, because we're poor." And my mother answered her. "You're poor? Let her learn a trade, to go to school, to do something." My mother didn't got a chance, because she had eleven children to wash and feed. She used to clean the house, and even the priest send, comes in the principal, you remember? He called me granddaughter. I asked him why he called...because he's coming to my mother's house. He was a teacher from my mother, and he taught my mother to learn German. He teach her Polish. He teach her... Oh! She was so bright. She know the whole davening by heart. She came to Israel with my father, she was a mashgiach.

**INT:** Okay, let's get back to after the war. I wanted to know if you could tell me just where you went after that. You stayed in the DP camp.

**ESTHER:** Oh, wait a minute. We stayed there three years.

**INT:** Three years. And you had your children there, in that camp.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, the both children. 1948, my daughter was born, and Israel established.

**INT:** What's her name, your daughter?

**ESTHER:** Frances, Faiga Bayla is Frances Halpern.

**INT:** Who did you name her for? Do you know?

**ESTHER:** Oh. For my husband's mother. And my grandfather. No, wait a minute. Wait a minute. Frances Bayla. Yeah, my grandfather. The rabbi.

**INT:** Okay. And she was born in 1948.

**ESTHER:** '48. February the 25th. And my son was born in 1946, September the 10th.

**INT:** Okay. He was born first. You had your son first.

**ESTHER:** Sure. I told you.

**INT:** And who did you name him after?

**ESTHER:** His father.

**INT:** Oh, okay, your husband's father.

**ESTHER:** His father is Shmuel Itzak. That was my son is Shmuel Itzak.

**INT:** So how did you feel being a mother? What was that like? Having, how was the birth, and...

**ESTHER:** Do you believe me, when I got the first baby, this is, I want everything on the records. Yeah, when I got the first baby, I didn't got nothing to eat, and I saw people eating. I go to the toilet and lay down, shall not smell the food.

**INT:** Oh. You were so sick.

**ESTHER:** I was so hungry. And I saw people eating, and my husband just schlepped the food, they give him a little soup. And I don't know. He was, didn't know. I don't understand him, you know, like...

**INT:** He didn't realize you were hungry?

**ESTHER:** No...I'm telling you. I don't know. I know one thing. No, I was mad, when we have to be in the camps, and we have to sleep like one, two, three beds.

**INT:** On top of each other?

**ESTHER:** Where you have to put me? Wo (?) you was thinking with **your** head?

**INT:** On the bottom, probably, because you were pregnant.

**ESTHER:** Right? Let her rest, his cousin, let her rest in peace. She told my husband she shall put me on the third. She was on the bottom.

**INT:** But you were pregnant.

**ESTHER:** Yes. They don't care.

**INT:** Oh, boy.

**ESTHER:** And one cousin, she's in Australia, her husband die a half a year, like three year later after my husband. He was 66. Not three year. He died when he was 66. My husband die, he was 61. Like five year later. They was still cousins, because the mothers, it was a lot of sisters, you know. What I want to tell you. His wife was two months pregnant. And she said to...you know, to the people, like in one room we're all there. And she said, "Oh, everybody, the old people, oh, she's the youngest." On me. And I was...you can't see I'm pregnant, because I was very skinny. I got nothing to eat. And I smell on the bed the food. Where she cut bread and a cucumber. Was no butter, was nothing. She bought a cucumber. And she give for her kids. If she was, we was all together, why she didn't have a heart to say, "Come down, Esther, we'll give you a slice of bread and this." And one man, the wife, he left the kids on the...by the goyim, you know, by the Catholic people, and they was saved. The two boys were saved. In church, the nuns saved him. Then somebody went to, he remember where, he went over and pay like \$2,000 the priest, and they give him back the kids.

**INT:** So in the DP camp, you didn't have a room to yourself, with your husband?

**ESTHER:** No! This was not DP camp. This was just to come in to the DP camp. Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** Oh, but once you were in the DP camp, you were just alone with your husband.

**ESTHER:** I was in my room, yes. They put the cousin, they put the cousin, I slept one time in her room, when...the other kids got the measles, then she want...they give us one room, like four people, three people, and I got the baby, and she with the carriage, and she sleep me here. No, she, let her rest in peace. I don't know if she's alive or not. She went and she...want to sleep, live together, and my husband would say nothing. No, my mother came, she was mad. She said, to him, "I give you a daughter, a (?) daughter. What have you done from her? She got a baby, yes. No, she should sleep with her in one bedroom? I heard the neighbor said, she's telling me, "Your daughter don't give her coffee? Why she didn't make coffee give for your daughter?"

**INT:** Oh, so your mother was angry.

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** So why was it, your husband wasn't...

**ESTHER:** He was too kind. He was too kind. He thought he owed it, he owed them. He owed them because they give him a couple zlotys there. He owed them. Then my...she got, she was rich, she had money, and she said to my husband, "Come with me, I gonna sell something, a pair of boots, and we will buy bread." She went half the way and she changed her mind, because she

will have to give my husband half. That's the way the people are. No, because of this, I never take revenge, nothing. Neither my husband or me.

**INT:** You never take what?

**ESTHER:** Revenge of anybody. What I did, when I was, we come in this country, he wants to go to...first we have to, they ask us where we want to go.

**INT:** Now wait. You stayed in that DP camp for three years, and then you went to America, you went to Israel first?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no, no. I never was that time in Israel. I got the two kids, and I was...then we went to another camp. Three camps I was in Germany. Lager Poking Waldstadt three years, nine months, seven months in Eidenheim, it's a German city, Eidenheim. This was comfortable. I live in one room, and I got an oven where to cook. You know, it was beautiful. Clean, I clean it up. And I got plenty food, we buy. You know, you can go to buy. Eidenheim's a big city, I used to walk. And then we went to...Lechtweld. It's a big Lager, a Jewish camp. This was a lot of Jews was living there. And my husband was, I told you, he was the chief of the fire rangers, because he saved in Poking a lot of people. Was a fire. The Hasidim, they're crazy, they're stupid. They shall read the Bible like supposed to read, not (?).

**INT:** So what happened in Poking?

**ESTHER:** When you dance, fell down a candle, how you're Hasidic, it's written -- I read, too -- it's written when it's a fire you have to...

**INT:** Even on Shabbas.

**ESTHER:** On Shabbas you have to take away the fire not to burn, nobody shall get hurt.

**INT:** Right.

**ESTHER:** And the whole Lager start to be on fire. And my husband came, I was pregnant with my daughter, I was at that time seven months pregnant, or six months, and my husband said, "Don't look there." Because I prepare supper, we're going to sit and eat supper. My husband said, "Look, there's a fire. You're not supposed to look, because you grab yourself in face, the baby's going to have a red spot on the face. Don't look there. Go in the house, sit down and eat. I cannot eat, I have to run." Then he told me, "I come later to eat. And feed the baby." I fed the baby, you know, the little boy. I put him to bed, I bathe him, and I ate, and he didn't eat, my husband. He run back. And he call out all the, he was ringing, like you ring a church, you know, it's not a church. You ring the police. You got nothing, you got no telephones, and he ringed the thing to come, and all the fire engines, the police to come, and they shall help him with the...to put out the fire. And that's...

**INT:** He got a job doing that in another camp, you were saying?

**ESTHER:** He was doing, oh, right away. They give him in Lechtweld. The record was going. Even here, I bring here the papers, and they took away in German, I thought they were going to give me some money. They didn't. She said no. I said, "You have to write them a letter." I give her all the papers, I have nothing.

**INT:** So that's what your husband was doing after the war? That was his job? He was a...

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He got no job. He got no training. No, he learn a lot. Like he helped, he went to work. No, we came in **this** country, oh, you want, is this finished?

**INT:** I just want to know, so you were in those three different camps.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** And from Lechtweld you went to America?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay. Right after the war, in those three or four years that you were in DP camps, were either you or your husband depressed, or how were you dealing with what you had just gone through? I mean, you just came out of a war, you came out of Siberia, he came out of all the horrible places he came out of, and you immediately got married, you immediately had children. How did you deal with all the things that you had lived through?

**ESTHER:** It was difficult, yeah. It was difficult.

**INT:** So how did you deal with it?

**ESTHER:** I never forget. It was very, it's very bad. The cousins was done injustice to us, too. Like he used to get a package, it's worth 2,000 marks. Then he used to give the cousins, and I told her. I said, "Your husband," because she married my husband's cousin. Three packages he took. He never give us back. Each package is 2,000 marks. Never give us a penny back.

**INT:** No, but I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about how did you...cope emotionally?

**ESTHER:** That's what I'm trying to tell you, that's emotional. If you're hungry, you're emotional, right? Then when I told the German doctor, when I went to check me, he said, "You cannot lose the baby." I want to lose the daughter. I was six weeks pregnant, and I was so...I fell down, I passed out, because I don't know why. And the German doctor just, see how nice? Because I'm...from Himmel. You see, G-d want me to have the children. Then he didn't touch me inside to check if I'm pregnant. He touched the breast.

**INT:** Oh, and he could tell from that.

**ESTHER:** He said, "You cannot...you're pregnant. You're under circumstances." It's in German. He said, "You're pregnant!" In German, you speak in another language.

**INT:** You didn't know you were pregnant, but you were getting dizzy?

**ESTHER:** I ask my mother. In a letter. She was living 7000 miles from me, so far. The camp Ulm. Poking, it's so far from one end Germany to the other Germany. No, he was, the American was there, too. And what I want to tell you, he said, "You got to eat a little more." And I said, "Ich hab nichts to..." I have nothing else to eat! He said, "Oh, no. The Americans there, and they deliver, they make the Germans deliver bread, potatoes, and you're living in that building, where everything is there. Tell your husband to tell the men, the German men. The German men have to give it out." Because this is from the German government, you know? They give out. And every time he went, he bring me a lot of carrots, because I shall drink carrot juice, and I shall give my son carrot juice, my husband carrot juice and my son carrot juice.

**INT:** To build up your...

**ESTHER:** Yes. We all was weak. The strength. And as a matter of fact, I should do it three times a day. I didn't think about it. I just make once a day. He told me once a day, I make it once. If he will tell me three times a day, I will not have now osteoporosis, and all the other stuff like I got, you see? An open heart surgery. Why? Because my body's always weak. You know, I worked so hard **everywhere**, even when I was pregnant, I told you what I did. Okay? And here...I always a fast worker.

**INT:** But did you think about, in those years after the war, did you think back?

**ESTHER:** No, I got a good husband. And we was just thinking, "G-d will help you." That's all. We will never think, I don't have a ring. He never bought me like a ring. We got married, we took by my cousin the ring. Her husband die, and I want to tell him, "Don't take the ring. It's not mazeldik. Her husband died." No, I cannot tell him, because he didn't ask me, he took from her. You see? He couldn't take the ring from my mother. My mother lived with my husband like fifty years. Was on my daughter's wedding, and my sister told me, I didn't know it. Because if my mother still have the ring. Maybe she sold it for a piece of bread. You see what I mean? And that's the way we, we sold everything.

**INT:** So you think you and your husband go through those years...

**ESTHER:** We never got arguments. We never fight, we never nothing. No, he was worried he lost the other family. Always in his mind.

**INT:** He used to think about them a lot?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. I know.

**INT:** Did he talk to you about that?



**ESTHER:** No. He never talked to **me**, no. Never talked to **anybody**. Never talked to anybody. As a matter of fact...

**INT:** About the war, or just about his family?

**ESTHER:** Excuse me?

**INT:** Did he ever talk to you about the war, or it was just about his family he didn't talk?

**ESTHER:** Oh, he talked, yeah. About the family he didn't talk. He talked, just for the parents. Never told...he said he married the girl, she was eighteen, she was in college, in Poland, this mean Gymnasium. She was in Gymnasium. And he met her, and she was from a Hasidic home. Her father got like a bar. He came there with a Polish officer. Gave him a drink in a glass of beer.

**INT:** He met her.

**ESTHER:** He met her, and they fall, they started talking, that's all. And you see how Hasidic, they got, the father with the mother came right away, they got married, because they saw each other. That was too nonsense, in Europe.

**INT:** How did you feel about that, the fact that he had a family before the war?

**ESTHER:** I never will marry a guy like this. It was...it happened, it happened.

**INT:** It happened, and you didn't really know until after you got married.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's it. I never told anybody, except my, you know, my mother know and I know.

**INT:** Yeah, but it must have been hard for you to know that...

**ESTHER:** Yeah, that's it.

**INT:** Do you think he was thinking about them a lot?

**ESTHER:** Oh, I don't know. I don't want to know, even. I know he went, when I was, my daughter was six weeks old, he have to go... he went to a German city, Stuttgart, to...put another exam, you know, because he's an officer, and he have to put another exam. He was learned, he was doing pretty good. I have pictures, sometime I show you. He was staying with the telephone, you know? And his office there. Then...he came home after six weeks, or three months, something like this. I was by myself, it was very hard. I didn't go nowhere. No, the cousin, let her rest in peace, she want to find out what I'm doing. And there was no doors, like you cannot lock the door. It was like, you know, it was a camp. She just pushed the door and

she went in. And I sit on the side here, and I hold my son here, and with a bottle in my hand, and my daughter, well, she was a couple months old, six weeks when he left, and I give her the breast. The breast I give her. And I was singing, "Hava Nagila," all the Hebrew songs. And she said, "I hear your singing, the whole thing, we hear your voice. I want to hear to who you're singing." She thought I got company. That's it. She said.

**INT:** Yeah, you had company. You had your two kids. (laughs)

**ESTHER:** Company! In the hand. You know? It's almost, I got tears in the eyes. It mean like she want to accuse me if I have a boyfriend or something.

**INT:** It's outrageous, yeah.

**ESTHER:** That's right. The way she came in, you know? I never forget.

**INT:** So that she could interrupt whatever was going on.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. The way she come in.

**INT:** Doesn't knock.

**ESTHER:** Doesn't knock, and she just opened the door, and she came in like this with both hands. The doors was like, doors like open up and close back. And she pushed in the doors like she's here. It's a good thing I didn't sit closer, she could **kill** me, because I was sitting like this, in the back. And this was not nice. Okay? And I never take revenge. No. I didn't make nothing. No, sometime it hurts. It hurts.

I remember, and my husband want to buy me something, like a ring or something, I didn't got nothing. He's going out, and he said, "Esther, I don't have money to buy you a ring." I said, "It's okay. We're married already. We have two children. What do I need a ring? Someday you'll buy me a diamond ring." I just make like an expression. And you know what? Because my mother sold her bracelet, and she told me, "I sold my bracelet, and give your husband the money, and let him buy a suit to the wedding," to my wedding. I remember this. Do you see how much my mother loves me?

**INT:** Yeah. It was very generous.

**ESTHER:** You see? And she said, "I want **you** shall give the money." Because this mean like...you know. I said, "No, Mother. You give him the money. It'd be nicer. This way he will think I beg for you." This way she give her generosity.

**INT:** It comes from her.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. She give it to you, and that's the way it was. He always said, "She's my mother, too." See?

**INT:** So they were close, your mother and your husband.

**ESTHER:** Oh, yeah. Every time I write a letter, he said, "Do you put money for them?" Because my father was still alive. "Do you put money? Don't write a letter without money." And a check, and always from the beginning I used to send packages for Passover.

**INT:** Because your parents went to live in Israel.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. 1948. They make everybody go to Israel. I want to go, too. No, they don't want to let me, because the first time I was pregnant with the other, with the first baby. And then the other time, that was established, the war, I got already the second baby. My daughter was born four months.

**INT:** After the state was declared.

**ESTHER:** After it was declared Israel the country. And she was four months old.

**INT:** So they told you not to come? Your family told you not to come?

**ESTHER:** Oh, they told me, in the beginning they said, they wrote a letter. "You better go to Uncle Sam." In Jewish they wrote a letter. "Because here it's so hard. It's nothing to buy." You have a lot of dollars, you buy money. It was liras. It was the English liras floating around.

**INT:** It was a hard life in Israel.

**ESTHER:** At one time when I read the letter, I cry. Each time I cry. And my husband was so, he liked me so much, then he said, "Why are you crying again?" And I said, "She told me that the two sisters, one is sixteen, and now she's going to be eighteen. They're going to both get married. One's eighteen, the other's going to be nineteen. And they're going to get married. And the mother begged me I shall send her at least some money, she shall rent a room like this." Then right away the neighbor, we told the neighbor, his sister, she die already. She goes to Israel, and we give her right away twenty dollar. He bring home 37 dollars. We live on that, and he took twenty dollar, and he said, "Esther, go buy a money order or give them the twenty dollars." I give them the whole twenty dollars. The following week, somebody else went to Israel, the niece. He said, "Give the other twenty dollar. This way they're going to have for a dress." And my mother wrote me a letter. "For one twenty dollar we rent a room for the wedding, and the second twenty dollar, we rent shoes and a dress for the wedding." Then two sisters got married in one day. Because I came to Israel 1961, and they married like 1953.

**INT:** Did your husband want to go to Israel to live, also?

**ESTHER:** I always want to go to Israel. And he said, "When I gonna be 62, we're going to go to Israel, and we're going to...buy a nice home." Because I said, "How about I'm going to buy a home, and we come, we're going to have ready." He said, "No. I know somebody lives in a

home, later they leave a mess, then we will have to lose money, the property." That's what he told me, and I should have never listened. Then I will buy that time, to put in a down payment, \$5,000, I wrote him a letter. I said, "I have a checkbook. Shall I write \$5,000? Do we have in the bank? Check the bank." He said, "Yes, I don't want you to buy anything now." This was 1961. And we just, you know, 1957 we went into the business. We just, poor, we're not rich. And this way we will save up money.

**INT:** Right. But after the war, he didn't want to go to Israel as much as you did?

**ESTHER:** No, he said after, no, no, no. Oh, after the war.

**INT:** After the war. Right after the war, did he want to go?

**ESTHER:** No, it was not Israel there.

**INT:** No, no, but I mean, instead of going to America, he didn't want to go to Israel instead of America?

**ESTHER:** Oh, he want to go to Argentina instead of to America. And I was praying candles, and I said to G-d, praying to G-d, to the candles, that way to Argentina shall be vanished.

**INT:** (laughs) You didn't want to go there.

**ESTHER:** I will tell you why. And I got a good reason. G-d will not punish me for that. Maybe I was punished, he die. I don't know. I used to cry. Because I read a letter. His brother wrote a letter to him. Or he was jealous, because he got married 1937, and my husband went into the army in 1937. His brother was the oldest. My husband was the youngest. He was, with a couple sisters with kids. And he wrote in a letter, "If you come to Argentina," he send me one time to America five dollars. That's it I saw. Then he wrote a letter. "I'm peddling," like, he's working. "And it's a very hard life. And if you want to come, I still live in one room." He said he have two children. "It will be too much, we will not be in one room. If you want to live with me in one room, then you have to come by yourself." How you read the letter?

**INT:** Why doesn't he, why would he even want?

**ESTHER:** Excuse me. That's what he wrote the letter. When I read the letter, I read a good Jewish. Nobody one can cheat me. (interviewer laughs) I can write Jewish.

**INT:** You could read what he wrote.

**ESTHER:** I can make a book in Jewish.

(END TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SEVEN, SIDE TWO)

**INT:** He was telling him to leave you and the kids home and come and find a job.

**ESTHER:** You see? That's right. Then I said to my husband, "You know what? If you want to go to your brother, you can go. I'll let you free." Just like that. "Where you gonna go," I said, "You're never going to see me. You go to your brother. Or me. You have two ways."

**INT:** What did he say?

**ESTHER:** I said, I will not, oh, finally, I went out with a cry, and I said, "I just bentsched licht, and I cry that Argentina never my foot would be stepping to Argentina." "Why?" "Because your brother want you, not me."

**INT:** Mm-hm. Yeah, why should you want to go there?

**ESTHER:** I said, "I don't want to even see him." And my husband look on me, he said, "You know, you're smarter from me. He want, he's jealous, he want to break me up with you." I said, "Well, if you ask your cousins, they will tell you, too, to go there to New York."

**INT:** Yeah, they weren't too nice to you, either.

**ESTHER:** No. And I said, "Listen, your cousins is good, like to essen Shabbas kugel." That's the Jewish tradition. That's all I want to see, to eat a cake, and kugel and wine. To be in a simchas. Just to meet on simchas. I told him. I was honest. I never was backwards. Never telling under his back. Just in the face. And I said, "And I came to build a home with you. We have children, and we have to raise them. I work with you." I was doing everything, cutting pork chops, everything. Even I got those fingers, I was working. He was working, I worked fourteen hours in the store, he worked sixteen hours.

**INT:** Yeah, it was a partnership.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. We was working. No, one thing he promised. I want to send our children to college. I never got high education because the war started. My father told me I have to marry a rabbi. And that's the war start. Then I was not that lucky. Then, thank G-d, I'm lucky, I met you. See? And that's, I said the truth. That's the way it was. And I want we shall teach our children to be, they shall meet just Jewish people. And we sat down by the table, and we told our children, "We come from a rabbinical backgrounds." I told them. Both. "You're not allowed to go to the library to meet an Irish guy, a Polish guy. No. You go to the cheder." We paid. I remember I paid fifty dollars at that time to sign up to be a member in the synagogue. Southwest Philadelphia. You know, we walked seventeen blocks to the synagogue? And the children walked with us. And we came home, the two days Rosh Hashanah, we got closed, and all the Italian people, like they was holding us for nice people, because I speak German, and I speak Ukrainian. My husband speaks beautiful. And Polish and German. And everybody came to us. Like one German said, the lady, "Ich hab nicht kenn ich nicht. Muss nicht kenn mir kaufen." I never know you before then I didn't have to come shopping to you. And I told her, "Haben Sie a

guten Tage." Have a good day. Like I told her, "You can go." I didn't throw her **out**, I just said, "Have a good day. Stay well, and you don't have to do shopping." You know, five weeks, she excuse herself, and she asked Polish people, the neighbors, they shall go with her and come in and apologize me?

**INT:** Good.

(Pause)

**INT:** This is a continuation of an interview with Esther Awruch. It's July 13th, 1995.

Mrs. Awruch, I'd like to talk today, I'd like to try and finish up today, and I'd like to talk about your life here in America with your husband. And raising your children. Could you tell me a little bit about how you got started here in this country and how your husband found a job, and how was your married life together in the beginning?

**ESTHER:** Yes. We got married in '46. We just see each other like for five weeks. He comes, so many men wants to marry me. No, my mother always open up the sefer.

**INT:** Yeah, you told us that story.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. You got it here?

**INT:** Yeah, you told us the story.

**ESTHER:** Then I don't want to tell it, yeah. When he came, he's a Jewish man, he said, "I'm also a rabbi's son."

**INT:** That convinced your mother.

**ESTHER:** That's right. And she asked him right away what he got. He said, "That's all I'm wearing, the mundo. Still the Polish blouse, you know, from the war." And he was in Treblinka for two years. And he save a Polish officer.

**INT:** Right. You told us that.

**ESTHER:** Then the Polish officer remember that, when they're running away from the Germans. And he was there, like two years. And guess what? One day, he came over, the officer, you got it here?

**INT:** Yeah. He helped him escape.

**ESTHER:** Not he helped him escape. He just say in Polish, "I throw you money, 300 zlotys, and change for a lady, and run away, because tomorrow gonna be no one Jew left in the whole, this...you know, this section. And I was...look on left, and don't look on me, and I gonna tell you

what to do. Change for a lady, go buy a wig, go the end of the..." He know, he find out already. "Go the end, the city, and you find an old lady with a man, by the eighties or seventies, something like this." They was killed later, too, probably. And that's the way it was.

**INT:** What year did you come to this country?

**ESTHER:** In 1950.

**INT:** 1950.

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** You had both your children in Germany?

**ESTHER:** Both born in Germany. No, when I was pregnant, I didn't got nothing to eat, because he didn't got money, I didn't got money. And he asked, and then he asked me what he shall take something. He know religion. He didn't got anything else. And I told him, "You know what? You try something else. Religion, there are plenty of rabbis here in Philadelphia. What you gonna be, a shammass?" You understand, her husband [Sarah Klein's husband] was a shammass. It was good, too. Right.

Then meantime, a lady saw when I walk with the kids, we walk always together. See, because we love each other. I never saw he's older twelve years. I thought like he's my age. We felt wonderful, we care for each other. Too much. He cared for me and for the children. In the middle of the work, he used to come to see if the house is warm.

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** Yes. See? And this give you more love, you know? Because when he come from work, I got ready the meal on the table. My mother taught me this, you see? Always have everything on the table. The husband is hungry, he don't have to wait. Then when he used to come, I used to grab him and hug him and kiss him. Then we sit down and eat. First I put on the food, and when he ate, he just said, "Oh, it's delicious." Like my father used to say, "It's delicious."

**INT:** Mm-hm. It sounds like your father. It sounds a lot like your father.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. My father used to love my mother so much, and he fell in love with her. And that's the way it was.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Would you say you had a good marriage with your husband?

**ESTHER:** A wonderful marriage. It last not much, because he was young, and healthy. Oh. Then I was going to work, I told him, "Don't worry." When he came here, he got from the war, all of those shells from the war, and he was operated in Einstein Northern Division.

**INT:** In Philadelphia?

**ESTHER:** In Philadelphia.

**INT:** Did you come straight to Philadelphia?

**ESTHER:** Straight to Philadelphia. Yeah.

**INT:** Not to New York. You didn't live in New York for a little bit?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. Not in New York. We came to...like we ate breakfast in Washington. We came in Louisiana. There's a ship there.

**INT:** Baltimore?

**ESTHER:** No, no, no, no. We didn't come that way. It was south. We went to...see, it's so many years. We came to America, and there was tables. The Jewish people should go to this table, and they give you a Jewish start, and you write a note. And they ask you where you want to go.

**INT:** Did you come into New York?

**ESTHER:** No, no. In Louisiana...it's here a big city. Oh, not Texas. Louisiana.

**INT:** Oh, New Orleans.

**ESTHER:** New Orleans! See? Thank you, you remind me. New Orleans. And there we right away, the Jewish Service give right away like...\$27.00, we shall buy some food or something. And I remember the first thing I give the children, we ate. And then they give us two tickets to go to where we want to go.

**INT:** Where did you **want** to go?

**ESTHER:** I don't know America. We never was. Then my husband remember his uncle came to go into Philadelphia, and his mother used to write letters to him, to her brother. "Do you know that I'm here?" And as soon as we came, our cousin, call up, and we were still in the Jewish Family Service, in the Fourth and Jackson. When we came, I came over, and the lady, she's dead already. She's so mean. She said, "Oh, you have a beautiful wife." Just like that. And she's so white like a ghost. I didn't got nothing to eat. On the ship, I could not eat. I used to vomit. All the women was pregnant. They eat a lot. You see? Keine hora. And I was not pregnant, because I got two and a half year a girl, and the boy was a year and a half older from her. Not quite four years. Then I'm telling you one thing. When we came there, we came, I said to my husband, "We have to make some food. Tomorrow's Shabbas. This is now 3:00. It will be too late." And this is December, you see?



**INT:** Oh, you came in December.

**ESTHER:** In December the 29th. December the 29th. That's why I'm 43 years in this country. And the 29, is for two days, I don't count for a whole year for two days. The same thing, then I ask the lady came, my husband went over to the lady, let her rest in peace, and said, "How about I got lokshen with you? I just got finished cooking." My husband said, "A cup of tea give her first." Because I'm still nauseous from the travelling. We travelled 21 days.

**INT:** It took that long.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Why? Because it was a question. We didn't know where to go. He wants we shall go to Florida. Maybe if I go to Florida, he'd be still alive, because we will find a better job. Here, he had to go in the Jewish Family Service. We belong there, and they don't treat us nice. Very ugly.

**INT:** Really?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Maybe it was my fault. I was very...

**INT:** Was this in Philadelphia?

**ESTHER:** In Philadelphia I'm talking. We came to Philadelphia, they don't treat us nice. Was the man's name Essman. I hope, if he's alive, I will just spit in his face.

**INT:** Oh. What did he do?

**ESTHER:** Wait. He make me feel bad. He told my husband have to be operated, all of those shells are taken out, then that's why the legs was swollen all the time. I married, saw his legs swollen.

**INT:** Swollen up from the...

**ESTHER:** Every time was swollen the legs.

**INT:** Was it painful for him?

**ESTHER:** He...a man never tells the woman, "I'm in pain." You know? He felt maybe bad, and he cried maybe, I don't see it. What I want, because I wash the floor, I give the kids food, you know? It's a balaboste. No, one thing I want to tell you. When he was operated, the next day, after seven and a half hours, I forgot her name. She was an old maid, born in America. A Jewish lady. She shall never rest for that. I never forgive her. She call me up, "You will come home and take home your husband." Do you know, this was a mistake, because...

**INT:** He just had the operation.

**ESTHER:** Just got his operation. He was like six hours after the operation, and they told me, and I told her, I said, "You have a mistake." And I didn't speak English, I speak German. I said, "(German)" You understand German? And I said, "This is not richtig. I had a doctor, and he had a heart, you know, and he will, he must besuchen him, (German -- I'm not a doctor, what should I do?) And she said to me, "We don't want to talk to you. You don't pay money. The Jewish Family [Service] don't want to pay."

**INT:** Oh. So they're kicking him out of the hospital because...

**ESTHER:** The Jewish Family [Service] wouldn't pay. It was not her fault, too. But she will give a note, and she'll say, he have to stay at least five days. You see the difference. I bring him home. I used to receive \$27.00 a week. Yeah, a week? That's right. A week. \$27.00 a week. You know. Then here I call up and I told them, "My husband just came from the hospital. I cannot come over you shall give me the check. Or you send it over." Then he came to the house. We was already three months in the country. He didn't work yet. And he was, Dr. Roberts was there, and we didn't go there, because he takes \$4.00 for a visit. We went across the street, he take \$3.00 a visit. You understand? If you don't have the money, it's very hard. My husband go, and he check him up, and he saw the legs, he said, "Oy." He charge him \$5.00! Make him feel, Dr. Berkowitz. I still remember the name. Dr. Berkowitz. He was a ganif! No, what a ganif! What he done to him. You know what he prescribe him? Aspirin. Because he used to have a temperature. In those days was not those medicine, antibiotic like now. They give him the big aspirin, you know, the good strong aspirin, and he have to take them. Okay, he took the aspirin. And he came to visit him. He came, and he see the house like you. It's clean, because we didn't got rugs. We got...And it was not my house. I clean it up, you know, I used to wash every day the floor, because kids, they're little, two and half year old, she's playing on the floor, right? And the brother. They was both playing. Then once I ask him, just like that. And I said, "Can you do me a favor? Please." I ask in Jewish. And I said, "Five dollar more, I'll be able to, you know for three dollars you buy a chicken. Then I will have something more to give him." Not I give him a little polkele, and I have to give the kids the food, too. I got one chicken the whole week, with a pound and a half ground beef, and I mention the whole week making every day different meals. You understand?

**INT:** You were able to make it stretch.

**ESTHER:** I stretched this out. And I never even touch a piece of meat, because I don't want they shall see. I put on a little more potatoes on my dish. I put a gorgale, you know, a gorgale, and this was my meal. I said I like gorgales, and my cousin like. Do I like? I got a choice?

**INT:** What was the Jewish community like when you came? Were they accepting of you? Did they want to hear about the Holocaust, did they...

**ESTHER:** No! They didn't know it. They was like **goyim!** For Jewish people to be like goyim. They didn't got a heart for you. They cannot help you. In those days it's different. It's not like today. When the Russians come, they give them right away the City Hall give them

\$250.00 a month. They give them right away Northeast, they shall live like queens and princes. They came here, you have a Gan Eden. We came, I came to a place, to check, my husband look around to apartment, and I told him, I'm always dizzy. Because I was hungry. I didn't got enough food. What do I eat? A piece of herring? I used to buy a herring and make him like, with onions, you know? Staying any time, I have a lunch. Take a piece of bread, and eat the herring.

I went to buy bread. This must be on the book, people shall read it. I should do it right away many years ago. I was two cents short.

**INT:** You told me this story. You told me. And the lady wouldn't let you go for the two cents.

**ESTHER:** An Irish lady.

**INT:** Yeah. And the Irish lady was the **nice** lady, right?

**ESTHER:** Took out from her pocket. And I don't know what her name was. She said, "Here, I'll give you two cents for this lady."

**INT:** But it was the Jewish lady who wouldn't give you the money.

**ESTHER:** The Jewish lady was the boss. It's Solis's Bakery. See, I remember the name. Solis's bakery. And I bring her the two cents, then she went out with me, she didn't want to take it. And I said, "You have to take it." She put it back to my pocket, to my hand. The Irish lady. And she said, "It's a shame. Not enough Hitler killed so many Jews, and you're alive." See, that's why the Jewish people in this country. They was asking, "How you save yourself?" They want to know. We came, just what I'm telling you. "We came here 1918, and we, for a hundred dollars, we run out from Poland, we don't want to go in the army." See?

**INT:** But were they questioning you why did you survive?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. A lot of people.

**INT:** They want to know how.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They want to know how. No, when...

**INT:** Did they want to hear the tsuris, and...

**ESTHER:** No, no, no, no tsuris. They just right away, "How about a cup," they will say at least a cup of coffee, a meal, they never say it. You know?

No one time we came into the cousins. They make a nice meal. They give us a little, like a chair, like I have the chairs you sit down? My husband bring home the chair, and I sit down on the chair. I'm not so heavy. I never weigh more, today I weigh 110. Maybe that time I weigh

112. You see, when I was pregnant I weigh 127. After the baby I weigh 104. You understand. I was never heavy. No, the only thing, when I sit down, this fell down, the chair broke. Then you have to pay \$20.00 to take it out, because my husband's leg was hurting. You see? He cannot, you're not allowed. Even he was operated. No, he was not allowed to pick me up this. Bring in somebody, like a Shwartz, I don't remember. \$20.00 we have to pay. Now is left \$7.00 to eat.

**INT:** So the community wasn't very good to you.

**ESTHER:** When I ask him, "How about giving me five dollars?" Guess what he answered to me? "Your wife, when she goes on the Arch Street, Thirteenth and Arch," I remember, never going to forget till I die, "and she can make more money like ten men working. She will just pick up the skirt."

**INT:** That's what he said?

**ESTHER:** That's what he said. A Jewish man to said. Let him never rest in peace. All right?

**INT:** So you were not treated very well when you got here.

**ESTHER:** No. And my husband...

**INT:** What neighborhood...

**ESTHER:** Excuse me. My husband was, we was just three months, when my husband said to him, "Zei gezunt. Go home." And he start to cry and I cry. It hurts us, right? And I never went to the Jewish Family Service. When I was writing, they shall, the Germans want to send me, you know like a letter, and I went to the...in town, to the...how you saw the Jewish Family Service, and I went in town, and she went look at my name, she said, "You just have one thing. You never went to ask for help. How you do it?" And I said, I told her, I said, "I went to work, when my daughter was four year old. Four and a half. I went to work to a shoe factory, and before this, I worked, too." I worked three and a half years there. I make 79 cents an hour.

**INT:** What kind of neighborhood did you move into when you moved here?

**ESTHER:** In Strawberry Mansion?

**INT:** Oh, Strawberry Mansion, you lived there? That's a Jewish neighborhood.

**ESTHER:** A Jewish neighborhood, it was wonderful.

**INT:** A lot of people from the war.

**ESTHER:** And we used to walk with my husband and the children, every day, we're like, you know, like this. And one lady saw, and she asked me, "How you make a living? You look so

clean. The children, your husband wears a clean shirt and everything." And I was ashamed to tell her, and I tell her, "At night, when everybody's asleep, I wash out all the clothes, I hang them in the basement, and in the morning, 6:00, I wake up, and I iron this." And...

**INT:** So one shirt.

**ESTHER:** Then my husband have a clean shirt and clean pants, always, in those days it was with a stripe, you know like this. Then he looks like a doctor, he went out, you know? I make sure he will be with a nice...

**INT:** But you didn't have money. You didn't have the money to buy clothes.

**ESTHER:** One dress. I was washing, I told you. All the clothes, the panties, everything I hang up in the basement, nobody shall see me, because this apartment, you know, I don't want people shall see my trouble. One time I have to work. And my husband brought me the children. They make me work Saturday. And I said, "I can't." He said, "You'll lose the job." Then I asked my husband, and he said, "Well, we don't have money to live." And my husband was not working all the time, because his legs. Then I...came over, and he said, "You know what the ladies talking? They said, 'You have a wonderful wife. She dress herself like a princess. How many dresses she has? The same dress you see her every day. How many those dresses she has?'"

And the kids wearing, I always polishing the shoes. For my husband. When everybody's asleep, I done everything like a balaboste. And believe me they said, "This is a marvelous person." And mother-in-law dying, she still lives. She's a Gentile from England. No, she became Jewish. She converted Jewish. In England synagogue, she got married. In London. In England, yes. London. Why? Because he's a Jewish man. His father was Jewish, the mother was Jewish. He was an American soldier. After the war, 1945, he met her, and she's a beautiful lady. Irene, yeah? She's a beautiful lady. And she got two children, two sons. For the first son I was not in the bris, because maybe they still was in England.

**INT:** Mm-hm. But she converted to Judaism.

**ESTHER:** She convert right away. They belong to 33rd Street to synagogue. Every Friday she went to the synagogue.

**INT:** So what kind of neighborhood was that, in Strawberry Mansion? Mostly Jewish people?

**ESTHER:** Jewish people, and it was a wonderful neighborhood.

**INT:** A lot of people from the war?

**ESTHER:** Oh, everybody.

**INT:** Everybody was.

**ESTHER:** Everybody was from the war. And in 33rd Street we all meet. Conversation, how you doing?

**INT:** The neighborhood's changed a little bit.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, right away. And on Diamond Street was all the doctors and all the lawyers. It was so clean.

**INT:** And you had the park there.

**ESTHER:** The park was on the 33rd Street, and this was a block after this. Diamond Street.

**INT:** What did your husband do for a living in the beginning?

**ESTHER:** I want to just tell you. The lady call me, and she said, "If you be not jealous, I'm going to teach your husband sewing on the machine. I have a machine." Then I said, "I be jealous? He will never bother. If he talks to somebody, he's a mentsch. He have to talk to somebody." She said, "You're a smart woman." I said, "If he loves me, he cannot love somebody else." That's the Jewish tradition. If he sleep with another lady, I'm not allowed to live with him anymore. See? Have to be a get right away in 24 hours. I know the religion. I was trained. I was raised. And it's supposed to anybody to touch me. I went in the Germans hand, and I wasn't then. We went, we run away, and we went to Russia. Nobody raped me. I used to go at night, just like...yeah, special. Because when I marry my husband, he asked me, "You a virgin?" And I said, "Of course." He said, "You're always doing at night, people telling me you're bringing home food. You're going to the dorf," you know like to the goyim, and I used to go, I used to take a nice...blanket, or a nice something like...

**INT:** Mm-hm. And trade it.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, and I trade for bread, for milk, for everything. That's the way I survived.

**INT:** So he thought maybe you had...

**ESTHER:** When my grandfather was alive, and he always, and I got sick of malaria, they took me to work springtime to the seashore, and we have to work like a man. Saw the wood. See, I cut it (shows hand) and here, I was sewing in the machine there, and in the shoe...I forgot the name.

**INT:** With the blouses for the soldiers?

**ESTHER:** Soldiers. This was Bijnsk. Not Minsk.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Bijnsk.

**ESTHER:** Bijnsk is in Siberia. And I worked three years. A Jewish boy, you know like still from home, if you want to take out a lady for the movies, he come over. He didn't kiss you in the face. He kiss you in the hand, he give you the hand, or he kiss me in the face. I don't remember. Not in the face. No, the forest. Then the boss heard. He looked through the window, probably.

**INT:** Yeah, you told this story, and he sent you away.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, you got the story. There's nothing to say no more, yeah.

**INT:** So, okay. So it was a Jewish community that you were living in, and you liked the Strawberry Mansion area.

**ESTHER:** Of course.

**INT:** Did you have friends when you moved?

**ESTHER:** I got a lot of friends.

**INT:** Was that helpful to you to make it in this country?

**ESTHER:** No. No.

**INT:** But here you were. You know the language. How did you learn the language?

**ESTHER:** The language? In one year, I learn English to talk. And then I want to go to work. I came over, I saw my husband's not well enough, why I'm pushing him? We need a pair of shoes for the kids, winter's coming, you know, something like this. And she was getting older, three years, three and a half. The shoes is tight. You have to buy her new shoes. Or the same for my son. And a shirt and everything. Then one time, I ask a lady, she's a Russian lady, she's still alive, thank G-d, with her husband. Her husband's my husband's age. See? My husband die, he was just three months 61.

**INT:** So young.

**ESTHER:** So young. And it's a shame. He was healthy. And I don't know what's happened. He got cancer on the lungs because he smoked four packs a day.

**INT:** That'll do it.

**ESTHER:** He never told me. Because I used to go to sleep, and he used to make a joke. "What are you doing, preparing for breakfast, you know, for tomorrow's supper, because we got a business later." Oh, I want to say. He went to the shoe factory, to the dressmaker. The lady told him how to sew, and when her husband was a tailor, he coming home from work, and my husband ate supper, he go over there, and he show him how to work with a needle. And then he

came over, and like he was so (?), my husband. You show him once, he know already how to do.

**INT:** Picked it up quickly.

**ESTHER:** Picked it up. That's why the Germans let him live.

**INT:** Yeah. He was smart.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. They want to kill him. Three times. And they shot him. And then the Germans said, "You still have to live. G-d wants you to live."

**INT:** Did your husband and you ever talk about the war, during the years of your marriage?

**ESTHER:** All the time.

**INT:** All the time?

**ESTHER:** All the time.

**INT:** How about with your friends? Would you talk about the war with your friends?

**ESTHER:** We're always talking. What we lost and, you know? Like everybody. And a lot of people used to say they're rich. I never tell the people rich. We was not rich. We just, I used to ask my mother, "What we are?" He said, "Balebotish." You understand? Balebotish mean we have enough to live. We can help people, too. Like we got a...

**INT:** But you weren't wealthy. You were just comfortable.

(END TAPE SEVEN, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE EIGHT, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** Every Saturday when I was nine year old till the war, you know? And I'm telling you, she was wearing a hat, all the style. How she knows the style? (laughs) Maybe she...there was no television. Maybe she saw it walking by, or read a paper, something. Yeah.

**INT:** Do you think it was helpful that you had friends that had gone through the war that you could talk to?

**ESTHER:** Oh, we always do. Like I just lost a friend, she die here. It's going to be almost seven weeks already. And she was not sick. And we used to go together. We used to work together. And she went...her name was Bluma (?) And she was a very kind lady. No, you see, maybe she didn't got no more years. Her husband die nine year after my husband. She at least



lives 37 years with her husband. She got something. No, I lived just 28. See? It's different. And I went to work. The first thing, I bring home, when I make the crowns, you know?

**INT:** For the hats.

**ESTHER:** For the hats. And this was Landau. And the Russian lady introduced me to him, and he asked me, "You need a job. How you going to work?" I said, "Show me once, I gonna do it." And that was true. And I make already, and he said, "You're doing good. Why you want to work?" I said, "I want to help my husband." Because I tell him I want to help my husband, he thought, this is a nice lady. And he give me right away a job.

**INT:** So you always worked from the time you got here, pretty much.

**ESTHER:** Always I work.

**INT:** Because your husband, he was working, too, but he had a hard time because of his leg?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. No, later, I told him after three years working in the shoe factory, and used to speak to the ladies, and I said, "My husband comes home always upset. Because..." One thing the Jewish people, they're kind. Don't mistake. No, no, the Jewish people, they have all kind people, you see? And don't feel bad I'm saying this. You understand? Because although they didn't have brains to think in their head, psychology to think of something to help a Jewish man. No, because he was doing every machine you put on my husband, he worked on seven machines, sewing the buttons, to making the lapels, he was doing everything, the whole day he was working. The Italian guy came, he show him how to do it, and he done it.

Was one Jewish man, an older man, he was 72 when my husband met him. He lived to 98 or something, because, you see, my husband used to say, "You're going to have to live long, because you're like my father." You know, he help him out with everything.

**INT:** So why was your husband coming home upset? You said he would come home upset.

**ESTHER:** Because when the Jewish man came, he sent him home an hour earlier from work. He was taking 79 cents an hour, he said, "You can go home. I'm going to do it." My husband went home, and when he went home, he came in the following day, he got to take off the spot, well, he didn't know how to do it. He just supposed, because it's like a Mafia, the Jewish Mafia. And he's from New York, he's coming over for three days. This was, he killed my husband. And he used to tell me this. I said, "Listen. Leave it alone." Because when I worked three days, and my father show me how to sew on the machine, and how to make, you know, little holes on the shoes...

**INT:** For the shoes, yeah.

**ESTHER:** For the shoes, and making so fancy, I done it. I showed the sample, I got work right away! And then after three weeks, you see, different Jews. The same Jewish people, no, in the

(?) shoe factory was 500 workers. Was not all Jewish. Was like 80 Jewish people. The rest was Italian, all the others. It's a shame. The Italian people helped my husband. He said, "Your wife have something to wear? Go over, buy a piece of stuff, I make for your wife a suit. Holidays coming." A Jewish man he will not **tell** you this! This is a shame. This is a shame. Like Cain killed the brother. That's the way it's going to be till the end of the world.

**INT:** So you're saying, so what you're saying is that you always helped your husband, it sounds like.

**ESTHER:** Always. Always.

**INT:** Try and take the burden off of him a little bit.

**ESTHER:** Oh, when he was sick, I let him stay there in the house. And in the beginning, and I saw, when from the mouth goes out blood. He never told me maybe it was longer from that. And I used to go to Dr. (?) because when I open up the frigidaire all the time, you know, you work, you're sweating. And I have a habit, when I see a lot of customers, I work fast, and I'm happy. When my husband saw customers, he got excited, you know? Maybe because he's older a little. I don't know. Just like I'm telling you. Then he went to work, to teach himself how to cut the meat, how to cut this. For three months to work. At night. And I used to stay in store. I never bother him, you know. And he said, I said, yeah, we got money. All right. We make like \$80.00 profits a day. See?

**INT:** Mm-hm. What store was this?

**ESTHER:** In Southwest Philadelphia. A grocery.

**INT:** You had a grocery?

**ESTHER:** And this is a hard job.

**INT:** Mm-hm. You bought a grocery?

**ESTHER:** Not we bought. We rent. We came over, and she, the lady saw her. They was 65, they want to retire. And this was in the Jewish Exponent. In the Jewish paper. In the Jewish Forward. (Yiddish) We don't want money. We want to just see someone not to spoil the store.

**INT:** So you rented it from them.

**ESTHER:** We rent it. We pay that time 170 dollar a month rent. And believe me, I didn't buy nothing. I just, like I buy shoes for the kids, this. They went already in Stokely School. I still have pictures of the kids from Stokely School. And the children, I make the children happy, because that's why I wake up early. I'm used to that. Used to make breakfast, like he likes an omelet for breakfast. She used to like something else. I make for her breakfast. I used to make a soft-boiled egg, and I used to say, "Frances, Fagele, ess, ess, ess. " You know, like this? And

she listened. Or she liked strawberries. I run to the end of the street and buy strawberries for her, in wintertime, in summertime, she always ate strawberries.

**INT:** Well, let's talk about the children a little bit. Could you tell me...

**ESTHER:** Oh, the children, I will tell you. They was very bright. We used to talk to them. We sit down at the table. We never fight, like husband and wife. We got nothing to **fight**. We're working together. We was busy. And we used to decide what to buy for the store. What I need.

**INT:** You must have had arguments sometimes with your husband. You never had arguments with your husband?

**ESTHER:** No.

**INT:** If you had a disagreement, how would you work it out? You'd talk about it?

**ESTHER:** Oh, we just talking. Yeah. I used to tell, it's not the way, it's wrong. We used to talk. I explained to you. We used to talk.

**INT:** Did he have a temper at all? Was he angry, or depressed?

**ESTHER:** No. He never got a temper. He was the finest person. He was not well enough. When he was sick, at that time was the rough time for me. He order meat, and they bring me all the fat. I lost money. No, I didn't tell him this, I lost money. Maybe if he cut it, he will do something. I just, all the fat, I throw it out. No, all the poor churches, every one came shopping to me, the nuns. And we give them the best, you know, like?

**INT:** So when your husband was sick, you were working.

**ESTHER:** Sixteen years, he was healthy. And half a year, we took the business 1957. We came in the country 1950. 1957 I took the, we saw the business, and the lady saw us, and she divide her children. She have three daughters, and they all saw us, and they talk to us. And I give him, my husband and I, we said, "We have two children." And they saw the children, so quiet. You know? She was already at that time eight year old. And he was older. Then I said, they was so sitting nice and listening what we talking, or looking a paper, something. You know, like not playing and making noise, or something, like other kids. And the lady admired this. And she said how we going to do, and my husband was a **very** bright man. He said, "Well, you will live here in the living room. We will not put nothing here." We didn't got a television, we didn't got nothing. "We don't need anything. Just, this is your room, and stay how long you wish. And if you need food, go to the store, help yourself." That's what he told them. This was, you know? She saw we're nice people. And he show me right away. My husband went with her husband to sign up the stuff for us in City Hall, to sign an agreement, and I was along, and he show me how to cut, to cut cheese or meat, you know? It was not kosher, the meat. No, for me, I used to go to the Jewish store, to Woodland Avenue. Was a Jewish butcher. And you know,

it's one block. A couple blocks. And my husband, later, he bought a car. The one thing I want to say, my house was kosher.

**INT:** Mm-hm. You always kept kosher.

**ESTHER:** Always.

**INT:** Did you keep Shabbas also, as much as you could, or...

**ESTHER:** We just, like I say, when we got a store, we have to stay open.

**INT:** You had to work, yeah. In those days it was hard not to work on Saturday. You had to.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. What I done wrong, we cut the meat. We didn't ...you know, like. And the meat was cut up, ready, in case somebody needed to purchase. My husband make Friday already.

**INT:** Well, let's talk about the kids. How did you handle discipline in your house? How did you discipline the kids if they did something wrong?

**ESTHER:** I didn't have to.

**INT:** You didn't have to?

**ESTHER:** They was just, see, they got everything, they was smart. And I used to tell them, "Frances. Faigele. I bought you a new dress." I didn't try on. I figured, then I make the shoulder, or something. Or the same for my son. I bought shoes, I took him along. And my husband used to say, "It's Wednesday. It's ladies day. Go something, buy for the kids." The kids was in school. One day they called me up and they said, "Your children are very bright, very smart. They're for education, for college. They're ready for college." Do you imagine? If they went to Hebrew School, they got all As. I can't remember the person, the Jewish lady who taught the kids Hebrew. You know, davening and everything.

**INT:** Did they go to public school, and then they went to Hebrew School in the afternoon?

**ESTHER:** Yes. In the afternoon. Because a synagogue was not far from us. I can't remember her name. She was an American-born lady. No, **very** fine. And she taught both kids. We used to go there, we meet a bunch of women. She bring her son. You know, they bring the daughter, and I bring my two children. Because my Frances, the daughter don't want to go out from the brother. Because a year and a half, I used to feed them together. I give her a spoon.

**INT:** They were very close.

**ESTHER:** And a spoon for him. I used to feed together. Even when he was a...he shall not be jealous. You see?

**INT:** Were they close growing up, the two of them?

**ESTHER:** I'm telling you. He used to play with boys, and she don't want to go play. She just with him, too. She don't want to let the brother go. And then when she, she got married earlier. She...he was, he finished college, my son. Four-year college. He was going for a doctor. He made two year permit, you know, permit, prepare himself. And then was the Vietnam War coming in. 1967. Or, what was the year? '63? No. '65 or something. And we was going to work, and I said to my husband, "You know what? Perhaps we will take the children, and they have to have college. And we have to pay for them. We will save up for college." You know, like, put away something for college. And that's, we send my son to college. And she was just, in school, she was a year, just she was a year earlier. Instead of a year and a half, no, she didn't go with him. Like he went this year in college, because she was seventeen. She skipped right away from kindergarten. I told you from kindergarten.

**INT:** Right into first grade, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Right to the first grade. And then she skipped the second grade, she went to the third grade.

**INT:** Oh, boy. So she's a smart girl.

**ESTHER:** Yes. She's, G-d bless her. She's still smart. She's the head of all the teachers. She have doctor degree, too, you know?

**INT:** She has a doctor degree?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Yeah. From education. And her daughter goes and finish college last year, at 21. She was also smart like her. And she is the older daughter. She's going back now to college. My daughter spoke to me. I used to buy them certificates, the Jewish Israeli bonds. She said, "Mom, I got in the Israeli bonds. I need the money to send the kids to college. I need more money." Because she want to go master's. She need two master's. She have one master already. She went to work last year. She went to work daytime in college, and in the evening, like from 4:00, she works, till 9:00. Five hours she worked, for a drug store, \$5.00 an hour, she shall make, to buy something what she needs.

**INT:** So both your children married Jewish people.

**ESTHER:** Of course.

**INT:** Do they keep kosher, or do they keep any kind of religious observance, do you know?

**ESTHER:** I will tell you. They're married, and the daughter-in-law, when she came, she see the house, and my son show her. This, remember, is dairy. This is dairy, this is meat. Don't forget.

He told her right away, because I told him. And here is the meat dishes, and here is the dishes for Pesach. I never use those things.

**INT:** But does she keep it herself, the kosher?

**ESTHER:** She didn't have treif in the house. She buy kosher meat. You know? They don't go to synagogues too much. Just for the holidays. They belong Brith Shalom on City Line, you know?

**INT:** Mm-hm. Okay. This is your daughter.

**ESTHER:** My daughter.

**INT:** What about your son?

**ESTHER:** My son lives in Connecticut. He's a doctor. He's an optometry doctor.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Do they keep kosher, or...

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. He, sure. By him is also. Strictly. This is the dairy.

**INT:** He keeps them separate.

**ESTHER:** He show her, and she keep herself. Yeah.

**INT:** Okay, when you look...oh, one other question before we finish up. I wanted to ask you, your belief in G-d. Did it change over the years, or have you always had a strong faith in G-d through the war?

**ESTHER:** Always till I die.

**INT:** Always till you die. It's never changed, never had any questions?

**ESTHER:** Never gonna change. I don't question. I said, "G-d's will."

**INT:** Mm-hm. What about your husband? How was his feeling about G-d?

**ESTHER:** My husband? I just mentioned, he was a rabbi's son. He was so...he never went to work before he put the tefillin. Always used to wake up in the morning, 6:00 in the morning, he put on tefillin. When I see him wake up 6:00, I wake up 6:00. And I iron the shirts for everybody, because he went to work.

**INT:** But he davened every morning, and...

**ESTHER:** Every morning, yeah. Yeah.

**INT:** He kept his religion.

**ESTHER:** Sure.

**INT:** Did he ever have nightmares about the war?

**ESTHER:** He never tell me.

**INT:** Never told you.

**ESTHER:** He lost a wife. With a baby. And I read the paper, the letter, and you know, I felt sorry for him.

**INT:** But you never really talked about that, you said, with him.

**ESTHER:** No, no, no. Never told him. And I never told my children. No, after he die, you know, I went to the cemetery. And then the Jewish Family Service said if you want to put, not the Jewish Family Service, our organization. The New Americans. You want to put a plot on the...you know, like...

**INT:** A plaque to say...

**ESTHER:** Yeah, there, to say, then I put his parents. I didn't got money to put, \$60.00 supposed to pay for two people. For one person, or for two, I couldn't remember. They die, I shall put more, because he got a lot, the family got like four sisters, three brothers, you know?

**INT:** He was the only one that survived from his family?

**ESTHER:** Yes.

**INT:** Did you ever tell your children that your husband had a wife and a child? Do your children know about that?

**ESTHER:** Oh, that's what I want to say. I told them then.

**INT:** After he died.

**ESTHER:** Oh, like a couple years later. I didn't tell them then. I couldn't talk. Every time I talk, I cry. I was crying when I went even to work. It's a half a year later. And then I was in kitchen, I make my breakfast, I wash the dishes, and I turn this way, and I saw him staying here! And I was numb, like this. I stay still, shivering. And he got vanished. Like he...

**INT:** It's like a ghost.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Like a ghost. You know, like the memories. It was my memory. I always pray to him at night. (crying)

**INT:** I'm sorry. You miss him very much. (Pause, crying) I'm sorry.

**ESTHER:** That's all right.

**INT:** But you had a good marriage. You had a good marriage with him.

**ESTHER:** That's my husband. (crying) He always used to buy me everything. When he was sick...he...told the doctor, "My wife is a better nurse. My wife is the best nurse." I wake up 6:00 in the morning, and I used to make him breakfast, the medicine right away to give him. Then I give him, just make myself juice first.

**INT:** Was he sick the whole time? Were you taking care of him all the time?

**ESTHER:** One year.

**INT:** He was at home?

**ESTHER:** I took care a whole year, yeah. He was in the home, he was there. I got a letter from the doctor, and I say, and the doctor said to my daughter, "He cannot survive, because...he got malignant. If he will not have malignant," he said, Dr. Levick. Simon Levick. See, I remember the name, even, so many years. My husband's dead 22 years. Do you imagine? It's going on 23. That's what I'm telling you.

I went out with people, dates. No, they was like, not my type, you know. When somebody loves you so much, you can, and I'm not a woman to go in bed with anybody. I don't care. He can be a rabbi, even.

**INT:** Did you ever marry again?

**ESTHER:** I was married by mistake four...1990, it's four years ago. And when I marry, I saw he's an older man, and I figure, my husband will never come back. My daughter told me this. "Mom, get married. You're so young." Do you imagine? He was not bad, no, his cousins. They was afraid, he told them he loves me so much, because I'm like a queen, like a princess, dressed up. I show you all things is always **clean** in my place. And everything looks like new. Then...she was jealous. She used to ask me, "What are you doing with your face? You're always not wrinkles, it looks so nice." (interviewer laughs) Her business.

**INT:** This is...his cousin?

**ESTHER:** His cousin. And I answer, like I answer to you. This is heritage.

**INT:** Heredity. Yeah.



**ESTHER:** Yeah. That's all. That's all. My mother was like this.

**INT:** So they weren't nice to you, his family.

**ESTHER:** Very ugly. We used to go shopping here when I got married. It's his fault, too. We went for like a honeymoon, right? We went to a honeymoon, he took me to a bungalow. You know, he had no seichel. To a bungalow to bring in, bungalows is make like...hall, you know, not a house. And this was pressing me in my chest, and I don't know it. And I went into a Jewish doctor with a kappele, Hasidic, there. In...this was Monticello. Monticello.

**INT:** Monticello, New York.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. In New York. And I went over to the doctor, and he said to him, "If you like your wife, don't come no more in this place."

**INT:** It's not good for you...

**ESTHER:** Yes. "She gonna get sick." And I got temperature every day. As soon as I take a shower, I got temperature. And it was very bad for me.

**INT:** So what happened with this man? Did you just...

**ESTHER:** My husband?

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** I just said.

**INT:** The second one.

**ESTHER:** Oh, the second one? He's alive. Oh, he wants me back, and I told him, oh. Then I right away meet people. "From where you come?" You know, something like this. He introduced me. All right, they liked me. And he said to me, "You have to like my cousins." I say, "I don't marry your cousins. I marry you." (interviewer laughs) And what is there, if your mother will live, I have to, I must like her. No, cousins? Cousins is nothing. I have cousins in Israel. We like each other. When I come to Israel -- I was ten times in Israel. I save every penny to go to Israel. Even my sisters they don't understand it, I told her now. "Come, we miss you." I said, "I'm not working." I used to make \$150.00 a week. 40 hours I used to work.

**INT:** It's expensive to go to Israel.

**ESTHER:** And in Israel always I spend \$2,000. Count it up. Ten times. And besides that, you have to have \$500 to spend. You keep going out for lunch.

**INT:** Gifts.

**ESTHER:** Gifts. Oh, the gifts I used to buy for \$500 gifts, I used to bring them. No, now, it's not nice of them. Let them be well. I told them, "I don't have the money now. And time might, I will come. Maybe for the holidays." Maybe I'm going to ask the daughter, to give me. Chip in. Or I gonna go just for a ticket, you know. And the holidays is very expensive.

**INT:** Yeah. That's the worst time to go.

**ESTHER:** The worst time. No, I was still not looking then. I will try to go. Because, she told me by telephone, one sister and the other. "We miss you so much. Please come." Then I will come. You know, I got an open heart surgery. I don't know how long I gonna live. You know? I read yesterday the paper. I didn't cry. It's written even what I shall wear!

**INT:** What do you mean?

**ESTHER:** I shall not wear rubber shoes.

**INT:** Oh, really?

**ESTHER:** It's not healthy.

**INT:** It's not healthy to wear that?

**ESTHER:** Yeah.

**INT:** Was your husband, your second husband, a Holocaust survivor also?

**ESTHER:** Yes. No, he never, he was not like Jewish. Maybe in the younger years he was living with a Gentile. Because he said he never was in a synagogue. And I said, "If you don't go in synagogue, I will not marry you. That's why I marry you, because I don't want to go alone by myself in synagogue." I used to go with my husband. "And if you want to marry me," I didn't want anything. I should tell him I want something. And the first thing, I figure if you're married, you like him, he will appreciate. And guess what? The cousins right away, we went into a place shopping, and he put in the better orange juice. I saw. And I was looking, and I heard. What I'm deaf? Then he said, "What's the matter? Esther cannot drink this juice? It's a \$1.50 cheaper." And I heard that word. You know, this was burning me up. And I told him. I said, "Why should I like your cousins? They don't care for me." I was young. I didn't got a Social Security yet. I just got a little pension from my husband, because he died so young. He die, he was just 61, and...61, he was in March 15th. Count up. And he died June the 5th. Three months later. He was just, the whole, whole year, 61. That's what bothers me.

**INT:** Very young.

**ESTHER:** He was sick a whole year. And I saw the letter. The doctor said, it's no hope.

**INT:** When this happened, when your husband passed away, how did you cope with that?

**ESTHER:** It was very bad. I explain. I used to cry day and night. I was laying on the kitchen. I didn't even want to sleep on the bed. I was so...just like this. And the neighbors -- she was nice, and she die already. She die young, too. She was like 78 year old. Wait a minute. 78...she was younger. She was 22 years, four years she's dead. She was not 70. She was 68. Excuse me, 68 or 67, something like this. She was just seven months. Because she got lungs, too. And she never smoked. Not her husband used to.

**INT:** Yeah, that happens sometimes.

**ESTHER:** No, what happened, she used to sit with couples to smoke.

**INT:** She brings it in.

**ESTHER:** Bring in, and this is the worst thing.

**INT:** Did she help you after your husband died?

**ESTHER:** One time, she sent her husband, it was summertime. She sent her husband to call me in for breakfast. I shall eat a breakfast. She makes a soft-boiled eggs and coffee and we eat together. I used to sit a half a day by her, and a half a day by the other Jewish family.

**INT:** And they helped you?

**ESTHER:** Sure, it helped me. They going to eat, they said, "Come to eat." I said, "No, thank you, I must serve my son food." Then I cooked supper.

**INT:** Your son was still living with you when your husband died?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, two years. Because he was going in college. Optometry.

**INT:** Was that helpful to you that your son was still there with you and you weren't totally alone?

**ESTHER:** Yes, yes. He used to go with me shopping. I give him my husband's car. A new car. I bought a car, and guess what? It got my name and his name, then I just sign it, said it was his birthday in March. No, I say March? No.

**INT:** June. He died in June.

**ESTHER:** June.

**INT:** March 15?

**ESTHER:** March 15. That's what I want to say. It was the yahrzeit...

**INT:** Shavuos is his...

**ESTHER:** Shavuos, yeah. And when he die, he told me, "Esther, you look so young. Don't let any...just don't marry anybody, because you're intelligent." That's my husband.

**INT:** That's what he told you, huh?

**ESTHER:** That's what he told me. "Marry somebody you enjoy your life."

**INT:** So you left this man afterwards, the second husband.

**ESTHER:** No, listen how we met. Why I left. When we're going to...he got, we have to come back to Philadelphia, for wintertime, you know? And we're coming home for Pesach here. He's coming in, and before then, the cousins she used to say, "Esther. Come, I show you." I said, "What are you going to show me?" "See, I make my own manicure. You save yourself money." Because she wants, and he took me, he said, "How about we stop here, we buy some medicine? I have to buy a medicine." I said, "For whom?" He said, "For my cousin." He paid for her medicine! I got a car. And he said, "I'm going to buy you a new car." I said, "That would be nice." My car was not old. Ten year old. No, it was eight year old at that time, the car. It was a Datsun. Datsun 500. It was a good car. No, I didn't got the money to pay the insurance. We used to pay \$1350, I used to pay a year insurance. And I worked and I paid. No, here, when I marry him, the cousins don't let me drive. He said, "Don't take your husband's, if you want to go shopping, go by yourself."

**INT:** So they were very mean to you.

**ESTHER:** Always mean. And G-d shall punish them for that. Because I'm not afraid to say it's the truth. That's not the way Jewish people handle.

**INT:** So did you eventually leave him?

**ESTHER:** No, not I leave **him!** I told them...oh. I was...I was...he aggravate me, do you know, from aggravation you get temperature. And I got temperature. I got 103. I got headaches, headache, a headache. I went to the doctor. He said, "I'm going to put you...go talk to him. You have to rest. You need..."

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** We came home from the doctor, and I have 103 temperature, and the doctor gave me an injection. Antibiotic. Because I cannot take the antibiotic. I'm allergic. Guess what? He

said, "Esther, you're sleeping already an hour. No, make me right away lunch." No, lunchtime he came home. He said, "Make me lunchtime." I drove my car. I drove the car. And when he came home, and lunchtime, I open up a tuna fish. I make him a nice lunch. And for me I just drink a cup of tea, and I take the medicine. I didn't take too much, because he gave me a needle, and I just take a cup of tea, and maybe a cracker or cookies, I don't remember. And I went and lay down.

I lay down, and I was resting. I washed the dishes, do everything. He would have done nothing. It was 4:00 he waked me up. "You slept two hours!" Like I have to pay him for that. And he said, he's dumb. And he said to me, "You have to start to make supper." And I told him, "The supper, before I went to the doctor, I have always supper. In the freezer, in the frigidaire." I said, "You have rice I cooked, you have noodles I cooked. Help yourself. You can do it here, or you take it in the microwave, warm it up for three seconds, and you have the soup. And you want a piece of meat, take a piece of chicken out, warm up too. Make yourself a salad." I told him. "**You** make it." And I did it. And I make.

Now, I could not eat, because staying with him like aggravate me worse. Then I just, maybe I ate soup, and this was the whole thing. A little dessert. I always make chicken soup and I make, what I want to say, like a vegetable, a cooked vegetable. And I put it on the table. And dessert I make. Like apples and plums, you know, something. I make dessert. I put this with a piece of bread and I ate. I don't make anything heavy.

Then guess what? I came to the next, three days later, I got a headache, and I could not see nobody's face. You know? And I said to him, "Do me a favor. Will you come take me by bus to the hospital? I'm afraid to drive the car, because I'm dizzy." And I measure myself. I learned, because I used to measure my kids all the time to see if they have temperature. Then I measure, and I have 103. And he said to me, "I'm not going. Go by yourself." Then finally I said, "That's the way I marry you? If you say like this, you can go right now away to your cousins." I told him just like that.

And he took me by bus to the doctor. We came to the doctor, he want to go to the doctor. The doctor said, "We're not accepting you. You go to Dr. Gordon to make your next chest x-ray. Because the lungs is very plugged up, and she have 103 temperature." You know, when I got a note, and we went over to the...to Dr. Gordon, is just like five blocks away. Guess what? I got 104 temperature already, and the lungs was clogged up, and the doctor call up, my doctor, and tell him, "Dr. Gordon, your patient must be placed right away in the hospital. Because otherwise she cannot survive." Just like that. And I was young. Do you imagine? The doctor did good. He measure my pulse. He said, 'Oh, my G-d." It was jumping like, you're getting a stroke. And he said to me, "You know what? I take you to...to the hospital. I call a cab for you." He was quiet. He call a cab, and we went to Frankfurt Torresdale hospital. We went there, and as soon as we come in, the lady ask me, your age. She said, "Oh, you're not 65 yet." I was still young. And she said to him, to me, "Do you have children?" I said, "Yes." "Where they are?" I said, "The daughter lives in Richboro." It's also far. It's an hour to go there. "And my son lives in Connecticut." And she said, "Who's the man?" I said, "This is my husband." "I'm not her husband! I'm not legal married."

**INT:** What?

**ESTHER:** Do you hear that? And we're married by a rabbi. And he said we're not legal married. Because in English is not legal. You have to have from the English paper, too. You have to make a blood test. His cousin don't allow him to make a blood test. You know, he didn't let my rabbi from my synagogue to give me a chuppah. He didn't let me and Leizerowski to make a chuppah. He just make sure, we went in to Castor Avenue there, and they make the chuppah. See? And when he told me this, the nurse, or it was the secretary, she got so curious. And she said, like this. And she put it on, on the chart. She asked me my name, she asked me where I was born and everything, and children, and husband, and she wrote it down. He said, "I'm not her husband. I'm not legal married." Then this was **bitter** on my heart.

And when I come in to Torresdale, I got 104 temperature, it came higher the temperature 104 and 105, you know they put me on the medicine, like anti-...you know, like antibiotics intravenous. And I was both hands with intravenous. And 3:00 I could not sleep. Because when I sleep, and I have something to worry, comes back to me. I don't know to anybody else. Comes back, the whole thing what I was upset, came back in my mind. And I tear it off. The intravenous, I throw it out. I want to die. See, that's what I'm saying with that man. If something trick you, you don't want to live no more. I was young. I want to die. That's why I took off. I don't want to live.

And he order, because I got high temperature. And the nurses told him, called the doctor, he want to know how I'm doing, and she call him 3:00, she said, "We come in, your wife was, the Mrs. Awruch was whole blood in the bed, whole blood on the floor." And the man used to come every hour to check my blood pressure, check my temperature. The temperature didn't go down. It was still there. Then they told him this. 6:00 he came to the hospital, the doctor. And when he came, he saw, he give me injection, to put on. This didn't help much. He said to the nurses, "I want every four hours to change the bottle. Give her other ones. Antibiotics." I got five antibiotics, too, you know, to take off the temperature.

**INT:** So why did you want to die? Why did you want to die?

**ESTHER:** Because, to marry a crazy man, with cousins? What's the use to live? That's what I'm saying. I don't know what I did.

**INT:** Yeah, you were sick, and...

**ESTHER:** No, no. I was like under the...

**INT:** Just angry at him.

**ESTHER:** Angry, and everything, why I did so big mistake. Guess what? The doctor said, "Oh, it's a nice chart." He said, "I'm not your husband." And I said, "When I go home, what shall I do?" He said, "He's not your husband, don't sleep with him. You're too weak anyhow.

Just tell him he shall sleep in the big bedroom, let him have it, and you sleep in that room," where I sleep now. He said, the doctor, "And you will heal yourself. Then you'll know what to do. I don't have to tell you anything." I got, you know?

And my son-in-law, you know, that came here, when my girlfriend, you know? They bring me home. The neighbor, Italian lady is my girlfriend. Now we aren't staying too close. After Israeli was fighting with all the Arabs. And at that time, he told me, her husband, "Why they done this? Why they kill so many Arabs?" the Italian guy. And he likes the Jews. He's not anti-Semite. Because he was sixteen, the Jewish man give him a job till now. I don't know if he's still working. The son give him the job. You know? Still holding him. He's like making...furniture. A furniture maker. Very nice. And she was working by the...a secretary, short-handed. For a lawyer. See? Intelligent people. She likes to talk to me. And when I used to bake something, I used to bring it over. You know, knishes, I bring it over. Cookies, I bring it over.

**INT:** So did you just get rid of your husband after this?

**ESTHER:** Wait. Wait, I want to tell you what I did. And when I come home, I hear, this was a telephone, he was probably eating breakfast here. And I heard, it was 7:00 in the morning, he told her I'm still asleep, and she can talk. It's 7:00 in the morning. And he said, "What shall I do with her?" And I heard with my all ears. "Get rid of her." The cousin said to him, "Do something." Okay? I felt that he want to punish me, because I came home, like in a Wednesday, and I was laying in bed, I was so weak. And he said, "Make me supper." And I went down and make him supper. And I just ate a little.

**INT:** Boy, he was a real...

**ESTHER:** He was a real, he's still alive. He's an 86 year old. You see. What I want to tell you just, one thing is the cousins. Any time I go in the bathroom, you have to wash yourself up. You have to take a bath or a shower. He used to call up the cousin and said, "Sima? Wieder a shower. Wieder a bath." It's his fault. Because if he started this way. That's the way, you know? That's the way it went.

Then **finally**, I have to go to the doctor, gynecologist. I have to make an appointment today, too. Because July is my month to go to the doctor. Do you imagine, he said, "Take off your jacket." Like he bought me a jacket. He went to the funeral of his wife, the second wife, or the third wife, and after we got married already, we was like...we was married the first of July, and he went nine days after. No, she got married thirteen day after. Thirteen day after the marriage she was, she died. You imagine? And I don't know it. They never told me. No, when we took, they took me home, the cousins. She said, "Esther, when are you going to be 65? Remember, if you get a check, you must give your husband check, otherwise it's not a good living." No, it will be no good. She the one have to tell me that. When I heard, then I went over, right, she put me home. I didn't go home. I went straight to the bank. I walk over. It's seven blocks. No, I was strong. I walk over, and I told her this story, like I talk to you. And she said, "Oh, no. We will hold the checks. We write a letter to the, how do you say, to the City Hall, the check shall come to the bank." And they came to the bank. No, other checks, I didn't think about it. You know?

There was no time. We're going to Atlantic...we're going to Florida, because he has a home there. A bastard he is. They all is. You know what? The (?) if you have the letter from the rabbi from New York, she die in New York, she was two and a half years sick, or three and a half years sick. Alzheimer's. You know. She was sick. He never want to see her.

**INT:** Okay, I was wondering if you could tell me how you think you got through the war years. What gave you the strength to get through it, and what gave you the strength after the war to start a new life in America? What was it?

**ESTHER:** We came to Germany first. We was living four years, five years in Germany. Yeah, four years. 1946. Till '50, is four years. The children was born there. It was a very hard life. When I got the first baby, I got nothing to eat, and I passed out every ten minutes. As soon as the baby moves, I passed out, and the German doctor said, "You have to give her a double portion."

**INT:** Right. You told me that.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, you see?

**INT:** But what gave you the strength inside?

**ESTHER:** Inside? Hope. Tomorrow will be a better day. And I still live with hope today, too.

**INT:** Yeah, you do?

**ESTHER:** Because I believe in G-d. That's it.

**INT:** Do you think a belief in G-d was helpful?

**ESTHER:** Yes. Very much to me. I don't know the other ladies. I came, it's funny. When I came to the United States, I carry like another can of diapers for the children. I carried the candelabra to bentsch licht. And I didn't got candles. Then I say to my husband. "Go buy a chicken. It's like 3:00, and buy a package noodles." And I told him to buy a **fat** children. I guess I got fun from that. And I say, "Buy a challah, and don't forget to buy three candles." And we didn't got money for more. He bought it, he bring home, and I know from the rules, because I came from a rabbi's home, you know? That if you come from a ship, that's where I came from, the ship. Then we're allowed fifty minutes to soak the meat, and fifty minutes to salt the meat. And then you wash it out with cold water, and hot water, and you start cooking. That's the way I did it.

**INT:** But you didn't have, you didn't have your family here. Your family was living in Israel.

**ESTHER:** No. My family went 1948 to Israel, my daughter was four months old. When they came, they want me to go to Israel. And I wish I will go. Maybe my husband be still alive.



Because here was too much for him. He got this in heart he have to work Shabbas. This was hurting a lot.

**INT:** That was hurting him a lot, you think.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He was very religious. He always davened before he went to work. Every day, he never miss. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, we keep the store closed. I told the ladies, on Pesach, too. One day. And he went to the synagogue. We all went, the children, we went to the synagogue, we walked seventeen blocks to the synagogue. In Southwest Philadelphia. We walked seventeen blocks to the synagogue, because we don't want to ride to here. We didn't want to ride Yom Tov. Then we walked to another synagogue.

**INT:** Do you regret that you didn't go to Israel? Is that a regret in your life? Do you think it would have been better if you would have gone there?

**ESTHER:** No. My mother used to tell me, with a husband, the whole world, even to the forest, with a husband you like, and you love each other, the husband geht man wie he wants to. Wherever he wants to. She told me that. And it's the truth. And we share always talking what we shall do and this and that.

**INT:** So it was your relationship with your husband that also helped you a lot, I guess.

**ESTHER:** That's why I cannot marry other guys! Because that kind of person I'm never going to have.

**INT:** Find him again, yeah.

**ESTHER:** I'm ashamed to tell you a secret. I don't want this on the...

**INT:** Okay. (pause) So you would say that the way that you coped was you had belief in G-d. You had a strong belief in G-d always.

**ESTHER:** I always believe in G-d. Wait a minute. Even the time from the war when I was...I was working in the...Yom Kippur. No, I ate, a whole day I was working, twelve hours I have to work to make the blouses for the, and I didn't ate not drink a drop of water.

**INT:** So you kept it even there, yeah.

**ESTHER:** Because nobody ate in my house. Was nothing to eat anyhow. I have to come home and bring him something.

**INT:** So you had religion, and you had your husband, a good relationship with your husband all the years.

**ESTHER:** Because I told you, because he was a rabbi's son, I was in heaven. I never went the wrong place. And do you know, I came here, when he died, I went every Shabbas to the synagogue. Then one time a synagogue, it was a bad time, it was so slippery, wintertime, and I came. He said, "Mrs. Awruch, we have to give you an aliyah." He make a joke. "And I will make a Misha Berach because you never miss to come to synagogue." All right? And later, when I start, even when I work, I was working. I was working. And that's why I was mad on Rabbi Leizerowski. On one lady I was mad, too. She said, these Hungarian Jews, they're not very kind. Not one of those. They're selfish. Because I was working, and she was working. And I ask, "Can I ask you a favor? Go over to the boss. I want to work on Sunday, every Sunday. And every Friday, and every Thursday, I will work." That's why Thursday night, I make the house Shabbas.

**INT:** Mm-hm. Yeah. Because you have to work all day Friday.

**ESTHER:** Friday I just want to have to do the other things, to cook, to this, not to clean. Everything is by me, like today, see? It's already for Shabbas. Yeah, I will wash the floor tonight. The soup, I don't have to make.

**INT:** What would you say...

**ESTHER:** You don't let me finish from my husband, the second husband.

**INT:** Well, yeah.

**ESTHER:** You don't want to listen.

**INT:** What happened?

**ESTHER:** Wait. Then the next door neighbor, I didn't see her. And all the time, when she was sick, she used to call me in. "Esther, you're home? Come in, we sit together outside." And she sit and talk to me, and how is everything. I said Fine. I'm ashamed to tell anything. Guess what. You can have this on the record. And he, I ask, she call up, and I ask him, "Do you mind to come out to the neighbors across the street?" We was friends for so many years. For 31 years. And you know, more than 31. We was friends for 41 years, because, you know, she die already four years. And we was friends all the time. We met three weeks after I was in Philadelphia, like in Strawberry Mansion, and we met in the park, you know? She saw me walking, and she recognize, I was walking with another lady we met, and we met the other lady we met in...the place where they give like the...in South Philadelphia, in the Fourth Street. Fourth and South. Was a Jewish home. Was four families living. (Pause)

Guess what? Then here, they call me up and they said she die. Who call up? Yeah. He answer to me, "I don't want to know, I'm not going to your friends'. See? And that started to get crazy. He used, like he used, when I go over to sit there, I said, "Nu? You want to sit? Watch television." That's what I told him. Guess what he did? He call up the cousin, and the cousin call up, they said, "Why are you letting your husband sit alone?"

**INT:** Oh, boy.

**ESTHER:** Okay? At that time, if you had a gun, now you see why people shooting people?

**INT:** Yeah.

**ESTHER:** Now you see it? It's always something. Nothing goes for nothing.

**INT:** It's not good. It wasn't good.

**ESTHER:** All right? That's what I'm always wishing. They shall feel my life. And G-d knows it's the truth.

And I was sitting with her, and her sister was sitting, because she could not do nothing. She die a couple weeks later. I went, when they took me to the hospital, she was already in the hospital just to check her blood. She got a blood clot. And they took her to the hospital, she never revive. And I was in hospital nine days. I came home, and three days later she die. Was the funeral three days later. She die on a Friday, and Sunday was the funeral. And I came home on a Thursday, a Wednesday, I couldn't remember.

No, one thing I'm telling you, when I got the cheese I bought for Shavuos, and I figure, I'm going to make a cheesecake. And I make the cheesecake right away. And when I make the cheesecake, I wash the floor, this was Friday morning, because I have to lay down after I eat breakfast. This was baking. I know I have to bake an hour, in a half an hour I have to stay close, like I teach you, remember? And guess what? "You're going to invite my cousins here?" I look on him, I said, "You be ashamed of yourself. I can hardly walk. Can I entertain people? I was just two, three days from the hospital? Are you all right?" He answered to me like this, "If you don't like my cousins, I'm going to move away. The next day I'm going to marry somebody else." Okay? He told me this right away. Nu?

By Friday, I just broiled the chicken. The soup was cooked, and I make the noodles, and maybe I make something else. I don't remember. I remember one thing. I want to bring her over the cheesecake, and I didn't got the energy. Do you understand? I told him, "Would you please help me?" Oh, and she die, and Saturday I came over there. You know, like I walk over. I felt so bad. And Sunday was the funeral. I wake up in the morning 6:00 and I bake a sponge cake, it's good fresh. I bake a sponge cake, and I told him, "Do me a favor. It's 11:00. It's 11:30 gonna be the funeral. I will bring over the cheesecake with this. If you will open the door for me. You hold the cheesecake or the sponge cake, and I hold one. It's too heavy for me to carry." "Go yourself." You see, this is a husband? Okay. And he went. And I said, "Listen. From now on, if you want to live with me, you listen what I say, not what your cousins say. I don't marry your cousins!" I give him right away like this. Of course, it hurts me. And we went over there. He didn't go in. No, I went in. All right, I say I'm sorry to the husband and everything, and to the daughter. And the son, he got two children. That's what happened. Do you imagine? I came back, and he's like (angry) like this, and I tell him nothing. I didn't say nothing. It's passed

already the time. I went, the next, this was like on a Thursday. And Thursday, I told him, "You know what? I'm sick, and I can't take care of you. You look like a dirty dog." He never took a shower, for once in a month. See? And the odor got me sick to vomit. I used to run. To live with him, I have to take a nerve pill, you know to, and when he see that he can't perform every duty, then he said to me, when he was young, he got two Deutschkes in one night. That's the way he talked to me? Or he got two ladies, he slept with **two**. And this got me also like this. You know, sick at my stomach.

And finally I tell him. The next day I tell him, "I have a terrible headache." This was on a Wednesday, or Thursday, something. Yeah, Wednesday. "I got a terrible headache. Please take me to the doctor." He said, "Go yourself," because he's afraid he have to take a cab again to, you know, pay money. And I call in Kathy, the Italian lady, and I said, "Do me a favor, honey. Would you take me, I have a headache, and I asked my husband to take me to the doctor, he said, 'Go yourself.' I cannot walk, I have to have somebody to hold my hand." (Do you have it on the record? Good.) And guess what, he said, 'Go yourself.'" She said, "Don't worry. I'm taking you right to the doctor." The Italian lady.

We came to the doctor's office, my blood pressure was 230. And the doctor got so scared, he's a young doctor. He thought I'm going to get a stroke. He ask the lady, "Who are you?" She said, "A neighbor. But we love her like friends." She liked me. I help, I bake her something, and I bring it over. I learn to bake this, and I learn her to bake that. Rolls. And we always, and she said to me one thing, "Esther, the doctor told me you have to not go home to your house. You have to come to my house, because otherwise you die."

**INT:** Yeah. He'll make your blood pressure go up again.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Again. If you have one more, a stroke, that's it. How long you can live? When she told me this, I became like energy in my body. And I said, "Thank you, Kathy." Then I kiss her and I say, "I'm not contagious. Remember, do me a favor. You're always doing me favors. Take me to the rabbi who gave me the chuppah. I want he write a letter." I came over, he saw my face, it was like a sheet. Why? Because I was pass out by the doctor. When he gave me the injection, I fell down, they put me right away in a bed, and I was an hour, and he put down the lady shall watch me, I shall not fall out. She will sit with me. And when I wake up, I was from the medicine, you see, he gave me for the head, and from the medicine I was so like choking. I said, "Give me an ice water." And I drink up almost like a quart of ice water. A big pitcher, I drink it out in one sip like a shicker. You see, I was all dry. I ask the nurse, "Give me another one." She gave me another one, and I drink the other one out. She told the doctor, he said, "You see? Your body needs a lot of water. You're all dried up. You're not eating. You lost weight." Just like this.

And guess what? I went over to that man and he wrote me a letter, she's very intelligent. He said, "How about you dictate me?" She dictate him, because she's a secretary for a lawyer, she know how. And she dictate me to him, that's the way he treat me and everything. We're not legal married, because not by, you know? He said, "I'm a rabbi. We give you just chuppah here. What do you mean not legal married?" He wrote it down, he put a stamp, he said, "Give him

this, take off your rings and give him the rings and forget it." And I came home. And I did it. Instead of lunch, I give him this. The ring, and, "Get out of here!" He went out. He went out. He left all his stuff, he went out. He went to the house, nobody's there. The cousin is in Atlantic City. She have a home there, a condominium. He came back, "I'm coming in. I will not bother you." I said, "Good. You want to eat, go in a restaurant." And he said, "I'm sorry. I will not listen. Just to you. I'm sorry." I said, "No." I give him back the ring, I got nothing. I don't want anything.

And I said, "Listen. I marry you, I thought you're a mentsch. No, you're nobody." Just like this I talk to him. He don't speak Yiddish. Because he always speak Polish to the goya probably. You understand?

**INT:** He didn't know Yiddish?

**ESTHER:** No. He know, maybe he know Russian. Who knows what...they was from, she's Russian, the cousin. And she's born, she's an engineer. She's born in...

(END TAPE EIGHT, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE NINE, SIDE ONE)

**ESTHER:** New...you know, I go on a honeymoon, and she gave me suitcases, new ones. Three suitcases. New ones, because her husband bought it, and they never went, because he die. He got like a heart attack. The son got a heart attack before, 45 year old. And three months later -- I thought three months, was two months later. I always say three months. And my daughter told me, "Mom, it was just two months." He died. When he die, it was very pitiful for me, you know, something like this, you know? And the lady, you know, her husband was very nice. That man took all of my four suitcases, he took four suitcases. Two of the new ones, and the third of the new ones, and he took my son's suitcases, and I got a bag from the suitcases, like a make-up case, he took that away too, from me. And guess what? The Italian lady, I told her I got rid of him, she came 7:30 in the morning with her husband. She said, "I go later to work. Because I'm afraid if he can do like this to you..." He took off a bracelet. This is mine. He took off a bracelet big like this. This was his name written on the bracelet. He came over and tell her, to me, "Why you wearing Jack's bracelet?" I said, "He's my husband. He gave it to me." And at night, he took it off. I don't tell. I told the Rabbi Leizerowski this. He said, "Why you didn't tell me right away?" I said, "I was not sure. I don't believe it." And I came to his house, she came over and she hug him. "My brother, I got your stuff. Your bracelet, I got it. I find it. I went back and I find it." It's not the truth. Where she find it?

**INT:** On your arm.

**ESTHER:** When I came home, I went over to the places where I bought bras and other stuff, and then I went another place to buy shoes, and I checked. I buy with my money shoes. Not, he didn't give me anything. Guess what she said? "We don't lost nothing. It's not here. Because the policy, we find something, we have to keep for the...customers come again shopping." It's

the truth. Guess what? She told him he should take it off at night when I was asleep. And I just told you. When I used to go to sleep, I take a nerve pill, because I want to be half-dead when I sleep. Not too much to bother with him, because my stomach was like vomiting up.

Then guess what? I felt it, and he told me I shall put on my chart to the...you know, like the house insurance, and they will replace me another thing. Then he went home already. You know, I threw him out. You know, then I figure, he can kill me. He said, he must sleep here. He gonna sleep under here, and I'll sleep here. I was still stupid. I shall tell him to go sleep outside, like the homeless. See, I was stupid. Then I let him sleep. Not with me, because it's finished. And in the morning, the lady with her husband came, and he took out those suitcases, and I could not, I was so mad, and so upset, then I figure, oh, he took away my checks. \$881.00. When I ask him, "Give me back my money." He said, "No. I pay for your hairdresser with nails to make." The cousin told him to say it like this, probably.

**INT:** Boy, he's a real winner.

**ESTHER:** Do you imagine? Not he's a winner. I'm a loser, because the cousins, maybe he will not be there. He stole two items what I saw with my face. And I was ashamed to show anybody. Like you're cutting off the nails? He took it off from the thing, he put it in pocket. I said, "I gonna pay now, it costs \$3.79. You cannot afford it? You just took my checks." I told him. He looked on me like mad. Why I'm talking like this. My father told me you're not allowed to take from nobody.

**INT:** How did you finally get rid of him?

**ESTHER:** I just told you.

**INT:** He finally left.

**ESTHER:** No, he left. I told him, "Out. I don't want to see you." And then, the following year, I told him I want a divorce. And he don't want to give me a divorce. Then I said to him, he came to the synagogue, and he want to make up with me. He know I'm in synagogue. You know, when I'm davening, I don't talk to **anybody**. G-d forbid, it's a fire, then I run. No, when you daven, you enjoy to listen to davening. Shacharis or whatever, you have to listen where you hold, you're not losing the pages. And he was saying, "I want to make up with you." And then he said to the neighbor, Marsha Levin, "How about you help me? You help me." She said, "I shall help you? Did I introduce you to her?" That's the way, she's a smart lady. She said nothing. She said she's going home with her husband, like lunch time. And the other ladies saw, like heard what he's talking, talking he want to make up. He will not listen to nobody, just to me. He's sorry.

I will come out, and she said to me, "Come, my husband's going home." And the other lady. They know me. Also refugees. And she said, "Come home." We went home. I went home, he saw me walking home. He scream, "Esther, I want to talk to you!" And scream so loud. You know, I was all bashful, ashamed. People listen. Then I stand, it start to raining a little. Then I

gonna spoil my hair. You know, it's a holiday. Then I said to him, "I'm going in the house. Good-bye." He said, "No, I'm going to your house, too." I let him in. He come into the house. You know, it's Yom Tov. You're allowed to make tea, coffee, tea. I make a coffee, because I was thirsty. I used to go to synagogue with no food. Just an orange juice and a vitamin. And a coffee. This was going to the synagogue. I never ate anything. You know, at that time I was younger. I don't felt bad. No, I was hungry already. Rosh Hashanah you go home 1:00, right? 1:30 sometimes. Then I bring him everything, put it down, and he notice the watch he gave me. He gave me a watch, and he said, "I want back my watch." I took it off, and I said, "Here's your watch." I took off the jacket, because I always wear a suit. Because I got heart. Because he took me off the watch, got me excited, you see? Nervous. And I give him the watch. He said to me, "Give me back the bracelet." It's from my insurance. He didn't do nothing. He wants the bracelet, because he gives everything the cousin. She take the rings from both wives, the diamonds she was wearing. She wear on all her finger diamonds, big diamonds. And I told him, "I want nothing from you."

What I want to say, he said to me, "Esther, we gonna put you in jail." I said, "What? You gonna put me in jail? For what? I think I have to put all three of you in jail, because your wife was alive when we was married." And that's the way I told him. I said, "Get out of here, I don't want to see you!" And I throw him out right away. And he stays by the door, he says, "I must call my cousin to pick me up." "Don't stay in the house, stay outside. You have nothing to do with me, I have nothing to do with you." I throw him out that way. The second time. I throw him out. Thank G-d. And later, and a month later, the cousins, not the cousins, the nieces. They was fine people. You see? She was a Russian, she was junk, slop. They're still alive. She's older even from her husband. She's maybe 89 year old. He's 85. She was married. She got a girl, like. The all money, I never saw his check. That's why I marry. He said he have \$2,000 a month. The check is \$940.

**INT:** And he's giving it all to the cousins.

**ESTHER:** He put away the money in the bank. The whole check goes to two daughters. He have two daughters. She have one from this husband, and one from the Russian husband. Then they give away.

**INT:** It sounds like he was just the opposite of your first husband.

**ESTHER:** That's what kills me. I told you, that's what makes me the heart attack. I could not sleep, and I was worried, and I could not sleep, and I was always upset, and that cost me high blood pressure. Right away, when I was living in Florida, I didn't tell anybody. You see? I didn't tell my girlfriend. Nothing. I was ashamed. Why I was smart one day, and now I became so stupid.

**INT:** Yeah. Well, you're out of it now. That's good.

**ESTHER:** Thank G-d. Guess what? He gave me February, you see, he gave me a divorce.

**INT:** Oh, okay.

**ESTHER:** This was like half a year later.

**INT:** All right. So you're done.

**ESTHER:** Then everybody heard I got a divorce. My neighbors was sitting with me. We ate lunch. I got gefilte fish, whatever I made.

**INT:** A little party.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Always I don't like to eat alone. We all, you know. And he went there to the synagogue the following day, and he told them, "You know, Esther got a divorce. The man came to the house." This is the first guy what I told you we're supposed to get married. You remember? That guy still goes around with me. His second wife died. And I want to explain to you. He's a nice man. No, the only thing, his wife, let her rest in peace, was smart. She came over to my house. And she said, "I'm very sorry. Because the ring for you, the sister-in-law told me, to give me, you could be married. And I took away your..." You know, that's the way she said. "And I'm sorry. Would you just forgive me?" And I hug her, and I kiss her, and I said, "I have no grudge on both of you. I wish you you should get better." And I kiss her and I hug her. He said all the time when they're laying in bed, he always thought from me, how Esther's clean, and this got her always, you know? Smart is smart, and every smart man does a mistake too? And that's the way it goes.

**INT:** Let's just finish up. I just have a couple more questions. These are short questions. I just want to ask you, would you consider yourself a hopeful person, or a pessimistic person? Do you look at life like it's going to get better, or do you look at it like it's always going to be bad. How do you look at life?

**ESTHER:** Oh, no. Tomorrow be a better day.

**INT:** It's always going to be a better day.

**ESTHER:** That's the way I survive.

**INT:** How about nightmares? Did you ever have any nightmares about the war?

**ESTHER:** In the beginning yes, because when the Germans, I was thirteen and a half when the Germans came. This was Rosh Hashanah. The next day Rosh Hashanah, the following day Rosh Hashanah, they kill the two cousins. They shot my two cousins, and we was running around like rats, you know? Running around in hiding places. And here they make a picture to kill us all. They got, you know, like a machine, a big one, and to shoot it, and all gonna get killed. We got in the city four rabbis. And you know, with wives, with kids, and all of us sitting by the city hall, and he came too. All the Jewish people were sitting there.



**INT:** And did you have nightmares about that?

**ESTHER:** No. It was worse from that. Because they make just a picture, no, they didn't shoot us. Because my aunt and my mother, in those days they learn in Poland, they learn German to talk. They speak a good German. And they told him. He said they told him, "Tell him Dr. (?) is here." I remember his name. "Tell him something." He was an Austrian Jew. He marry a Polish lady. She was so nice, she die young. She got nine children. The all the children was Gentile, and the older one, he wants to have Jewish. She went to the synagogue. Yeah. She was coming to my aunt and teach her how to cook Jewish food and everything.

What I want to say, he said, "This is my sister of my mother. And the aunt is my sister. And those rabbis, they're all my cousins." And he took him away. Because he was with them together working. He's a doctor. He's a doctor and he's like a general, you see? And they took him, and he went away. He went away, he brought him back home, I find my cousin laying. And I pick him up on these two hands. He look on me, open the eyes, and shaked his head, and he died. And this I got, I still have memories. I used to have nightmares. I used to have. Now, I must forget. Then I make myself, I go down, I take a little ice cream, and hot water, and mix it up, and drink it out. Or sometimes I take a half a nerve pill, and I lay down, I fell asleep.

**INT:** And that helps you with the nightmares?

**ESTHER:** That's it.

**INT:** Okay. Let me just ask you about Mrs. Klein. Sarah Klein. After the war you met up with her in Philadelphia?

**ESTHER:** No. We was in the war together.

**INT:** I know, but after the war you found each other again in Philadelphia.

**ESTHER:** Oh, when she got a second baby. And my husband saw she's going out from the hospital, she got a baby. Then, and she have to go on the same bus with me. Because that's the bus 20, 20 bus takes us from South Philadelphia to Strawberry Mansion.

**INT:** You were on the same bus?

**ESTHER:** She come in. And my husband took the baby like this, and help her out. You know, she have diapers or something. And she came home. See, her husband don't even pick her up. He was also Hasidic. You see, not all Hasidic people were nice. When my husband, when I went out from the hospitals, he used to carry me in one side, and the baby on the other side. You see?

**INT:** How do you think Mrs. Klein coped with the war, after the war? How do you think she...

**ESTHER:** Wait a minute. She lost...a sister, two sisters right away.

**INT:** Right. And a mother. Her mother died.

**ESTHER:** No, no, no, her mother die after this. When we came back. After the war. I told you why, right?

**INT:** She was pregnant.

**ESTHER:** All right? I don't want, don't mention to her. And she was very sick. And she was young. She was like 43.

**INT:** Yeah. But how do you think Mrs. Klein has coped through the years with her troubles? I mean, her husband also died.

**ESTHER:** Her husband died three year later. Three year later.

**INT:** After your husband died.

**ESTHER:** Yes. Three later. He was suffering, he was sick already.

**INT:** He also had lung cancer, didn't he?

**ESTHER:** No. He got heart trouble. I remember he came to my house, and we used to talk every Saturday night. She call me up, said, "Gut Woch." You know? Used to talk. And then I told her, "You know, the children graduate high school, and they're invited to go to a dance. Do you mind," she ask me, "When is your daughter going?" My daughter graduates on Friday. She said, "My son..." No, no, no, is different. Saturday night. Something like this. And I got the picture, you know, he bring me the picture. And I give one for her. And I bring. When her father saw the picture, her father was very nice. Hasidic man. A very nice gentleman. Then his father said, "Oh, this will be a nice shidduch." Just like that. Then her husband came to my store, listen. Oh, I came when she bought a house, and I never saw before, you know, where she's living. Then it was a new, nice house. Then I went. They make money. Because they work in synagogue, you know, and she was taking the coats when somebody comes in, you know, like parties and this. She was working. She always worked.

No, what I want to say, then they came. And I took out biscuits, and I put them in the oven for ten minutes, or fifteen, and I baked them. Or maybe I bake my own. I couldn't remember that time. And, oh. I bought by the...it was a Jewish bakery, I forgot the name already.

**INT:** It's not important.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, not important, yeah. And I took from him rolls, like a dozen rolls. Because I didn't know they're going to come. They surprised me. Then I keep this. And I took out cottage cheese, sour cream and I make a salad. And I took out like applesauce I make myself. I bake a

cake. I bake a cake, and I put it on the table, and we all ate. It was not the children. It was her husband and her, me and my husband.

**INT:** What was her husband like?

**ESTHER:** He was a nice man. Yeah. She was not allowed to watch the television. We came, and it was in a Sunday, because the whole week we worked. I got no chance we came, came over. We bring the present. I bring her a lamp, with three light bulbs, you know, four light bulbs. It's so nice, stand up. Very, thirty dollars I paid **those** days.

**INT:** That's a lot.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. It's my girlfriend. Then guess what? We used to talk every week. Ten cents was the telephone. I didn't got the ten cents. I used to go to my girlfriend, she lives in California, and give me ten cents, when I have the money, I'll give you back tomorrow. My husband gave me the whole paycheck. Then I save up the ten cents to talk every Sunday with her.

**INT:** So she was your good friend all the years.

**ESTHER:** All the time, we're gonna be till we...we're always going to be good friends. I love her. She's so smart. And you know, it's a good friend. We was friends from kids. From the time...you see, we was little kids.

What I want to say, then she had a first husband, then a lot of the, and I used to say, I just heard from the television they kill a Jewish man in a store, something like this. They make the hold ups. I told her. She said, "I don't watch television. He don't allow me."

**INT:** Why not? Do you know why?

**ESTHER:** You're asking me?

**INT:** You don't know why?

**ESTHER:** Because he thinks, I believe he never was Hasidic before. That's my mind figures. He's from Czechoslovakia. He was like...a salesman with materials, you know? Like in a...

**INT:** Yeah, he used to sell material.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. Clothes. Then he was not poor. No, the time from the war, maybe he got a number, I don't know. I know one thing, then he marry with her. Maybe he was introduced, probably. And he thought, he became like here, like a rabbi. He's not a rabbi. He's just a, what do I say?

**INT:** A shammass. Gabbai or something.

**ESTHER:** Shammás. It's not a rabbi.

**INT:** So he became very religious, you think, here.

**ESTHER:** He became religious. He was learning the children the bar mitzvahs. He get money for that. He was going on the cemeteries and making "El malehs," you know, for the dead people. He make money because she told me that. She has money, because they bought a house. And then she bought a car, and the children learn how to drive. Keine hore, she's still driving.

**INT:** But how do you think she's coped with her life after her husband died?

**ESTHER:** It was very...you know, pity. I used to talk to her on the telephone.

**INT:** Because you both lost your husband within several months of each other.

**ESTHER:** Three year later.

**INT:** Three years. Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

**ESTHER:** Yeah. And I told her, I said...

**INT:** Your husband died first, and then her husband died?

**ESTHER:** Three year later, yeah. And I remember when I was there, and she was sitting shiva, I bring her, was...was hamantaschen, I bought from the Jewish bakery. You know? I went over and I bought. Because at that time, I don't bake, you know? Or do I bake and bring it over? I could not remember. No, I ask my cousin, an American cousin born. She was a year old when her mother die. Do you imagine? Yeah. And she was born in America. And her husband and my husband was real cousins. I told you, in Philadelphia, they used to write, like her mother write to her father. See, that's the way it went, and she hold me, she call me cousins till today. Yeah, we're always close.

**INT:** So do you think she was able to cope with that, after her husband died?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, she coped. The two sons went to college. One son is a doctor, I met in Boston. They're very good. And went to Boston to college. And...her husband, I think, he was 22 or 20 when her husband died. You see, that's the way it goes. Because my son is older. She married later from me. She married in Germany, Ulm, and I marry in Siberia maybe three years before.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** Because my children, I was...

**INT:** So your children are a few years older.

**ESTHER:** Yeah, yeah. And she have then, I want to tell you, then my daughter liked him. And they were...

**INT:** Liked her son?

**ESTHER:** Yeah. He was a nice boy, sure. Handsome boy. And she's a nice girl, too. They like each other. And guess what? Her husband came. Looking like you will see President, the first president I remember. He was in the military.

**INT:** Grant? Lincoln?

**ESTHER:** Yeah, with the high hat. And with a (?) I thought he's like a crazy man. (laughs) No, like he came from Washington. He came into the house. I came into the kitchen. I still have the table downstairs. It was a big kitchen. Can twelve people, I told my husband, "Buy a big one." Because we didn't have a living room. Then that was small. Then guess what, we all ate, he ate, too. Because it was all dairy I make, right? And dairy you're allowed, and I was kosher. See? He went over, my husband liked to cover the pork all the time, because it would get dark, then it doesn't look good to sell, you see? I bought my stuff, everything, by the kosher places. She know it, the wife. No, when they come home, he saw, he went over, my husband show him how clean we hold this stuff. And he noticed the pork chop there.

**INT:** Oh. So he won't eat in your house?

**ESTHER:** The pork. The whole pork. No, no, they ate. This was after. And would be a good shidduch, sure. I prefer. No, what he did? The father don't allow him. And my girlfriend want me, you know? And what's his name, my girlfriend wants me to make a shidduch, and her father, so smart man, he said, "Why not? This is all from a good family. It's rabbonim."

**INT:** But he didn't want it, the husband didn't want it. He saw the pork chop in the kitchen.

**ESTHER:** Because he saw pork chops. He didn't understand, this is for business. When I, we hold this. We go with Ajax, you wash up the hand, the hand is clean. This, he don't figure. Because he was not too religious to understand this. You understand? Like the Hasidim in Germany was Lubavitchers there a lot. I think those Lubavitchers, was three brothers. Then they went, they're throwing stones on the Jews because Friday night they make a...came a Jewish musical. And they came to Poking. Was 9,000 people. And they're throwing stones on Jewish people. Now, the Bible said we have to kill Jewish people because they watch music? They didn't do nothing. They're playing with the fiddle, if they sing, there's nothing wrong with that.

**INT:** So her husband was very intolerant.

**ESTHER:** Yes. Yes. It was not the kindest man. No, this man was more, more modern. She's married eleven years, keine hore, let her live long, both together. No, he went, where he went,

hiding or kah-tzet, I don't know. He's taking from Germany money, and she call me up like the same year when she got married. She call me up and she said to me, "Esther, do you remember anything from Siberia?" I said, "Everything." And she come over, and I told her, and she wrote it down.

**INT:** So she could get money?

**ESTHER:** No, no. She was married already. I said she called me up, and he put her on. On her husband's...she takes money for the husband who die.

**INT:** I see.

**ESTHER:** You see? Don't tell her. She takes German...then she, because he was sick on the heart, when they wrote it down, she got also like a...the doctors write it down, and she get money. Okay. When my husband die, and I told her everything, everything I told her. No, he was nice. He used to call and talk to me an hour and a half all the time. No, lately, when I come back from the hospital, and I could not talk too much, then she call up, she came, she brought me a kugel, ready made. She want to cook for me. I said, "I don't eat much. My daughter cooked already chicken soup." It's not so heavy to cook, you know? I told her how, and she made it. And she prepare everything. She went back to school. She wake up early.

**INT:** I just want to ask you if there's anything else you'd like to add to this interview. Is there anything else you'd like to say about how the Holocaust has affected you in your life?

**ESTHER:** Very much, because the time from the war, when we was sitting shiva in our house, came a rabbi with a son from (?) And...(crying) I can't talk. And...don't close it. And he said to, because they was my aunt's brother-in-law, the rabbi. You see, we all came from high society. And the cousin lives in...in Hadera, and she wears a sheitel. All the cousins wearing sheitelen. I don't wear a sheitel. Because my father wasn't Hasidic.

**INT:** He was more modern, yeah.

**ESTHER:** He was **better** like Hasidic. He got a good heart. They come for, like somebody came, she said, "My husband's working, and he didn't bring the pay, and it's Yom Tov, I want to buy for my kids shoes." My father said, "Bring the kids, I'll give you shoes. And whenever you have money, you pay." Is this not better like to be Hasidic?

**INT:** Than to be religious. Yeah.

**ESTHER:** Do you understand? You have a heart. Oh, he was davening, too. My father never missed Mincha and Maariv. He always went. You know, I was, my mother stayed in store. Then he always said. In the morning he davened. My mother opened the store. You see, we came from a Hasidic family. And I always keep kosher. Even the time from the war, we never touch a piece of meat. Never.

One time, my sister was sick. The sister, G-d bless her. You see? I save her. I was very young. When I was eleven in Poland, I worked already. My father taught me.

**INT:** Right. You told me that.

**ESTHER:** Sweep up the store, do something. What I want to tell you is very important. Then she became like pneumonia, my sister. And she's in...near Tel Aviv. Holon, she lives with her husband. She have three daughters and grandchildren. Five grandchildren, G-d bless her. What I want to say, guess what? The doctor told me, it was a lady doctor, and she became my friend. And I don't know why, she saw me wearing on a Shabbas, I put on a nice dress with flowers, like you have flowers, and go over to my aunt. You know, Shabbas we didn't do nothing. We talked. Then I went over, and she saw me with the dress, and she ask me, "Esther, lend me the dress. I want to go out for a date."

(END TAPE NINE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE NINE, SIDE TWO)

**ESTHER:** Then I said to her, "Please, help me. Help my sister. Take her from the hospital." She said yes. She sent a doctor from the hospital, and came with like an ambulance, or with a car, I don't remember. And they took my sister. She was three months in that hospital, because she was like lung. She didn't got cancer. She was like lung sick. You know, she was very ill. And I remember, the following day, I didn't see my sister. My mother went every day to see the daughter. Was very far. It was like fifteen miles. And my mother walked there. She was young. The time from the war, my mother was forty. You see, that's what. And then I took the two dresses, the flower dresses, and another dress, and I bring over to the doctor. She was like in the cleaning, the Russian cleaning. And I told her, I said, "This is a gift for you. And if you want to keep the both dresses for you. Or give the other doctor who hold my sister." And guess what? They took the sister, they give her the best medicine, because she give one dress for the doctor, and one doctor, she's also a doctor. She took one dress for herself. See, and those dresses, I didn't got money, save my sister. And that's when she called me up, she said to me, "Esther, I miss you. You must come." And when my mother die, they talk like, they talk like all the time I'm their mother, because when I was seeing little kids, I was just bringing food for no love. I took off my watch, I took off my earrings. Everything, just to bring food, the kids shall not be hungry. I even fight with my mother one time in my life, in Russia. I was so young. I was sixteen. And I said, "You know, (?)" (Yiddish) Make them kosher, and G-d forgive you, it's war time, and take potatoes, and make a piece of soup.

**INT:** That's more important. Yeah.

**ESTHER:** Because my sister was sick. That's why I told her. I was mad. Do you imagine? And you know, after I came, she said to me, my mother, "Esther, Mamele, (Yiddish)" Because my sister...you know, in Poland, if somebody sick in lungs, you're allowed to eat chazzer, too.

**INT:** Yeah, sure. To save your life.

**ESTHER:** Save your life. Then it's not written in the Bible. No, it's written if you're sick, you can go on Shabbas to a doctor.

**INT:** Yeah, sure. Of course.

**ESTHER:** You see? That's what I'm trying to tell you. At that time, I fight the first time with my mother for that. Because she could die. It's a good thing I got the two dresses. I was money for the lady, I help her out. I was from eleven year old working for her, also for three years, till the war. And...I used to come. And she liked me because I was honest. I used to put the money in my (?) because she didn't want to open the register. Maybe she got no money, and she didn't know it. When I come, sell it, I count up, and I told her everything what I sold. I mark it down. I mark it down in Polish. You know? She shall see it. Or Jewish. I write Jewish, too. And I mark it down and I show her. "This I sold, this I sold..." She said this is laying six years by me and nobody sold it. You sold it. I sold it, I make always money, and she feed the baby. Because she got a little boy. That's why I went to work for her. Till the war.

**INT:** All right. Well, I want to thank you very, very much for...

**ESTHER:** For what?

**INT:** For all your time, and telling some very painful things, I'm sure.

**ESTHER:** Very painful, yeah.

**INT:** But it's very important what you did, and I want to thank you very much.

**ESTHER:** Believe me, this is not enough. Can make two books.

**INT:** (laughs) Yeah.

**ESTHER:** Whatever I have to say, you see what I went through. No, thank G-d, here, I'm lucky. When I come into the New Americans, it's like a princess comes to the place. Maybe I look young. Everybody, "Hi, Esther," and they hug me and kiss me. Not one person, ladies and men. Because I never owe them money. I always pay my check, you know, like in synagogue. I come in synagogue, you know how many honors I have? Always they honor me. As a matter of fact, here is Conservative. Women don't go to the pulpit. No, what I gonna tell you, I come the same with the men. When I come, they start davening.

**INT:** They wait for you?

**ESTHER:** I know the time. And that's why I come all the time. 7:00. I pick up the clock in case, I wake up 7:00, 6:30 always. Sometimes (Yiddish) you know? Then I put on the clock to wake me up 7:00. A quarter before 7:00. Then I take a shower, dress myself. I take vitamins, the medicine, and I make a cup of coffee. I warm up the, all the time this. But now, because I'm



sick, I warm up a cup of milk, and put to the corn flakes, and I put raisins. And I make a cereal, and I make coffee, and I go in synagogue. I never ate, because I have to take so many medicine. Then G-d forgive me. I always understand, because my grandfather used to tell me. "When a person's sick, you got to do everything for them."

**INT:** Well, I want to thank you very much.

**ESTHER:** You're welcome.

(END OF INTERVIEW)