Interviewee: Paula Bultz
Date: April 28th, 2013

Z- So let's begin the day you were born . . .

P- Well, my name is Paula. My maiden name is Minsky, and my married name is Boltz. And I go under the name of Paula Boltz. I was born November 24th in 1935. And I was born in Warsaw. My family comes from Poland. My family had lived in Poland for four generations. And so my mother, my grandmother, and I were all born in Poland. And the . . . I was not quite four when the war broke out.

Z- So talk to me about you mother a little bit and you father, what they did. Were you an only child?

P- Well so far I had been an only child, yes. And so, the day . . . Our family, my grandparents, I didn't know them, I don't remember them, but from what I know that my mother used to tell me . . . I mean everything that I know from before is everything that I learned from my mother. My grandparents were what my mother referred to as traditional Jews. Today they would probably be called Orthodox. My mother was the youngest of 8 children. She had five brothers and two sisters. And the older children followed in my grandparents' footsteps, but the others chose their own way of life. For my parents, biblical religious didn't mean all that much, but they were very immersed in Yiddish culture and Yiddish [0:02:30]; and very supportive of Jewish writers, and poets, and Jewish theatre and so on.

Z- What did they speak?

P- Polish.

Z- So no Yiddish?

P- No. My parents were neighbors and they knew each other all their life. And the way my mother tells the story is that there was never a time when she wasn't in love with my father, but my father didn't know she existed until she was 17. Well, if you knew my mother you would know that that couldn't be possible, that he just chose to say that he didn't know her.

Z- Because?

P- Because he was five years older, and you know, they were growing up and I suppose having girlfriends was not the style then. So that's what happened. When she was 17 they finally got together. And my mother had a sister who, her eldest sister, who I will speak about later, lived in another part of Warsaw. So when my father would go into Warsaw, to like the downtown part, she made sure that he takes her along and brings her to her sister's place. So this way my mother maneuvered that they should be together without him really realizing what was happening to him. So both my parent went to Polish school, so they were fluent in Polish, and Polish was the language that they spoke.

Z- So even though her parents were traditional they sent her to a regular— they didn't send her to a Jewish school?

P- No. My mother was very well versed in Jewish traditions and so on because she learned from home. And my father, from what I understand, was sent to [0:04:37], but then the teacher who wasn't too nice to him, he hit him, and so my grandfather decided that he wasn't going—my father was an only child—so he decided he wasn't going to send him there. He was sent to Polish school. So both of them could function in the Polish culture as well as the Yiddish culture. The Yiddish they chose for themselves. So like really was a plus afterwards.

Z- So how much education did they have?

P- Well, my mother finished public school and then she went to [0:05:19], which was part high school and part learning a trade. [same as 0;05:19] school like they have all over the place, in North America as well.

Z- What was the trade?

P- My mother learned how to sew lingerie and all this fine work with the laces and so on. And she also would make [0:05:44], and to embroider. She would embroider all those pillow cases and whatever came as part of a [same as 0:05:44]. My mother was very talented, very artistic, very creative, which helped her later on. So . . . I should have brought . . . I didn't know that you want to start that way, otherwise I would have brought some photographs. As I said, my father was an only child because my grandmother had mother children but either they died before they were born or died right after. So my father was the only child. And symbolically they named him Chaim, life. Because . . . And they didn't expect him to survive, but he did. So, in the summer my mother's family would get together in the country and I have some photographs of us in the country, I didn't bring them. I don't remember much about that because I was of course very young. The last photograph I have is the summer of 1939.

Z- Before we go there, what did your father do? What was his education?

P- Well he also went to public and he finished at public school. And I really don't know that much about my father because my mother never felt comfortable to talk about it.

Z- Do you know what he worked at?

P- No.

Z- Okay, that's okay. But your mother did work when you were young?

P- Yeah. Yeah.

Z- Would you say they were working-class? Middle-class? Would you know that?

P- They were probably middle-class.

Z- They did okay?

P- Yeah. They had a very rich cultural life. So, my earliest memory is of the summer of 1939 when the whole family got together. And all my cousins were older than I was because, you know, my mother was the youngest, and so I was always the youngest.

Z- And you were 4?

P- I was not yet 4, I was 3 ½. And it was the summer of 1939, and I vaguely remember how my cousins used to play skipping rope. At that time it was this long rope and you had two people turning the rope, and they did their fancy footwork. So they would let me hold the very end of the rope. And sometimes when they were playing hide and seek one of them would take me along with them to hide and so on. So these are the only memories that I have. At the end of the summer everybody went home because all the other children had to get ready to go to school in September, and since I was not in school yet my mother decided to remain in the country. And so, one day when I was playing with a little neighbor girl a Polish woman passed by with her horse and carriage and called out to me, "Little girl go tell your mother that your father just got off the train." And so I did. And if I close my eyes I can still feel the energy with which my mother was holding my hand as we walked along this narrow path to the train station. And walking towards us was my father.

Z- And you remember this?

P- I remember that very distinctly, yes. And my father wasn't the same man that I remember walking very straight and proud, and when he saw me he would stretch out his arms. But he was walking sort of sad looking, hunched up. And when we met my parents spoke in very low voices, and when we came to the house we packed up. I don't know if it was the same day or the next day that we went back to Warsaw. My parents at that point I remember spoke in very hushed voices, and even if you're 3 ½ and you don't know what's going on in the world, you certainly know that something is not right in your home.

Z- They spoke Polish to each other as well.

P- Polish was the language that we spoke at home. With their friends I think they also spoke Yiddish, because they had Yiddish-speaking friends.

Z- Did they speak Russian?

P- No.

Z- Okay.

P- When we came back to Warsaw, I don't remember if it was a few days later, the three of us went to an assembly place where there were other families like us. We parted with my father because my father served in the Polish army. So now he was called up to came and join his army.

Z- How old were your parents at that point in'39?

P- my mother was born in 1913 and my father I'm told was 5 years older.

Z- So 1908.

P- So we said goodbye to my father and he left. And I remember that it couldn't have been a train, because usually when you leave on a train you stand on the platform and you wave and the train goes either this way or that way. But my father was moving away from us. And his silhouette was getting smaller and smaller as we waved. And that was the last time that I saw my father, because my father was killed very early on in the war.

Z- On the front?

P- Yes.

Z- As a soldier.

P- As a soldier, yes. So he must have been going either on a boat, or on a truck, I don't know. They were moving away from us. My mother and I went back to our apartment in Warsaw and after a while the war started in earnest. And Warsaw, that's the capital, was being bombed. It was being bombed all the time. I understand now that if the capital is going to be destroyed the idea is that, you know, the whole country will fall. But of course I didn't know it them. And there were bombings. And I don't know how my mother knew, whether she heard on the radio or just by instinct, she knew when we had to run down to a shelter. Because before bombing took place there was a siren and, you know, so she sort of figured out that our area was going to be bombed, and if it wasn't we would remain at the apartment. And one day when she decided that we weren't going to go down to a shelter, it became obvious that the area where we were living was going to be bombed. So we very quickly put on our coasts. And I had this red coat with the white little fur collar, and I stuck my feet into a pair of white rain-boots. All this was prepared in front of the door always, and we ran downstairs. By the time we came downstairs the planes were already flying. And so, we didn't have enough time to go to a shelter so we just crossed the street, and we remained standing under an archway that connected two buildings. So the architecture in Warsaw is a little bit different than it is here because you have like some buildings that are connected by archways or gates, and when you go through the gate there is a courtyard, and there are apartments built all around the courtyard. So we ran across the street and we remained standing under this archway. And the bombing of that day was so severe that little pieces of cement started falling. And so my mother took me in front of her and held me with one arm against her, and then she bent over to the wall of the archway and at a moment when the planes were not flying and it was quiet, she said to me, "Something is

going to happen and we'll fall. And I'll fall on top of you, but when it gets very quiet you crawl out from under me. And if I'm sleeping don't wake me, and don't cry, just sit and wait until your uncle is going to come and get you." So I understood what my mother was saying, but at 3 ½ I didn't know about death and I didn't understand the message that my mother was giving me. So as you see my mother thought that with her body she was going to be able to protect me from bombs. Well, when the bombing stopped we came out onto the sidewalk just in time to see the walls of our apartment collapsing, and there was also fire inside. And I remember standing next to my mother and asking her why is everything red. Why is my bed red? Why is . . . my toys, and my books, everything is red. We remained standing. I didn't know what a fire like this would mean. So we stood and watched as everything was destroyed and we remained just with what we had on. We went to live with my mother's eldest sister who lived in a part of Warsaw that was across the river, because Warsaw like Montreal is a city divided by a river. And she lived on the other side of the river that was much more residential than the area where we were living. So when we came to my aunty my mother sewed a little pouch from leather, the kind of pouch that sometimes when you buy jewelry you get the little pouch. And she made two holes on top, she put a shoelace through it. She put it around my neck, and inside she put in a little piece of paper on which was written my name, my date of birth, and Warsaw. She told me I'm never, ever to let anybody take that off my neck until I learn how to read and memorize what it says there.

So the war was going on and you know there was chaos in Warsaw. And I remember my mother always wanting to protect me, that after we would come out of a shelter and there would be people that were obviously wounded or killed on the sidewalk, and so I would ask my mother, "Why are these people lying on the sidewalk." So she wanted to retain this innocent children's world for me and she said, "Well they're tired, they're resting, they were running just like us." We were running to the shelter. So they were resting. She would always shield me from these sights. So the war was in full swing in Warsaw and food was becoming very difficult to obtain. And also we started seeing the restrictions that were put on Jews. So there was a curfew, Jews could not be out at a certain time of day. They couldn't be out in the morning or the evening. And there was also a restriction on when they could go and buy food. And somehow when the Jews went to shop for food, food disappeared. So my mother who was blonde and blue-eyed and had a fair complexion and could very well mix in a Polish crowd, dared to go to a different area of the city where she knew she wouldn't be recognized, she wouldn't be known. And she pretended to be Polish and this way she would be able to buy food.

Z- And that's where her Polish education, they way she spoke Polish . . .

P- Came in, yeah. She knew all the nuances, she grew up with them. Although I knew that we had Polish neighbors, I never heard my parents talking about having Polish friends, close friends. So that's where of course her education and her acculturation to the Polish society—yeah. So that was going on and of course ever since our house burned down me mother never ever left me alone. Anywhere she went she always took me along. So one day when we were standing in line for food a uniformed man came in with his rifle pointed and he was shouting, and although I didn't know what he was shouting then, I know now

that he was shouting Żyd Żyd [not sure if I'm spelling that correctly – sounds like 'U-da'], which means Jew. And eventually somebody came out of the line and pointed at another woman—that she was Jewish. And obviously they caught on that this was happened, that some Jews would stand in line to buy food. And then another woman came out of the line and pointed to another one. And they started beating up on these Jewish woman, so at that point my mother and I we left the store. And when we came back home my mother said that she no longer wants to stay in Warsaw. She had heard about things that were happening before that to Jews in German and she doesn't have a good felling about it, so she says she wants to leave. And where she was going to go is to this family who lived in [0:21:28], which is in the eastern part of Poland and with whom she had stayed at the time when my father was serving in the army and she would go to visit him. So she stayed with this Jewish family.

Z- They were just friends?

P- Yeah. I don't think at that time they had hotels or that my mother would chose to stay in a hotel, you stayed with a family. And so, we started out to go to the eastern part of Poland, and of course it was a lot of bombing on the way and we had to get off the train. Then we'd get on the train, some people were hit by a bomb and were killed. We kept loosing our things in this chaos that was at the time. And at one point there were also uniformed men came up on the train and asked for identification papers. And I don't know what my mother had whether she had passport of whatever, but she had identity papers. And when they looked at it they said, well these are Polish papers and now you're crossing into Russia. Because that part of Poland was now occupied by Russia. And so he said, Well you have to give up your papers. My parents were so nationalistic, and they loved Poland, Poland was there country. There was no way my mother would give up her papers and become Russian. So they said, well then you can't continue any further, you have to stay and wait in the train station until a train was going back, and you have to go back. So we got off and we were in the train station a few days, and there was no train going back.

In the meantime other people came, like us, came into this station and they said, you know, under no circumstances should you go back, because there are terrible things happening. So my mother eventually heard about a Polish farmer who for a fee was taking people across the boarder. So she met with him and she paid him to cross two people. And when we came on the arranged day and the time, there is my mother with this 4 year old child. So the farmer got very angry with her saying that why didn't she tell him that the second person was a child, because he would have never taken us. He said, you know, what it means to cross a borderer illegally with a child. Well he . . . you know the farmer, I guess he could have shot us, he could have done whatever he wanted with us, nobody would have known, but he was a decent man obviously and he took us to his farm. And he had like a whole group of people that he was going to cross the borderer with. And while he put all the adults into his barn, he took me into his house. He told me not to go close to the window, not to open the door, and if I heard any kind of commotion outside I should get into bed and cover myself. And if I'm found in the bed then I should pretend I'm very sick. And of course that was the first time I was told to lie.

Z- You were 4 then?

P- Yeah. I was 4, I just turned 4 because it was the winter and my birthday is November 24th, the end of November. So . . . Well, if you know what a Polish bed looks like you know Polish people sleep on a lot of feather pillows, and they have these big feather beds that cover themselves. And I suppose a little girl could very easily hide in a bed like that. We were there a few days, and our leaving the farm had something to do with the moon. I still don't know whether it was supposed to be a full moon to illuminate where we were going, or there should be no moon at all . . .

Z- So no one can see you.

P- Yeah. When they have the patrols, you know, going patrolling the borderer that we shouldn't be seen. But the day before we left, the day of when we were leaving at night, the farmer called in my mother and he asked her to leave me with him. And that he could always say that I'm a member of his family who live in the city, and since the war is on and city life is not so good, so they send me to live on the farm. And he said to my mother, Well when you go back you can always pick her up. But my mother wouldn't hear about it, so we started out. And of course I didn't get very far and we had to all stay together because you couldn't leave me behind. And so . . .

Z- So you were walking across?

P- We were walking, we had to walk through a forest as well. And I remember the branches hanging down, and was I going to be able to keep up with a group of adults. So he had some kind of equipment with him pretending that if he's caught of course he would say he didn't know anything about these people, but he came to the forest to cut some trees. So he had a rope, and so he put the rope around his waist. He was wearing this heavy sheepskin jacket or coat. And he put a rope around his waist, he unbuttoned his jacket, and he picked me up. And with my legs around his waist and my arms around his neck he carried me across the borderer. That's how we crossed.

Z- So he was a very decent guy.

P- Yes. And so we eventually reached the family where my mother wanted to go to, and they welcomed us. Of course we didn't have very much, so we became part of their family and so on. And I know during that time my mother had met with my father twice, but we weren't there all that long when again uniformed men came in and they told us to get—gave us a few minute to get ready and to leave the house. My mother cried and pleaded with them to leave us, but they wouldn't hear about it. So we had to leave. When we came out there were many other people like us. We were all gathered up, we were marched to the train station, put on the train, and the doors were locked. We weren't told where we were going. And eventually, we were on this train, I know now that we were on the train about two weeks. And eventually where we ended up was in Siberia. The trip to Siberia was really an awful trip. We weren't given anything to eat or drink. What we had was only what we took with us. There were no bathroom facilities so the train would stop, you know,

once or twice a day in an isolated area and the doors would be opened and we could get of the train. And everybody did his business right there where you stood. All modesty was gone, it was men and women and children and so on. Well eventually we arrived to the place where we were being taken. And the doors opened and we were let out. And there was again, we were again met by uniformed men and there was a lot of shouting. And what they were shouting is that, This is your home for the rest of your life. Of course, at that time nobody ever returned from Siberia. I mean Siberia was a place, a god forsaken, frozen corner of the world. It was just one labor camp after another, one prison after another. And so, they . . . So, actually they wanted to take . . . The officials wanted to take me away and they would have sent me off to a children's home or an orphanage, but again my mother wouldn't part with me. So there was no fuss made. We were counted off, 8 to 10 people, and marched to a barrack. And we were put in a labor camp. The work at that camp was cutting trees, and it was very, very primitive. They had like a saw and one person was holding each end, and they were just . . saw the tree off. And also when we came the adults were given typical Siberian clothes of quilted pants, and quilted jacket, and felt boots. And they were marched to work. So . . .

Z- What happened to you?

P- Well, I stayed home all by myself waiting until my mother came home. They were fed at work, so in the morning they would be given a cup of hot water and a slice of bread. And then during the day they would be given a cup of soup and a slice of bread. And of course there wasn't much that my mother could bring home for me, and I wasn't getting food because I wasn't working and as far as they were concerned I guess I didn't exist. So my mother had to get a second job in order to get a second food ration to feed me. So the job that she got was working in the health clinic after working in the forest. And she was a cleaning lady. Of course they didn't have any detergents or anything. My mother had to get down on her knees and scrub the floor with this little dull knife. So she would take me along when she went for the second job. And the Russian woman who was in charge of the health and wellbeing of this camp felt sorry for my mother, and eventually she found her a job in a children's home. So my mother was able to take me along to work with her in the morning. And at least we were indoors where it wasn't so cold. Because of course in Siberia the climate is that it's like 50-55 below 0 everyday. So now we were indoors and also the food was pretty plentiful. Because in Russia, unlike in Poland that by then was occupied by the Germans, in Russia children are valued. They are seen as the future and they're valued, so children are better fed than anybody else, and looked after better than anybody else. So food was adequate, but the only thing is because I Polish I wasn't allowed to mix with the other children. At the age of four I don't know how they thought I can influence these children. So I stayed in the kitchen in the corner. I would sit all day in the corner. And I remember I had a piece of string, and I would play with that piece of string because for all intensive purposes I wasn't allowed to there. And there were very frequent inspections to make sure that, you know, the children were looked after and they are fed well and they are clean and so on. So somehow the woman used to signal one another when an inspector was coming, so the women in the kitchen would hide me in the closet where they kept their pails and their brooms. And when the inspection was over I would come out of the closet.

Z- Did you learn Russian?

P- No, I didn't speak to anybody. We weren't mixing with the Russians because this whole camp was people like us.

Z- Jews?

P- No only Jews, but Poles as well. Pole who the Russians felt were, you know, either rich people who had a business or they were politically not in tune with the Russian, so yeah there were Poles as well. But there were quite a large group of Jews. So this was our daily work in the . . . Back where we were there were bed against the wall and a table with two benches and that was all. It was very cold, and most of the time we didn't get undressed to go to bed. Eventually of course we developed lice and there were bed bugs and so on. Again, the people that we were with were . . . some of the people my mother knew from before the war, from Warsaw. And they sort of created a click and they had this social group, and a social interaction. And one thing that they never lost hope [in] is that they were going to return. No matter what they were going to return to Warsaw. There were also many people who died in the camp. They either froze to death or they died or disease or malnutrition. And I always had these people that were disappearing on me, because you know, we would wake up in the morning and they were dead. And by the time we came back they were gone, then new people came. So I always had these people that were disappearing on me. That became like a normal thing.

Z- And you were there for how long?

P- We were there for a year and a half. And after a year and a half we were told that we can leave. We didn't know why at the time, but I know now that the Germans were attacking Russia and they were really loosing the war at that point, the Russians. So what they decided to do is let all people like us out. And they formed a Polish army unit attached to the Russian army, and so they let us out. They gave us back our Polish citizenship and we were free to leave.

Z- So this was sometime in '41?

P- After '41, yes. We were there about a year and a half.

Z- So you were 5 and a half then.

P- Yeah, yeah. So then of course my mother wanted to go back to Warsaw, she had her whole family there. But that wasn't possible. We also couldn't go to the part that was Russia, to any large city or anything. We were able to go to some of the areas that were part of the Soviet Union. One area that we were allowed to go was to Asia. So this whole group that, you know, we were together, decided that that's where we were going to go. We had a few choices, but that we were going to go to Asia. Because of course Asia in everybody's mid is a place where it's warm and at least we weren't going to suffer from the

cold. And if it's warm and the sun is shinning, there's lot's of food, you know, fruits and vegetables are growing so we weren't going to suffer from hunger. And so this is where we went, and when we came, we ended up in a country called Uzbekistan, which is of course bordering Afghanistan now. So when we came there my mother felt that . . . It was a terrible shock to her to be in that kind of culture and lifestyle that Uzbeks have. And she felt that she lost all her survival skills. But I as a child have good memories of being in Uzbekistan. We were assigned to live in a village, and Uzbeks live in mud huts, and there were four or five huts with a garden, and fruit trees growing and so on, but . . . [cell phone rings]

J- So how did you get there? Did you walk?

P- No, trains. It was all trains.

Z- How did you have money?

P- You didn't pay for the train. You just got on. You were pushed in like sardines and it wasn't like a passenger train that had a seat or anything. They were freight trains. And they pushed in as many as could get it. I don't remember buying a ticket. You just appeared at the train station and if you were lucky you got on the train.

Z- So you were in these huts with little gardens . . .

P- Yeah, and so this little compound there were two Uzbek women living there with their female children, and apparently they were the wives of one Uzbek man who must have been very wealthy because he had a third wife. And this wife gave birth to a son for him, so he spent most of his time with that wife. And this whole menagerie was managed by an elderly woman who apparently was the sister of this man. And my mother and I had one of these huts. The huts where all made of mud, the floor, the walls, everything. There was a little window and the door. The Uzbek don't have any furniture, and they sleep on the floor, but they have like piles of carpets that they inherit from generations and also that they weave themselves, and they sleep on the carpet. The hut is sort of divided into two parts; the part where they were living and also the part where they were eating. And that part didn't have as many carpets. And they also don't use any utensils. And they eat very little in the day, their main mean is in the evening, where everyone sits around and the pot is just tilted from one person to the other.

Z- And what would they eat? Stews?

P- They ate rice. They had this one dish that they cooked this rice, they called pilaf. With a little bit of vegetables and lamb meet.

Z- Sounds very Afghani, Persian type of food.

P- yeah. And they don't use any utensils and when the pot was tilted towards you, you got food into your hand and then with your thumb you pushed it into your mouth. It sounds

savage, but it was not. It's very orderly and very cultural. I doesn't make a bad impression, you know, because it's really very orderly.

Z- So is Uzbekistan in the mountains?

P- It is.

Z- So it could get cold, right?

P- Yeah. Of course this was a misconception that it was warm and there was plenty of food, there wasn't. And the children in Uzbekistan are part of the economic unit of the family, so they have jobs. Not jobs outside, there are no factories or anything, but they have responsibilities withing the family. So why did I say that I have good memories, it's because when we came we got settled and the children of the village just embraced me. And I became part of the group of kids, the village kids.

Z- And what did they speak?

P- They spoke Uzbeki.

Z- Which is a Russian . . . or?

P- No. It sounds more like Arabic.

Z- So did you learn that? Obviously.

P- yes. Of course. And somehow it didn't matter that here I was this child with blue eyes and a fair complexion and I spoke Polish and they spoke Uzbeki. But they embraced me and I followed them and did the things that they were doing. Being with children is what children need I guess.

Z- It's normal.

P- Yeah and they don't, obviously, need a language to communicate. They can communicate in other ways.

Z- What did your mother do?

P- Since that was now part of Russia they had certain amounts of things that they produced. Whether it was the milk from the cows or the fruits or the vegetables, they had to give to the communal organization. So, food was scarce. The only thing is that they Uzbeks they had, let's say, food from one season to another, they knew how to preserve. As I said they slept on the carpets, and we had nothing, we had to sleep on the bare floor. But eventually my mother went to the side of the mountain and she would collect dry twigs and grasses and she brought this home and she put it on the floor. That's what we slept on. Because I

was part of this group of kids who did all the work that the children were supposed to do, I would get asked to come and eat with them in the evening.

Z- What was your mother's name?

P- Bella.

Z- Bella Minsky.

P- Yeah. And so, eventually my mother was in a way horrified that . . . she said someday she's going to get back to Warsaw, and she's going to bring back the Asiatic child. And so she started spending her free time with me telling me about life in Warsaw, telling me about what it was like, telling me about the theatres that they used to go to, and the opera. As I told you, my mother was very artistic and very talented, and she painted these beautiful pictures for me of life in Warsaw.

Z- Did she teach you to read? To write?

P- No there was nothing, no books, there was nothing. And she made me repeat the stories of the books that I had before the war, which were like these rhymes and children's stories. They weren't that much different than the Dr. Seuss book. Very colorful and so on. And my mother had a very beautiful singing voice, so she would sing songs and so on. So she tried to keep alive for me that part of life.

Z- Polish culture.

P- So my mother what she was doing there, they were growing cotton. So all these people like us who came, you know, who were let out from Siberia . . .

Z- Refugees of sorts.

P-Yes, refugees. We weren't immigrants, that's for sure. We were refugees. So she would be in the field picking the cotton when it became ripe to be picked, and then it was sent off to be processed.

Z- So you didn't learn all that time, no reading or . . . with the children?

P- No. No. Eventually my mother heard that not far away from the village where we lived there was a town and they had quite a large population of Polish people. This was Polish and Jews, you know, there you weren't separated by being Jewish. You were Polish and that was it. So eventually we made our way to that town, and sure enough there was quite a large western population there. They even had an organization to help Polish citizens.

Z- So what year was that? Do you remember? So do you know how long you were in the little village? A year?

P- Probably. I can only tell by the seasons, you know, we were there a summer season, we were there a winter season. So, you know, established ourselves in this town, and as I said there was this Polish organization to give help to Polish citizens. I don't know where they got them, might have been getting stuff from England. And they also organized a unit of Polish soldiers to go fight with the Russians. So these men were given uniforms, and part of the uniform was the shirt that they were given, it's something that the Russians wear. It's sort of like a long shirt with no collar. And at one time, a number of years ago it was very popular here, but to a Polish officer to wear a shirt without a collar was a disgrace. I mean you had to be really, really poor to –you have to understand the nuances—you had to be really, really poor to wear a shirt without a collar. So this was a big embarrassment to them. So what my mother caught onto the idea . . . that she borrowed a sewing machine from a Uzbeki woman and she cut off the bottom part of the shirt and she made for them a collar. And then she became creative and she also made them a tie. So now they had a collar and they had a tie. And the she did it for the soldiers as well. First it was just for the officers. And for that they would give us a food ration that they received from the military. And so, our life was a little bit better. There was also there a Polish school, middle of Asia, because there was enough Polish children. My mother went to register me at the school, but one of the things that you had to have is a pair of shoes in order to go to sschool. And I no longer had any shoes because the ones I had before I outgrew, and in Uzbekistan I was like all the other kids running around in bare feet. So my mother went to this organization and they gave her a pair of shoes, but they weren't children's shoes. Of course I don't think that in times like that, you know, much attention is given to children's needs or anything. So, you know, it was a pair of adults shoes and I was 7 years old by then. So my mother stuck paper into the toes of the shoes and I didn't have any socks so she wrapped my feet in rags, and off to school I went. Well, school is in the fall, and although there wasn't any snow it rained a lot. Nothing is paved there, no roads, no sidewalks, and the consistency of the earth is such that it's almost like clue when all this got wet. So on the way to school I got stuck and I couldn't pull my foot out from the mud. And eventually I pulled, and pulled, and eventually my foot came out, but the shoes remained, and I couldn't pull out the shoe. So when I went back afterwards with my mother to where I got stuck, the shoe was gone. So now I didn't have any shoes and I wouldn't be given another pair of shoes, so that was the end of my schooling. It was very, very short.

And the war was sort of coming to an end, and they started to . . . Where we lived in this town, it was called [0:54:27], and there was a train station. Obviously it was some kind of an important town that there was a train station. And we began to see Russian soldiers coming back from the front. And one didn't have a leg, and one didn't have an arm, and one had a head bandage, and one had a patch over the eye. And they were the ones who started telling us how terrible the war was, but nobody believed them. They figured, well you know, they got shot, and they got wounded, and they didn't come back these big heroes, so they have to tell you that it was a terrible war. And all this time we really didn't know what was happened. So then the war was— The reason why children used to go to train station is when the train stopped they would throw out, the train at that time was fueled by coal, so they would throw out the little pieces of coal and then fill up again. So sometimes it wasn't only ashes, it was also pieces of coal. And children would pick up these pieces of coal, and then were using that for fuel. So eventually the war came to an end.

Z- In ’44 for Russia.

P- Yeah. ’44 came . . . or maybe it was the beginning of ’45, the war came to an end. And the official, I suppose that’s like what we would call the mayor of the town, sent a message to my mother that he wanted to see her. What he wanted is that now the war is over they have a lot of these parties to celebrate, that he wanted my mother should sew a dress for his wife. And although my mother wasn’t a dressmaker, she was used to sewing these fine things. She made a dress for her, and he called her again because he said he was very pleased because his wife looked beautiful and, you know, how does my mother want that he should reward her. So she told him, Well you can give me permission to leave. So he said, Where do you want to go? She said, I want to go back home. So he said, well you know it’s impossible. Because they weren’t letting out people like us, because here we had been people who were in Siberia. We knew life in Siberia and we knew what it was like. And at that time . . . As the soldiers said when we first got there, This is your home for the rest of your life. Nobody came out of Siberia. So they really didn’t know what to do with us, and you know, we weren’t allowed to go. So he said to my mother, Well I can’t give you permission to go back to Poland, but if you want to leave here I’ll give you a permit to leave this area here. So, the way my mother tells it is that when he was sitting at his desk, there was this big map in the back of him, so my mother spotted the name of a tiny little town that was already across the boarder from Russia, it was already in Poland. So she said, Well I’d like to go there. So he didn’t check her and he gave her a permit to leave. Well the next day we were on the train . . .

Z- Freight train?

P- Freight train. That was a trip from hell.

Z- How long did it take?

P- Well, it took a long time. Must have taken 10 days, two weeks maybe. And ther freight train didn’t have of course a roof. We were pushed in, it was mostly Poles who were on the train with us, very few Jews.

Z- And it was winter?

P- It was the fall. And we were pushed in . . . unbelievable, we were practically one on top of the other. And of course no seats, you sat on the floor with your packages. And if somebody wanted to lie, the next person had to get up for that person to be able to lie down, to stretch out. Again, there were no bathroom facilities, there was a pail in front of the door where everybody used and it would spill over and . . . It was so terrible because it rained a lot and when it rained we got all wet. And then when the sun came out we started drying out and the smell was just terrible. There were many people who died and this journey back home. And again we weren’t given any food, it was only what we had with us. And so, of course nobody changed, nobody washed, nobody brushed there teeth, so you can

imagine what it was like. Eventually we came to a place where we had to change trains, and then we were on a passenger train.

Z- So you were 9, 10?

P- I was 9. And the first city that we came to was Lwow, Lemberg. And it was there that we found out what the war was like. We didn't stay there very long because my mother was not familiar with that part of Warsaw, and it was also very close to Russia, it was the Ukraine. So after a very short time we left and we made out way to Krakow. And in Krakow when we came there it was '45, the end of '45 and there was already an organized Jewish community there of people who had been liberated in Europe, in Poland or Germany. They had a soup kitchen, they looked after us, and whoever came would register and they would try to find their relatives. One person was looking after another and so on. It was there that the full impact of what had happened hit my mother, and she lost it. She would walk on the street and attack people. She would shake them up and ask them, Did you see my bother? Did you see my sister? Because her family was such a large family . . .

Z- Did you find out about your father then?

P- Well, we found out in Russia. After quite a while we found out that he died. So she knew that my father wasn't coming back. So, we stayed in Krakow and eventually my mother passed by once a store, and they had lingerie in the window, there was some lingerie. So she went in and she asked if she can get a job. Apparently the store belonged to a Jewish person who during the war was taken over by his workers and after the war they gave it back to him. He survived and they gave it back to him. So my mother got a job working there. And for her first pay, I think they paid her everyday, and for the first pay she went and she bought two large breads. She came home and she put the two breads on the table. Well, why not one breads? Why not one bread and something else with it? So she said, No, I want us to eat bread as much as we want, and there should be some leftover for tomorrow. Because all this time we were always hungry. We never had enough food. And during that time my mother also remarried.

Z- So she obviously healed a little bit psychologically. And you weren't sick at all the whole time?

P- Oh, yeah sure. Like during the time we were in Asia I had typhoid fever, but I came out of it even though there was no medication or anything. You know, you either lived or you died. My mother and I also had malaria, we suffered from malaria, but once we left we were okay.

Z- Okay, so when did she remarry?

P- When we were in Krakow she remarried to somebody that, not that my mother knew him, but they had mutual friends. And he had lost is wife and child.

Z- What was his name?

P- Usher. [Sp?]

Z- Is that the Minsky or . . .?

P- Yeah.

Z- Okay so what was your father's name?

P- My biological father's name was Chaim Zucker [SP?].

Z- Zucker.

P- Which was really great because, you know, as a result of this marriage I have two brothers and they're married and have children, and married children.

Z- So what did Usher do?

P- He was a tailor. And while we were in Krakow—

Z- And he was from Krakow?

P- no. He was also from Warsaw. And while we were in Krakow I used to go not far from where we lived, there was a park, so I used to go to the park. And one day I came to the park and there was nobody there, and I couldn't understand why nobody was there. Well, I knew nothing of religion. I didn't know what being Jewish is, what being Jewish means. I knew that I was Jewish because I just knew that, you know, I was called [1:05:57], so I knew that this is part of me, but what it meant I didn't know. So I went to this park and one day there was nobody there and I couldn't understand. I was waiting around and no children came. I saw, a little off from the park on the side, there was this building. And people are going in and going and going to that building and nobody was coming out, so I became curious. So I went to see what's doing there. And that was a church, which I knew nothing about—a church. So there was a foyer and there was this figure of Jesus hanging on the wall, and it was this sad Jesus with this crown of thorns and his head, and he had a cut on the right side with blood kind of coming out. I mean it was paint, it wasn't a painting, but it was a statue.

Z- yeah, but for a child . . .

P- Yeah. So I went over to a woman and I asked her, "What is this place?" So she says, "Well this is a church, do you know about a church?" I said no. She says, "Are you Polish?" I said Yes. I didn't know that I was anything else but Polish. So she says, "And you don't know about a church?" I said no. She says, "And you mother never told you about a church?" No. And she says, "Do you know about Jesus?" I say, no. So she says, "Well you know . . ." she pointed at Jesus and she says, "Well you know, Jesus loves the little children and if there's anything that you want, you ask Jesus and you'll get it." So I said, " Well I don't think

so because we were very hungry, and if that was true my mother would have told me to ask Jesus, and if my mother didn't tell me than I don't believe it's true." So like I said, I didn't know how to read. And she asked me if I knew any prayers and of course I didn't. So she was reading her prayer book, and she got me to repeat it and then I saw how people would, there were these big doors to go into the actual church, and how people stuck their hand into this dish and they crossed themselves. And I looked in and I saw that they get down on their knees when the walk in, so I did the same thing. I stuck my hand into the holy water, and I crossed myself, and I went into the church on my knees. Eventually I sat down. It was a beautiful, beautiful service, the priest and all the boys after him were beautifully dressed, and they were singing. It was so colorful. I guess at that time the service was in Latin, so I didn't understand anything that was happening, so I suppose I got board after a while and I left.

Z- So what about school?

P- Well it was right after the war, it was '45, and you know, things were in turmoil. And like I said my mother wasn't from Krakow, didn't really know her way around or anything like this. So I didn't go to school. And so, when I came home I told my mother that I had been to an opera. So my mother said, well, you know, where did you go to an opera. So I told her [about] this beautiful ceremony, and how beautiful they were dressed and so forth. So my mother of course realized that I had gone to the church. And she figured that this woman eventually she was going to catch on that I was Jewish, and of course a child probably didn't go very far from the house, that they would come look for us. At the time anti-Semitism was so prevalent in Poland that really the life of Jews was threatened at the time. Because this woman kept on asking me are you sure you're Polish. Yes I'm Polish. And so on. So after that we packed up and left Krakow. And sure enough we heard afterwards that there were people who came to search for us. So she, you know, she must have talked to her family, talked it over and realized that I was Jewish. So we left and we went to Lodz. Lodz at that time had quite a large Jewish population, and we settled in Lodz. My father now found a friend of his who survived in Poland. He went through the concentration camps and he had a store, a men's clothing store, so my father went to work there.

Z- So Usher became your father?

P- Yeah. And our living accommodations were just absolutely terrible. We had this tiny little room and by now I had a brother and . . . they were just horrible.

Z- So there's 9 years, 10 years difference between you and your brother?

P- Yeah. And then I have another, he was born later—

Z- In Poland?

P- In Sweden. So one day my mother was . . . So when we were living in Lodz, I don't remember the address, but it was a room part of an apartment, obviously a beautiful apartment at one time. But the rooms had no doors and had no windows because

everything was taken off the frames to use for wood. So there was only the kitchen left and this tiny little room beside the kitchen, and the kitchen was already taken by somebody, so we had this tiny little room. And one day when my mother was walking on the street, she met a friend of my biological father's, who they were army buddies. He survived and he came back a decorated soldier. And, you know, when she brought him home he said, you know, you don't have to live like that. He says he is entitled to have an apartment. Because his wife and child also didn't survive, so he said that because he was single he was living in the army barracks. And he says, I can get an apartment for you, you're gonna become my family. So we did. We moved into this nice area. We had a nice apartment. And at that point my mother registered me for school.

Z- So was this '46?

P- '45, maybe the beginning of '46. We must have been about five or six Jewish children in this school. It became obvious that we were different. I mean we hadn't gone to school, we didn't know how to read, and they put us into school, and we didn't . . . Well I didn't know what a school was even. So the Polish kids would beat us you. Anyways, my mother went to speak to the principals and she told him. The message went around that there should be no fighting in the school. So there wasn't in the school, but you know, [they would] wait for us outside of the school, a block away, and they would beat us up then. So that was the end of my schooling again. My mother didn't send me back to the school.

So then there was this military parade. It was some kind of military holiday and there was a military parade. And this friend of my mother's was asked to walk with the Polish flag at the head of his army unit. And they later . . . He was found with his throat slit and a note attached to his body that, No Jew is going to walk with a Polish flag at the head of a Polish army unit. So after this my mother said, "Well Poland is no longer . . ." As much as she spoke with such love for Poland, for the country, such devotion, such loyalty. She said that's it Poland is no longer her country. And at that point we fled Poland.

Z- And where did you go?

P- We fled across the border to Germany and we ended up in a DP.

Z- Where?

P- Well first we were in Berlin, and after that— that camp was situated on a military base, so were like also accommodated in barrack with many people in, you know, in one barrack. There were just these beds, one next to the other, that we slept in. For our meals we went to the dinning room, and it was on the American zone so the food was sent in from the United States. I remember getting . . . They were using like the, you know, packaged foods. They used the instant potatoes, and there was something about these instant potatoes that didn't agree with me, and every time I ate I threw up. But what I remember is having this cornation evaporated milk.

Z- Was it sweet?

P- It was delicious. So . . . And then they decided that— They announced that they are going to open up a family camp. So, since we were a family we went to live in the other camp. It was in Heidenheim. And what this DP camp was was that they took part of this city and made the Germans leave, and they made this into a displaced people camp. So, you know, we lived in what we know here in Montreal as a fourplex. We had the upper floor, it was three rooms and a kitchen, and so us being a family, we got two rooms. [...] It was like living in North America in the suburb. They had gardens, and the flowers were growing . . .

Z- And school?

P- And we came in. So there was, you know, everything . . . the furniture was there. And in some places the table was even set for food. They were just chased out of this part. But now it was already, we were all Jews at that camp. So they started to organize themselves. There wasn't any school but there were teacher who got together the kids. Now we were taught Hebrew. Because they objective of the camp was that everybody should go to Israel. But the wouldn't take us to go to Israel because my mother and I had malaria, and at that time they had malaria in Israel as well. They hadn't yet cleaned up the swamps, so they had all those mosquitoes, so they wouldn't take us. So, yeah, so the Jewish community started getting organized and they had workshops and they had, you know . . . I remember piano teacher, in one house there was a piano, so there was a teacher that was teaching piano. And there were like all these children [...] Not all the children had parents, some of the parents . . . . They were like my mown age, and some of the children were picked up by uncles and aunts and, you know, there were a lot of orphans. I don't think there was any child that had two surviving parents. So we were getting these . . . Everything was supplied for us; our clothes, and our food. Everything was supplied to us by the Americans. But life in the DP was very chaotic. Here you had these young people like in their 20s I suppose, who missed their whole teenage life and they, you know, survived, and they were wild, you know. It was just such a chaotic life. You know, people who had come out of death camps, you know, in the park they set up a few boards and they had dancing every night. They had somebody coming with an accordion and there was dancing every night. I mean is that normal to come out of such hell and . . . They used to come, entertainer from the United States used to come also, used to put up plays, and singing, and from New York, the Jewish actors.

Z- How long were you there?

P- My mother, you know, my mother . . . My parent were very independent people and proud people and my mother said, you know, this is not our life. This is not where she wanted to bring up children. She said, you know, look at this life—it immoral. This is where I first learned the word immoral.

Z- What was the language you spoke in the DP camp?

P- In our home we spoke Polish, but there were people there from all over. In the fourplex where we lived there, downstairs there was this large family there who were Hungarian, so

they spoke Hungarian. Some spoke Yiddish. Some spoke Russian. [...] So it was all mixed, you know, there wasn't really one particular language that you communicated in. So my parents went to every consul that was there and they applied to immigrate. They applied to Sweden, to Canada, to the United States, and to Australia. Sweden, within a couple of weeks Sweden wanted us. So we left, we went to Sweden.

Z- Stockholm?

P- No. We were taken to [1:23:19], because also it was because my father was a tailor and they had a clothing factory there.

Z- In [same as 1:23:19]

P- It's near [1:23:19]

Z- Okay, so it's south.

P- South. And it's small town. We went by bus, and I think the bus might have gone on a barge maybe.

Z- Yes, it would have. [...]

P- Yes, so it was by bus. So when we came to [same as 1:23:19] there was an apartment ready for us, and my father had work, and my mother also went to work in the factory.

Z- Who took care of you?

P- Well they have very good services for children. They have nurseries and they have, you know, I was registered to go to school. And also my other brother was born, my brother David was born, so we have this Swedish connection.

Z- So did you go to school there?

P- Yeah I went to school there was and . . . I mean my life was very traumatic because here we came and, I suppose in Sweden they can't even imagine that I child shouldn't go to school, shouldn't know how to read or write or math or anything. So according to my age, they put me into a classroom with children my age, but I wasn't able to keep up with them. And they couldn't understand how this is possible that a child wouldn't have gone to school. There weren't many children . . . a lot of children were born after the war, but there were very few, well actually there was nobody except me—somebody that was born before the war. So it was mostly like people had got married after the war, and they had their families then. We lived in [1:25:43] for a while and there wasn't much of a Jewish life there. There were a few women there who had been brought with the Red Cross from the concentration camps, mostly from [1:26:00]. And so, my parent were always looking to go somewhere where there was more of a Jewish community. So we left and we moved to [1:26:14].

Z- Northern Sweden.

P- Yeah, near Stockholm. And there we lived for the most part. There I also went to school. And, you know, our life evolved there.

Z- And how long were you in Sweden?

P- Well we came here in '47 and we left in '51.

Z- Well how come your parents left?

P- [laughs] I'm going to come to that. So we were established in Sweden and life was good. And one day we received a notice from the Canadian consul that our quota followed us to Sweden, you know, when parents registered in Germany, the quote followed us to Sweden. So even though we were established there, my mother said now that we have the opportunity she wants to leave, she wants to get as far away from Europe as possible. So that's how we came to Canada.

Z- So you speak Swedish?

P- Not any longer, it's a language that I've forgotten. It's really strange, I can speak Polish. I don't speak it well. I don't speak it grammatically well, but I can certainly speak Polish. I can read Polish, and yet Uzbeki I forgot, Swedish I forgot.

J- You forgot a lot of languages.

P- Yeah.

Z- So you came over by boat? By Plane?

P- Where, from Sweden?

Z- Yeah.

P- From Sweden we . . . went from Stockholm. I have some documents here that might be interesting to show you. From [1:28:18] we were taken to Norway by bus, to Norway, to Borgen. And there we got on a ship which brought us to Canada.

Z- To Halifax or Quebec?

P- Halifax. We arrived to Halifax on the February the 14th, 1951.

J- Following the sun. You had a talent. [laughter]

P- The name of the boat was [1:29:02], and our trip coming here was terrible. I looked at my documents that I found looking in my mother's handbag that I kept, you know, since my

mother passed away, and I never looked into it, but my mother kept lot's of little papers. And we were accommodate—like we didn't have to pay for anything, the Canadian government paid for bringing us over here. And once again we were supposed to go to Winnipeg and there was a job waiting for my father there, and also accommodations. But on the way . . . In the ship we traveled third class. I never hear of it until now when I looked at the paper, but we were third class and we were all the way at the bottom.

Z- Steerage as they called it.

P- And I don't know why they separated men from women. So even if you were a family they separated you. So my mother and I and my brother who was born in July, '48 and he was like 2 and half years old, so we were together. And my father and my older brother were together somewhere else also. My mother became very ill. She was seasick and became very ill, and she couldn't eat, and, you know, she became very, very ill. And the rumor started going around that every journey claims a victim, and this journey my mother was going to be it. So finally they let her go up to the upper class, God forbid to give her a place where to be, but she was allowed to be on the deck and they would bring her a little bit of food from that kitchen. So this was our journey over here.

Z- And you were 15.

P- Yeah.

Z- So you would be helping with the care of your brother.

P- Yeah, of course. And so we arrived to Halifax and when we disembarked we were brought in front of this immigration official. And there we were, huddled little family of five. And we were processed and they immigration official said to us, "Welcome to Canada." And so, my mother said, you know, we've been to so many countries and so many places, and we're always the strangers, we're always the other people, and here we're coming and somebody says welcome. So my mother said, you know, this much be such a wonderful country. And she says, this is where we are unpacking. And it wasn't only unpacking our suitcase, but unpacking our baggage. So after this we were put on a train to—

Z- Were you greeted by anyone? JIAS?

P- Not in Halifax, no.

Z- So you didn't come on a tailor scheme.

P- Yeah, yeah.

Z- And JIAS wasn't there greeting?

P- No. no.

Z- And you were supposed to go to Winnipeg.

P- We were supposed to go to Winnipeg, but we had to come to Montreal first. So they put us on a train to Montreal. And I remember looking out the window, and you know it was winter, and we saw these lumberjacks with this colorful plaid jackets, and they're all waving and smiling. It was so beautiful. We weren't used to seeing people, you know, in colorful clothes and smiling and waving.

Z- Sweden's a pretty depressed place. I mean I've been there and I've lived a little bit there. It's a hard place to be.

P- Yeah. Of course. So, and on the train eventually somebody came up and was serving sandwiches and McIntosh apples. And so, I remember my parents bought a peanut butter sandwich to give to my brother David, who was at that time 2 ½. And the sandwich was this white western bread, and European people don't know from this bread [laughter]. So he took a bit of this bread and it got stuck on the roof of his mouth.

Z- With the peanut butter.

P –With the peanut butter. And he almost chocked. So this . . . Now, you know, when you open up the Frigidaire, of course the jar of peanut butter is there, but at that time it was something we didn't know about. And so . . . But then the apples were delicious. We ate the apples and they were so delicious, and my mother said, you know they're so juicy it's like having a drink and having something to eat. You know, we were just fascinated with the McIntosh apples.

Z- Funny, my mother would only eat McIntosh apples.

P- Maybe it's an immigrant thing.

Z- Maybe.

P- So we came to Montreal. I think it took us a couple days and a night to come to Montreal. And when we got off the train—

Z- Excuse me, did you parents have any money? Did they come with money?

P- We had very little money. We had maybe $50. And we came to the station, and we were a large group of Jewish people who came from Sweden at the same time. And I don't know whether the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, or the HIAS, or the JIAS or whoever, they knew that this group was coming, or whether they were just there everyday when a train came from Halifax. They were social workers.

Z- Yeah, they knew they were coming. They actually tracked every ship. And I think prior to '51, because I've been working with a lot of case files, they actually greeted people in Halifax and had someone escort them to Montreal. But I guess that stopped.

P- Well it wasn't the case with us, from Halifax. But here in Montreal there were social workers. And I think the social workers got the job because they knew [how] to speak Yiddish. And we happened to get a social worker, a male social worker, that thought he spoke Yiddish, but he really he didn't. I mean we couldn't understand what he was saying because he spoke very poorly, and he spoke with this Canadian accent.

Z- Do you remember his name?

P- No I don't. Anyways, but my mother was very ill. At the station she was taken to a clinic. They had like a little clinic there. And the doctor there examined her and he said that she's not able to go to Winnipeg, because at that time I think it took three days to get from Montreal to Winnipeg, that there's no way she will survive that trip, that she had to remain in Montreal for a few weeks to get her strength back.

Z- So was it just seasickness? Or was it . . .

P- No, no, she was seasick and she couldn't eat, and she lost a lot of weight.

Z- Became dehydrated.

P- Yeah. So we went with my mother to this clinic. Our baggage went to Winnipeg, we didn't take it off in Montreal. And so we had very little with us. By the time we came out of the clinic there was nobody in the train station anymore, like everybody had been taken already.

Z- So where was this clinic? In the train station?

P- They had like a doctor, or you know . . .

Z- At the train station?

P- At the train station, yes.

Z- I guess it was— . . . yeah.

P- So we came out and the train station was empty. And this social worker who was supposed to look after us, he took away a lot of our documents and receipts and whatever, and we came out and you know, we didn't speak English, we didn't know where to go or anything, we just remained in the train station. And eventually somebody came, a Canadian person, had nothing to do with the Jewish community, and took us to a place that I call a jail, but it was a prison prison with real hardened criminals. It was somewhere in Old Montreal, and part of it was like a prison, there were cells and people were locked up, but the upper floor was for people like us, who had to stay over in Montreal, because they didn't have a train everyday that went out west, to be in transit. We were the only Jewish family, most of the people there . . . And we were free to come and go as we pleased. We couldn't use the

elevator, we had to walk the stairs. And there were mostly German families, and German people, who were going out west, and Ukrainians. We were . . . After the prisoners ate we were allowed to go to the dinning room.

Z- And your mom was still in the clinic.

P- No, no, no. They let her out, she came with us.

Z- Oh okay, but she needed to rest.

P- She couldn't travel. And so, you know, for days, and days, and days my mother used to say, I still smell the sea, the fish, the fish smell of the sea. And so, we were taken to eat in the dinning room. I remember piles of this white bread on the tables and jugs of milk. And if we wanted anything else we had to go over to the kitchen part and we were served. So we were there, we had a room.

Z- Did you go to the JIAS at that point?

P- No, because we figured that somebody's going to, you know, follow us, somebody's going to come and get us. But nobody did. So we were in this jail. When we looked out we saw the St. Lawrence River, it was somewhere way downtown in Old Montreal. And I've never tried to find it. Something always, you know, you would think that I would want to go and see it, but I never did.

Z- So it was some holding, hostel?

P- No it was prison, they had bars, not on our floor. Like we were free to come and go, but they had bars. Mostly it was a lot of people who were smuggling things from the United States. They were smuggling cigarettes and they were caught. They didn't have murders there, you know, it wasn't that kind of a jail. But it was a prison, I mean they were locked up.

Eventually my mother started looking through little papers that she had left, and she found the address of the JIAS, it was on Esplanade. And so my parents said well they want to make their way there. And at the time, I knew a little bit of English because in Sweden you were taught English so . . .

Z- So how many grades did you complete in Sweden?

P- I was going to grade 8.

Z- So you were caught up, so-to-speak.

P- trying to catch up. So I asked for directions [for] how you get to this address. We were somewhere on St James or Craig or somewhere there, and I was given the instructions how to get to this address on Esplanade, and so, I remained with my two brothers and my parents, you know, were going to go to this address. And I supposed, well there is no

transportation going from where we were—Notre Dame or St James or one of these streets—to Esplanade, but you probably had to go to St. Lawrence or . . .

Z- Park Avenue.

P- Park Avenue and then make your way around. And when my parent were on the streetcar they saw Esplanade, so they figured well all these instructions are all wrong and they got off. They didn't know that the streets are so long. You know, in Montreal the streets go from north to south. So they got off the bus and they started looking for the number. Anyways, they walked all the way. When they came to this office, they JIAS let's say, they wouldn't have anything to do, not very flattering act of the Jewish community here, and they wouldn't have anything to do with us because we belong to Winnipeg.

Z- We read so many case files like that, if you belonged to Toronto they would have nothing to do, give no help, nothing.

P- So you know about that, it's the first time that I hear that. Anyways, they would have nothing to do with us. They wouldn't give us any—you know, not only not monetary, nothing, nothing. We belong to Winnipeg and that's where we should go, and they have nothing to do with us. So they asked to see the social worker that took away all our papers and all our receipts and everything, and he no longer worked there and they didn't know anything about it.

Z- It was only a few days.

P- Well it was maybe a week. So that was the end of that. Walking out of there they met somebody that we knew from Sweden who had come here 6 months earlier, so he knew his way around here already. So he says, Why do you want to go to Winnipeg? You know, he says, It's terrible, Winnipeg, you know, it's cold and it's this and that . . . you have to stay in Montreal. So, they came back to the jail and he said he was going to help us, you know, to look after us.

Z- Was he from Poland too?

P- yeah, he was from Poland too. He was like us. He left Sweden, but he was a furrier.

Z- Do you know his name?

P- Yeah, [1:46:41] was his name, [same]. So, they came back to the jail, and you know, like after, and my mother was petrified of living there because she said, you know, if the German and Ukrainians didn't kill us in Europe, they'll kill us here. I mean, nobody knew anything about us. I mean if we disappeared we would have disappeared, that's all. So she wanted to get out of there as fast she could. So we went to the official there and we told them we don't want to go to Winnipeg we want to stay here. So they called together the court, and it was a large room downstairs in this building, and with a long table and there were all this official men sitting.

J- And this was at . . .

Z- JIAS

P- No, this was in the jail. Because we were supposed to be there until we go to Winnipeg, you know. We didn't want to got to Winnipeg, so we had to ask permission to leave there I suppose. So they had this court case in that jail, and since I knew a little bit of English I was the representative, spokesperson for our family. And I told them that we want to remain here. So they said, well okay, like if my father will find a job and if we find where to live, because at that time Montreal was difficult to find a place where to live, especially if you were a family. So then it's no problem, we can stay in Montreal. So we met with this Mr. [same as 1:46:41], he said, well it's no problem, he spoke to his boss where he worked, and he was going to hire my father. My father was a tailor, he didn't know anything about fur. And he also found us a room where to live.

Z- Do you know where that was?

P- The room? It was on the street of city hall, I don't remember the number. And so, they let us go from this jail. And my father went to work and the owner, the boss, gave him $25 a week. And he said, I know that you're worth more, but you don't really know the fur business, so he said that's what I'm given you. We had no choice, I mean my father went to work. We went to live in this room with a couple who had no children. And it just was so terrible, they couldn't tolerate having these kids running around.

Z- Was this a Jewish family?

P- No it was not a Jewish family. And we stayed there and . . .

Z- How long?

P- Well we stayed there not very long. Strangest thing was, in the corner there was school, obviously it was a school because we saw children in the yard. The school was run by nuns, but to my parents it didn't matter that it was run by nuns, it was school. So my mother came with the three of us and wanted to register us for school, and my mother knew a little bit of French because when she went to school in Poland they taught French. So they asked her all kinds of questions and then she asked her if she's Catholic, so my mother said, no we're Jewish. When she learned we're Jewish, she walked us to the door, she opened the door, and she told us to go. My mother, said, oh my god we came all this way here and again it's with the Jewish. So we went back home and my mother said, what am I going to do with theses children, they need to go to school. We didn't know that the schools at that time were running according to religious grounds. And life became very difficult for us to live there in that room, so we found another place on Hutchinson near St. Joseph, with a Jewish family. They had a double parlor that we were able to rent and another small room.

Z- Use of the kitchen?

P- Yeah, use of the kitchen and the one bathroom. We were allowed to take a bath once a week when they heated up the water. So my father was working getting $25 a week. And after we paid the rent there was hardly anything left, so the only thing that we lived on was bread, and eggs, and milk. So in the morning my mother would make the soft-boiled eggs, and for lunch it would be hard-boiled eggs, and for supper it would be scrambled eggs. But that was our life here and eventually my mother—

Z- So where did you go to school?

P- Eventually my mother found out that she can register us to school. I went to Baron Bing, and the older of the two brothers, was 7 years old, he went to Bancroft School. And all our things went to Winnipeg so we didn't have any baggage with us. Not that much, but whatever we had went to Winnipeg. By the summer of '51 I had learned to speak English quite well, passable. And the . . .

Z- What was your first day in school like?

P- Oh it was strange, but I had gone through so many strange beginnings that it was just another strange beginning. And the only thing is, I remember what I was so impressed with is that the girls were wearing lipstick, and they had nail-polish, and their hair done. A school child in Europe doesn't look like that.

Z- You were 16.

P- Yeah. Almost. I had just turned 15. So by the summer I already spoke English. When my parents went to the JIAS to help us get our things back from Winnipeg, they wouldn't, they wouldn't give us any help. By July I already knew how to speak English, so my mother and I we went down to the train station. And we went over to the man in the wicket. And I asked if it's possible to get our things back from Winnipeg. So he telegraphed and sure enough our things were there at the station, and he said that they'll sent it back. Then he opens up his door and takes out 150 dollars and gives it to my mother, and my mother didn't want to take it.

Z- For the ticket?

P- Yeah, but we didn't know. So my mother wouldn't take it, and she didn't understand why he was giving her that money. So, you know, she didn't take it and we started going out of the train station, so he closed his wicket and he went out with us, and by then we were already on the street. And he's pushing the 150 dollars, so my mother figured—well, you know, like an immigrant you're always afraid if you do something wrong you're going to be sent back. So she figured well—on the street, and there's so many people, so she took 150 dollars. But of course the 150 dollars was a refund of our ticket going from Winnipeg to Montreal. So, now we had 150 dollars.

Z- That was a lot of money then.

P- That was a lot of money. And that was the first time my mother went and she bought a chicken, and she bought chicken soup. It was the first time we had a meal.

Z- Did she work?

P- Not at that point, no. She asked our landlord if she could work at home. So with the 150 dollars she bought a sewing machine and she was able to get work from a factory, to take home to work at home. And what she was doing, it was a man's manufacturing . . . Also she got this work through somebody that we knew from before. And at that time they made the pants that had a little pocket in the front, they called it the clock pocket.

[…talk about clock pockets]

So you learned a new word, clock pocket. She was paid very poorly for it, and it was really like very difficult because it's so small, and she sort of had to discover how to make it herself, how to do it herself, because she didn't work in a factory where there was somebody showing you how to do it. But Hutchinson life was good, it was a nice street, there was a lot of Jewish people living there. We lived in a community that was, you know, populated by Jews and so on. But this landlord he used to— Well before that his wife had passed away, and one of the rooms that they had rented was to a single woman, an older woman, I mean he was an older man. And when his wife died he said, either you marry me or you move out of here. It's not proper that a widower and a single woman should live under the same roof. So she decided to marry him, and that's how that room became vacant.

Z- So she was an immigrant as well?

P- No, no she was a Canadian from way back. You know, and she was illiterate and she was working in a [1:58:29] place. And every Saturday when she didn't work she would sit me down next to her and open up the telephone book, and somehow she knew on which page were her friends, and she made me dial the number. Because at that time telephone had both a name and a number and she couldn't read, so I used to dial the phone for her when she needs to speak to her friends. How she knew on which page? But she did.

J - […]

P- Once when mother was already also earning some money, my father was working, so we got a flat for ourselves.

Z- Where was that?

P- On Clark and St Joseph. 4870 Clark. And it was a very nice flat. And the landlord was really very, very nice.

Z- Was that in '52? '53?

P- Probably '52, yeah.

Z- How did your brother adjust in Bancroft School? What was it like for him?

P- He was just a kid. He was in grade 1.

Z- And there were lot's of immigrant kids.

P- There were lot's of immigrant kids, yeah. And so, there when we had our flat already, my mother started working for somebody else, and she was making the linings [for] somebody that was a fur finisher, also worked at home. And it was not far from where we lived.

Z- Do you know where that was? Do you know who it was?

P- First she was working for somebody, they were a Russian family who came here more or less the same time as us. They were very educated people, but of course here it didn't make much difference. Mind you the father was a professor, he got a job at the university of Montreal. He was a math professor. He knew French from Russian. And they had a daughter who was studying, and she became a dentist. And the mother was a journalist, but here she couldn't work, so she was doing this fur finishing business, and my mother sewed the lining for her. That was more the work that my mother was familiar with. And then she worked for somebody else, also that were survivors, who were also fur finishers. They worked at home, and they gave my mother to make the linings.

Z- Do you know their names?

P- Yeah, their name was Werner, and their son became a rabbi. My brother recently found out that he's still a rabbi, but I don't think he has a congregation anymore.

Z- So your mother worked all the time, pretty much?

P- Yeah. And eventually my younger brother was able to go to what they call neighborhood house. And that was on . . . I think it was on Clark or St Urbain, I don't remember. But I remember going from school, from Baron Bing, and would pick him up.

Z- They would have a daycare. Was that on Germains [sp?]?

P- Maybe, yeah, maybe.

Z- Right, I think we read about that. There was a daycare with only like 20 spots. I read about that, it was a real issue because there was no childcare available, and that was the only place.

P- I remember they called it neighborhood house.

Z- Yeah, and I think it was on Germains.

P- And then there was also, like in the summer, they would have a day camp, a day camp there. So at that point this is when our life became Canadian.

Z- So what was that '53? '54?

P- Earlier then that. In '54 I graduated from school already. In the summer I worked.

J- What did you do?

P- After Baron Bing I took a business course and I worked in an office. I was an assistant bookkeeper. In the summer when I went to school I would also work. One year I worked in a pastry store. One summer I worked in sort of like a 5 & 10 cent store, which was on St Lawrence, near St Catherine. So, you know, this is when . . .

Z- Did you start wearing lipstick? [laughter]

P- [laughter]I don't remember when I started wearing lipstick, yeah. All I know is that I wanted to become as Canadian as possible, as fast as possible.

Z- So it was good?

P- It was good.

Z- Was it good for your parents?

P- It was normal. My father got another job. And He got a job working in a cleaning store, you know, where they clean clothes, and they repair. So he would be repairing and fixing things. It was a strange kind of job. He was getting I think about $55 a week paid, but he also had to work on Sunday, although the store was closed on Sunday. The boss would come in, open the door, let him in, and then he used to lock the door, and he used to sit and wait until he let him out. So immigrant life is tough.

Z- Who was the boss?

P- His name was Kosak [sp?].

Z- Was he a Jew?

P- Yeah. Yeah.

Z- An established Jew?

P- Yeah. Yeah.

Z- Where was that?

P- On Queen Mary.

Z- And you were still living on Clark?

P- Yeah, we were living on Clark all this time.

Z- Who were your friends?

P- Most of my friends were like us.

Z- Survivors.

P- Yeah.

Z- How come?

P- Well we just didn't fit in with Canadians— I had one Canadian friend and we just . . . I don't know, we just drifted to one another that way. And as a matter fact there was a girl that was sitting behind me in school.

Z- In Baron Bing.

P- In Baron Bing, yeah. She was a mean kid. I guess today we'd call her a bully.

Z- And this was a Canadian Jewish girl?

P- Yeah. I had braids and she would pull my braids, and I always couldn't sit still in my desk, she would poke pencils in my back.

Z- Why would she do that?

P- She was just a mean kid.

Z- And was it because you were an immigrant?

P- I suppose. And the teacher would yell at me, "Can't you sit still?" I mean the teacher didn't see what was happening in the back. Can't you sit still in your desk? And so, I do a lot of volunteer work at the Cummings House at the Holocaust Museum, and this girl turned out to be a social worker. And we used to meet coming and going all the time. She worked also for the Jewish community.

J- Did she remember you?

P- Yes.

J- You knew each other when you first met? It all came back?

P- Yes.

Z- Did she remember doing that to you?

P- Yes. And she said to me— For about a year we used to just acknowledge each other. And she says, I'd like we should go out for lunch one day. I said okay. And so every time we met she says, you know we must make up to go for lunch. I said okay. So one day I'm home and I get this phone call and we made up to meet for lunch, and so we did, we went out for lunch. And she said to me, you know, she said, that her mother always told her there must be immigrant children in your school, why don't you bring somebody home for lunch? So her mother knew better, at that time it was a time when we practically didn't eat, you know, like I told you what we ate. On Friday just to make it a little more festive my mother would buy one apple and she would cut it into slivers and we would each have a sliver of apple or orange, and we would each have a segment of the orange. That was our treat. So she said, you know, my mother always told me, you know, Bring somebody home for lunch, you know she said, There must be immigrant children. But of course she never did. And she realized how insensitive, how mean she was. And this was our—

J- Lunch.

P- Yeah. Our meeting after so many years afterwards. So that's why we never bonded with Canadian children. We were always together, although the children that we bonded with, some were children that were born in France, or Belgium, and from all over, and somehow we bonded with these children. I had a very close friend, she was from Romania. And there were kids all over, and yet we were able to bond with these . . .

Z- Why do you think you weren't able to bond with the Canadian Jewish kids?

P- I guess we waited for some kind of sign that we were part of them, that we were welcome. I don't know, we just didn't.

Z- And there was no sign?

P- I guess not.

Z- And they teachers, how were they?

P- I don't remember the teachers being better or worse in one way or the other. I remember we had one teacher, a Jewish teacher, her name is Miss Gatz [sp?]. She was a miss. And she once said to me, "Why don't you smile more often? You have such beautiful teeth."

Z- IS that what she said to you? Knowing your background?

P- Yeah.

Z- So what did you say?

P- Well nobody ever said that to me before. So, she sort of understood us a little bit better. But otherwise, I mean, most of the teachers were not Jewish. And I don't remember anything outstanding that they would be nicer to us, treat us better, or . . .

Z- Were they good teachers?

P- Yeah. We started of the day with the prayers, and we didn't know, so we had to learn the prayers.

Z- I remember that.

P- SO when I graduated from school, from Baron Bing, I got a job in an office and, you know, was able to contribute. The first job I had I got $65 which was a lot of money at that time.

Z- More than your father.

P- Yeah. And then I, you know, we socialized. We went to the beach in the summer. We went to a beach that was called [2:12:38] beach. I don't know, I think it somewhere in [2:12:42].

Z- And what about your parents? Who did they socialize with?

P- Well, they had a very large circle of friends here in Montreal. My parents were socialist, they belonged to the Bund before the war, and so they joined the Workmen's circle and their life evolved there, their social life evolved there.

Z- So what it mostly with immigrants?

P- Yeah. And then I met my husband and I got married.

Z- When did you meet him?

P- In '55.

Z- So you were 20.

P- Yeah. And we got married in '56.

Z- And is your husband an immigrant?

P- Yeah.

Z- Where was he from?

P- He was also from Poland, but he was from the— At that time it was Poland, but it was like more of the Ukrainian Poland. Where we lived it was central Poland.

Z- And is he older?

P- Yes, he's older. And that was our life, and we . . .

Z- So do you think you were looking to get married, have your family? I mean you were young, even for that time 20 was on the youngish side, right?

P- No. At that time people got married quite young, they got married even like out of high school, 18, 19.

Z- How did your mother feel about you getting married?

P- Well, I had a Canadian boyfriend, and my parents weren't very happy about it. You know they can't really speak to him, what about his parents. And then you know, like how would these two families blend, you know. So it was the end of the boyfriend.

Z- You ended it because your mother wasn't happy?

P- Well, you know, my parents weren't encouraging, so I guess it didn't mean that much to me?

Z- Did you meet his family?

P- No.

Z- Did he ask you about your past or anything/

P- Yeah. Well Canadian people had this vision of European people who came here with lot's of money, with lot's of diamond.

Z- The survivors?

P- Yeah.

Z- And this is the Canadian Jewish community?

P- Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well they weren't used to this kind of immigrant who is an educated person, who is . . .

Z- Cultured.

P- Cultured and sophisticated and wanted to be dressed well, and look well, and wanted, you know, to surround ourselves with nice things. Because at that time if you wanted to rent a flat you had to pay key money. But that wasn't allowed, so what they left you was their old furniture, and that you had to pay for. Of course nobody wanted that furniture, it was junk. They couldn't understand why we weren't grateful for having this broken sofa.

Z- Did you parents pay key money?

P- Yeah, of course.

Z- Do you remember how much it was?

P- I don't remember, but I remember going with my mother—they used to advertise in the Canadian Jewish paper—and so there was a flat advertised somewhere on Waverly, and I went with my mother and this woman said that she has things to sell. So my mother said okay, what is there to sell? So she says, well I have—she was speaking to her in Yiddish—she said, the stove, and the oil cloth, and the table and the chairs. So my mother looks at her, and she says to her, You understood? So my mother says, no. She says, well if you don't understand Yiddish I don't know how to speak to you. But of course she was naming all these things in English.

[…]

Yeah, so we look back at these things as being funny stories.

[…]

You know my brother, David, he was in Halifax once and he went to Pier 21. And he found [2:18:50] and he was looking for our name on it, if there was a passenger list. And it wasn't there, which was really strange, but I recently heard from somebody that people like us they didn't even both registering.

Z- Because you were in the steerage.

P- Yeah. So our name isn't even on this list, he was very disappointed.

Z- What does David do?

P- He went into business, he was a manufacturer and he did very good. He was very successful and he did very well. A few years ago he and his partner gave up the business. But now he works for . . . he's very happy to work.

Z- In Montreal?

P- Yeah, in Montreal. And my older brother, Sam, is a psychologist. He went to school, he graduated from McGill. And he went to Toronto to complete his PhD, and he was supposed to return, but he didn't return.

Z- So he's in Toronto. Does he work with Holocaust people?

P- No, well he's also retired now. He worked at the University of Toronto as a psychologist.

Z- So did your parents ever buy a house?

P- Yeah. My husband eventually went into the construction business, and he was building a project in St. Laurent, duplexes, so we bought a house together.

Z- So you were in one part and they were in the other.

P- Yeah. We lived downstairs and they lived upstairs.

Z- So they stayed with you.

P- Yeah.

Z- And what did your husband do, you said he was in construction, was he always in construction?

P- No, in the beginning he was a peddler. So, yeah we lived in St. Laurent together. Once my brothers were out of the, you know, like full time school, so my mother went to work in a factory. So she wasn't working at home anymore.

Z- So she always worked, ran the whole house, took care of the kids, did everything?

P- Yeah. But they used to come into me and we used to have supper together because my mother worked downtown and by the time she came home it was late, so yeah, we were together. It was really good. And my mother lived . . . My parents lived in St. Laurent until my mother died there.

Z- When did she die?

P- You know, it's something I'm blocking out of my head. She was 82 when she died. And my father lived for another 6 years. He moved out of St. Laurent, of course, we sold the house and he lived in an apartment.

Z- So when you got married where did you live?

P- We lived on Vanhorne. We lived in a building that was demolished to make the entrance for the sanctuaire. When we lived there we looked out and it was all like a forest where the sanctuary apartments are today. And there was a convent there I think.

Z- And you both worked?

P- Yeah.

Z- And you worked until when? Or continued working always?

P- No, no, no. I became pregnant and my son was born in 1960, I worked until then. I loved working so when he was 8 . . . well the first time he went to camp he was 7, but when he was 8 and I had a whole summer to myself, I found a job for the summer.

Z- Bookkeeping?

P- Yeah. I replaced a girl who got married and wanted to, you know, go for her honeymoon to Europe, so they were looking for somebody. I knew it was temporary, and you know, it was fine. I did a good job, so they wanted me to remain, to train me for another job. But I told them, it was downtown on Dorchester and Peele or in that area, I told them that I couldn't work all day, that I have to be home by 4 o'clock, that I could work maybe until three, and they said, well it was a large office, they can't make any exceptions, because they'd have to let others too. But once my son was established back in school after the summer, I went looking for another job. I went to look for a job in the garment industry near [2:24:51], because it wasn't far from where we lived. And I had an interview with this office manager, and she liked me, and she said, Look as far as I'm concerned you're hired, but you have to see my boss. So I came a few days later, I had appointment with the boys, and he saw me walking in. Of course I got dressed and made myself look presentable. And he looks me up and down like this, he says, A worker like this I have at home. He didn't think I was serious. So that's when I gave up looking for a job.

Z- Unbelievable, hey. Do you only have one child?

P- Yeah. One son, and I have two grandchildren.