HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

DORA FREILICH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Helen Grossman
Date: October 24 & 31, 1984

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DF - Dora Freilich[1] [interviewee]
HG - Helen Grossman [interviewer]
Date: October 24 & 31, 1984

Tape one, side one:

HG: This is tape one, side one, and this is Helen Grossman interviewing Dora Freilich about the Holocaust and her experiences. And this is October 24, 1984 and we are going to start with her story. Tell me, Dora, where you were born, the date and a little bit about your family.

DF: I was born in Poland, on December 25, 1926 in a small town not far from Bialystok.

HG: Do you remember the name of this town?

DF: Yes.

HG: Can you spell it?

DF: Yes, P-R-U-Z-A-N-Y.

HG: Okay, good. Tell me about your family.

DF: We were a family of four, or rather five. My father had a bakery and we were very well-to-do. Our children were brought up a very nice way. We played the piano, we went to good schools, we went on nice vacations, we had private teachers for Hebrew.

HG: These were public schools?

DF: Public schools, but we had private teachers that came after school for Hebrew and Yiddish. This is how we got our languages. It was a nice town with a lot of Jews.

HG: The neighborhood was Jewish?

DF: The neighborhood was strictly Jewish. I, as a rule, did not encounter any antisemitism. Maybe I was too young to realize, or too young...we played together, we ate together, we visited each other.

HG: In their homes?

DF: In their homes. We came to their homes, they came to our house.

HG: How did their parents treat you?

DF: I have not bad memories of this at all. Maybe it was just that age that you don't grasp yet any antisemitism. We always had a maid that worked in our house because my mother worked with my father. And she was like with us forever and she was Gentile. She spoke Yiddish just like us. So I don't know...

HG: Was it a kosher home?

DF: We were not Orthodox. We were what you call now Conservative. We were closed for the holidays at our store and we belonged to a synagogue. Of course, the synagogue was more Orthodox than my father was. There were a few synagogues in the town but they were all the same, they were all Orthodox.

[1]née Golubowitz.

HG: Did your family go on *Shabbas* to the synagogue?

DF: No.

HG: You were open, the store was open, then?

DF: Yes, we had Gentile people that worked in the store. A bakery is a very hard business. It was all done by hand, not done with machines as now, and we had Gentile people that worked for us for years and years.

HG: Did your parents work at the shop on Fridays and Saturdays?

DF: Usually my father did not work nights because that is when he used to go to sleep. He worked during the day, but on *Shabbas* my mother did not usually go in. We had Gentile people that worked in the store.

HG: And your father went in?

DF: My father would go in but he was never in the front. He used to be in the back. We had a very beautiful life.

HG: Where were you in the family? The oldest, the youngest?

DF: No, I was the second to the oldest. I had a sister that was a year-and-a-half older than me, and then I had a brother that was three years younger and then we had a baby that was born in 1942.

HG: Oh lord, the baby lived?

DF: The baby lived and the baby survived; it was all right.

HG: Now, your life was very pleasant. Were there any other Jewish organizations that you belonged to besides the synagogue, before the war?

DF: Before the war, as I'm always telling my husband...I was 13 years old, and the girls belonged to the *Shomer Hatzair*, we belonged to the *Halutz*, but all of the organizations that had to do more with fun...than, you know...

HG: It was social.

DF: It was social.

HG: Did your family belong to any Jewish organizations?

DF: I don't know, I don't remember. I don't think so. I really did not pay attention to those things.

HG: The school that you were in, how did the teachers treat you, the Polish school?

DF: Absolutely good.

HG: They were civilians; they weren't people that worked for the government?

DF: No, they were just regular teachers. Of course our schools were run different than the schools here. Homework had to be done and in the classroom you conducted yourself like a pupil. You conducted yourself accordingly. A teacher was someone you respected. You came prepared for school, and we had a marvelous life. In school we learned, and by the time we finished seven grades and here it would be like 12th grade of high school.

HG: Then how old would you be after you finished the seventh grade?

DF: Well, we start at six.

HG: And you finish at 13.

DF: The materials that we took and the education that we got...and if you took a language you had to learn that language. It wasn't just left on your roster that you take French, English, or whatever. You did your homework and it was taken for granted that you learned it. Or you were left in the grade for two or three years. You didn't just go. You did whatever had to be done. I as a rule did not account for any antisemitism.

HG: Did you meet after school? Was there such a thing as clubs and organizations in the school that you were allowed to...?

DF: We had a choir and we sang but everybody belonged to that. We had religion, and that is an interesting issue because religion was separated between the Jewish religion and the Gentile religion. Otherwise, when we had Jewish religion, there came a teacher from the Hebrew University and he taught us Jewish religion.

HG: That was given each day or two or three times a week?

DF: I would say two or three times, not every day, but two or three times during the week.

HG: They also had their religion and you were not forced in anyway to take theirs?

DF: Absolutely not, absolutely not.

HG: How many people do you think lived in that town?

DF: I would say, before the war, about 10,000.

HG: And of that, how many do you think were Jewish?

DF: I would say four or five.

HG: Four or five thousand?

DF: Yes.

HG: Almost half.

DF: We had two Jewish newspapers in the city. We had a lot of organizations. This I know even though I was not joining because I saw older, like my cousins. We had a Hebrew school and a Hebrew high school that was called *Gymnasium*, and a [unclear]. We had a Yiddish school. It's like my husband said, we had two papers but we had only one boss. But this was our town, very Jewish, and we lived a very normal life.

HG: Were there social events that were Jewish that you would go to, anywhere besides...the synagogue?

DF: That was not in style.

HG: Right.

DF: You went to the synagogue with your parents for services only. The synagogue did not cater to anything else except for the services.

HG: The Rabbi was not somebody who was around all the time, or he was?

DF: He was around but you came to him with problems that concerned...you know, but the children were not affiliated, there was nothing in the synagogue for the children.

HG: That was a different day...

DF: As far as I can remember was 1939...I mean...that was, first of all, at 13 you are more a child there than here. Here you are exposed to so much more. You are exposed to television, you are exposed to good books, you are exposed to music, and there you are not.

HG: Then children didn't read newspapers, either?

DF: No.

HG: Parents did. Did your mother?

DF: My mother did and my father did but, you know, but until the news used to come, it was probably a half of year old. You were concerned for the things that were going on in town. There was a Yiddish *kehilla*, and eventually you had to give some money to help.

HG: Was there a name for that, do you know?

DF: It would be the Pruzany *kehilla*. I don't know exactly the name as I was at the stage where those things did not interest me.

HG: Did you say Prussian?

DF: Pruzany. That was the name of the little town. Right.

HG: Then you weren't aware that your parents weren't really involved in that.

DF: They would be involved to the extent that they would donate some money, but that was it. This is what I can remember. There were a lot of organizations that I know of where the youth belonged; there was *Shomer Hatzair, Halutz*, there was also a big organization which was not far from our house, but I can't think of the name now.

HG: You said *Shomer*...

DF: Yes.

HG: How would you spell that?

DF: Well, the way I would spell that would be...

HG: S-H-O-M-E-R H-A-T-Z-A-I-R. Right. And that was an organization for youths.

DF: Yes.

HG: But you didn't belong to that, or you weren't old enough.

DF: I don't think I was old enough to belong to this.

HG: In other words, it would be for young adults?

DF: Yes, age 17, 18 and something like this.

HG: Literally you had a good young life.

DF: A wonderful young life. A wonderful young life.

HG: With parents who were close to you.

DF: With parents who were close to us. Family around us. Our children were very well-educated, and I had traced over 100 relatives...

HG: From that town?

DF: From that town, and many were lost, killed in the Holocaust. The reason that we all stayed together is because family just stays together, that is all there is to it.

HG: There was no reason to leave.

DF: There was no reason to leave. I had two uncles, brothers of my mother: my oldest uncle who lives here in New York, and the youngest he left four years ago, he left for Cuba but he was taken to the Israeli Army, to the Polish Army, and his brother could not take him to the United States because there was a quota going on, so he came to Cuba and when the war started in 1939 and '40 he brought him over to the United States and he was in the army.

HG: So, he was in for how long, do you think?

DF: Where?

HG: In the army?

DF: I think he was in for about three years.

HG: Did he ever talk about his treatment in the army?

DF: No, he never discussed those things with him. He remembered us. I have some pictures of him as a child. He lived in our house as a child and my mother was his sister and I was the only survivor of that whole family. In Germany he started looking for me in 1945 but he couldn't find me and he had to return to the United States with his unit, so he left a letter with a cousin of mine that he is looking for me. My cousin did not know at that time that I am alive but he heard from people, you know. We went from town to town and wherever we were we put our names down, one after another. You came and you stopped and you looked, and you looked and you searched for names. Sometimes you found nothing, but this was the procedure on how to go through it.

HG: That was after...?

DF: That was after the war. Yes.

HG: Let's go back to when you were young. When did you start to feel the effects of the Nazis?

DF: All right. The war started in 1939.

HG: Where were you then?

DF: I was in my hometown and I didn't even know what war is. What I learned in history was that wars happened somewhere else. I mean what kind of war would come to us and why? And children were not allowed to listen in at certain things, you know; and then the war started. This was 1939, September, or October. I don't remember the exact date, and it was a very brief encounter when the war started, nobody knew what was going on. It was at that time that Germany and Russia made a pact and divided Poland in half, and our part of Poland fell unto the Russians. We are close to the Russian border so we fell

under the Russians. Okay. They didn't kill us. They had other methods. They took away our businesses, but they didn't take away your life.

HG: And they took away your father's business?

DF: They took all the businesses.

HG: And you were 13 at that time?

DF: I was 13 at the time and they gave you passports. In other words everybody had to carry a passport. It's your name, your birth, a certificate, and if your father had a business then you had a number. That number was very bad, otherwise: it meant that you exploited people. If people worked for you, then you exploited them, because in Russia, you know, everything belonged to the government. You worked for the government. Everything is taken care of. If people were happy working for you, it didn't matter. You got this, was 11 they called it, number 11. They started reorganizing the cities, they made schools and we all went back to school.

HG: You stayed in your house?

DF: We stayed in our house, except every house had to take...like they brought in a lot of soldiers and in our town...

HG: Were these Germans?

DF: No, Russians. I hadn't seen a German at that time yet, but they brought in a lot of Russian soldiers and I don't know for what reason. I guess we had a lot of empty lots in our part of town, it wasn't over-populated, and they stationed some airfields there, which is interesting for a small town like this. We went to schools, and again it started. Russia is very hard on teaching. You got to know what you are doing there, and a lot of kids that could not attend school, they had to go out and work before the war, they got to go to school now because it was free. In fact, they paid you. If you made good marks you got what they called a stipendium.

HG: The government?

DF: The government, absolutely. There are a lot of things that are not known. If you made good marks, they paid. They didn't pay much.

HG: The Jewish people were paid?

DF: Jewish or Gentile, it didn't matter, we all went to school again. The businesses were taken away.

HG: How did your father earn a living then?

DF: My father was very upset when they took. They let him stay for a while in the bakery because they needed bread anyway, so he was working in the bakery, which he never did before, because he inherited from his father and he was the boss. Now he had to go in the back and work with everybody together. It still did not affect our children. We were happy. I mean we had enough to eat...

HG: Because he owned the store did they pay him? Did he have any type of an income?

DF: No, no.

HG: Then how were you expected to live?

DF: Well, we were expected to live on what we had, with no payment.

HG: Were there other people put in the store with him?

DF: Yes, there were people that were there before and some others that they chose, of their own choosing, in the store to work. Of course, my father was devastated, but it was done to everybody else too. All the stores were taken over. We remained in our house. The first time that I realized that there was something wrong...the Russians have three organizations. In other words, they start preparing you to be a Communist in the very early stages. This is their main thing. Otherwise as little as we were involved in political parties, this is their main aim. We start them very young. As I was 13, the name of the party was called Komsomol.

HG: How would you spell that?

DF: K-O-M-S-O-M-O-L. Now, of course, there were a lot of Jews and, for that matter, Gentiles, too, that were not rich in the town. Not everybody can be rich and well off and well-to-do, but I don't think anybody went hungry to bed. There were a lot that came back to school that were out working at an early age, you know like quitting school at 13 or 14 and going out working as tailors and such, and making a living and helping the parents to raise the family. Families were big—five, six and seven children—and there was a guy, a Jewish guy, and he started organizing the girls and the boys for this party. The party would meet at night and they would have dances and they would talk about politics and, as children, everybody is very anxious...and he came over to me and said, "You are not going to belong," and I said, "Why? I never did anything wrong." And he said, "You are not going to belong because of your father's [not clear]," and I came home crying and I said, "Because of you I cannot belong to that party, and I will be the only one that does not belong to it." My father tried to explain to me but I didn't take "No" for an answer. I just wanted to go where everybody else went, having a good time, singing and dancing and listening to the teachers, and to me it was interesting whatever they talked about. I didn't know yet what, and I knew then that there was going to be a great big thing. I didn't know what's going to happen.

HG: You said it was because of your father's stature?

DF: Right, because of my father being an owner of a business.

HG: A number "11".

DF: A number "11".

HG: That was on your passport?

DF: It was on his passport. It was like you exploited people. People that worked for you were exploited rather than worked. They didn't ask nobody how they were treated or whatever. This was like...So, of course, I was very upset; I was young and I wanted to know what was going on but I couldn't belong. Times were starting to get rough.

HG: You were still 13 then?

DF: That was in 1939, ‘40. But we still met together, the girls and the boys, you know, and talking...

HG: The parties were mixed, Jewish and Christian?

DF: The parties were mixed. A lot of Poles: Polish families tried to take their families and go away. Otherwise, people that were in the military and visited their families, government people, and they knew, you know, what the consequences might be because this is how they were going. First the owners of the stores, then after them...

HG: Did Jewish people try to leave at that point?

DF: No.

HG: There was no reason yet or they didn’t understand?

DF: No, they didn’t understand. There was one big organization called *Bund* which was not acceptable at the Polish side because they were very communistically inclined.[2] But it was very big. A lot of Jewish people belonged to it, a lot of Jewish youth, and by youth, I mean the older ones. When we were youths, we were 18 or 19, we were not youths at 13 or 14. We were children. This is the big difference here. We were children, we played with *schmatte* dolls and we did not take any great interest in political things. That was not the thing to do. We started looking at boys, of course, but political things did not interest us at all.

HG: The *Bund* was a regular organization.

DF: A regular organization. It was not allowed by the Polish, but in our town it just so happens that it was very big. Now the Russians did not like them either. They had to gather them together and they sent them to Siberia. It just so happens that in Siberia they didn’t get killed. They survived.

HG: Did you know any of these people? Were they friends of yours?

DF: No, they were older.

HG: But, you knew their families?

DF: I knew their families and I knew a few families.

HG: And they were young adults?

DF: They were young adults...

[2]The Bund was actually a Socialist, anti-Bolshevik Jewish organization.

Tape one, side two:

HG: This is tape one, side two. We are recording Dora Freilich and this is Helen Grossman doing the interviewing. You were talking about the *Bund*. Would you continue with that?

DF: I knew that it was a big organization, and why I knew it is not because I belonged to it or I knew much about it, it's just that their meeting place was two houses away from our house, and when they had the meetings, there were always disturbances there.

HG: Was it in a home?

DF: Yes, a private home.

HG: What do you mean by disturbances?

DF: You know, there was always somebody watching outside, to see if the police is not coming, I mean people that belonged to that organization because it was communistically inclined...

HG: And not really accepted by the Polish people?

DF: Absolutely. The reason that a lot of them survived is that they were taken and they were shipped to Siberia, and the miracle of being there, you know, whoever died, died there, from natural causes because conditions were bad there, too, but actually they survived because they had lived through the war not going through to the Nazis.

HG: And there were Jews and Christians?

DF: No, Jews only.

HG: Sent to Siberia.

DF: There were a lot of Christians sent, but for different reasons. I mean anybody that had #11 was sitting with their suitcase packed ready to be shipped. We were, otherwise, not a desirable element to be kept so close to a border, not knowing what was going to come. We were ready because we knew that we were going to be shipped out.

HG: You knew that you were going to be shipped somewhere?

DF: Yes, by the Russians, to Siberia, and my father said that as long as we are together we will do whatever we can to help each other and this is how life was going on. Times were not good anymore. There was not enough food and...

HG: You were getting some kind of a stipend from the government just to get decent grades, but your father wasn't getting anything?

DF: No.

HG: And you were living on what you had?

DF: What we had, right.

HG: Were you selling possessions at all at that point?

DF: At that time, in our family, there was enough left yet without...but people were starting doing it. They were trading with the peasants, material for some food, like butter or chicken or whatever it is.

HG: Like flour?

DF: Flour.

HG: You had flour in the bakery. Couldn't you use that?

DF: Probably, he could take some out and have. Otherwise, in our family, as far as I can remember, there was no necessity to do that. Other families I knew were doing it already, otherwise there was no abundance of food anymore. There were no stores anymore to buy anything. Whatever the Russians brought in, it was...on a certain day that they told you they was going to give. You didn't care what they gave, as long as they gave. You stood in line, and that went on through the night. You stood in line the whole night. If they were giving bread, you stood in line.

HG: Did they ever give clothing, or anything like that?

DF: No, they took everything away that they could find in Poland, because Poland was a pretty rich country. It was nothing compared to the United States, but it was doing its best.

HG: Did the Russians come into the houses to take things?

DF: No, I wouldn't say that they came into the houses to take things. What they did, rather, was bring in a lot of army people and they stationed them in the private homes. Sometimes you benefited from it because, for instance, with us was staying a Russian pilot, a young guy, who they stationed in our house and he used to bring a lot of packages that the soldiers get and he used to bring it home. There was always fish and beans and things like this.

HG: Canned food?

DF: Right. Or he used to bring like, sometimes, wood for the stove to burn. They got everything, and the families, as time was going on, got less and less. I mean you ate up what you had and you traded a little away and...there was a lot of commotion [?] of the government in the schools. The difference was that in the Polish school, politics were not discussed, not in my grade anyway. You learned history, and that is why I say that wars always went on somewhere else. There was always wars in Sweden and wars in Spain, but there...[unclear] in Russia but not in Poland. Why would Poland be in a war for? We had nothing to offer that could be taken away.

HG: Was Palestine discussed in your school?

DF: Palestine was discussed. We knew a few people, like a few young people that left for Palestine. It was not a habit of the townspeople to do. In fact some families would be very upset not for the fact that they went to Palestine but for the reason that they went all together. Families stuck together. This was our survival.

HG: When you had the *Bund* you had uncles and aunts around. Were they involved too, or were they busy trying to survive?

DF: I don't think that none of our family, as I can picture it or remember it belonged to any of those organizations. Our boys, our cousins, which we had many, belonged to the *Betar*. That was Jabotinsky's...

HG: What is *Betar*?

DF: An organization...

HG: How do you spell it?

DF: B-E-I-T-A-R.[3]

HG: And that was...

DF: Jabotinsky. He was not in our time but this was his organization. We had to have Palestine by fighting for it. They are not going to give it to us on a silver platter. The boys belong to this organization, all my cousins. I don't know about other boys but all my cousins belong to this. When I think about it, my husband belonged to that organization, too.

HG: Did you know him then?

DF: No.

HG: Oh, you probably found out about it later.

DF: In fact Menachem Begin married a girl that lived above my husband's store. Jabotinsky was there to the wedding and before he became Prime Minister, he was always involved in politics. They came here. Many years ago they were honoring somebody, and we were invited to that dinner. I don't remember where it was, but he was the main speaker there and my husband wanted to see him very much and, of course, his wife came and they lived above my husband's shoe store. So, all those connections. That was before he became Prime Minister. His wife, she remembered the street, she remembered everything.

HG: Tell me, at the time of the *Bund*, were poorer people, people that didn't have enough, were any of them trying to come to the United States or to Palestine?

DF: Well, there were a lot of families that were getting help from the United States because they had families here.

HG: Financial help?

DF: Financial help got to them at that time. Not at the Russian time. Before Russia, and there were a lot of people that got a lot of financial help.

HG: But they couldn't after Russia came in and took over and Poland was divided. That was the end. Life changed.

DF: Life changed and some people became more popular that in the Polish. For instance, some got very good jobs.

HG: The Polish people?

DF: No, the Jewish people. We are not talking about the Polish people. The Polish people were afraid; they were afraid of the Russians.

HG: So, the Russians really accepted the Jews at that time.

DF: Oh yes, the Russians accepted the Jews at that time. There were a lot of people that got high positions. We had a lot of very educated people. There were a lot of lawyers and doctors, they took over these positions. There was a judge, and we went to

[3]Betar

schools that were established. It was not war, it was just under a different government, and the difference was that in the Russian schools, politics was a big thing. They had a way of praising their government, theirs is the best, and you know, you brain-washed children, especially young adults. And the day came when they said we were going to have a fake exercise in case of something. They prepared the whole town, all the schools and all the shops.

HG: What year do you think that was?

DF: That was 1941. I think it was the beginning of '41 and the end of '40 and the beginning of '41, and they taught the girls how to be nurses. It was a survival thing. You had what to do in case of an emergency. It wasn't just preparations for war, you know, suppose...we were supposed to meet, like in a cemetery. The schools were divided, some schools were coming from one side and some from another, and we are all supposed to meet there and all of a sudden we saw planes. The Russians, when they see planes... Bombs started falling and they said, "Look how we are performing!", but there started to be explosions and there is fire and people are falling, and that is when Germany broke the treaty with them and took over Russia. They started advancing.

HG: And took over your town?

DF: Our town was not the only thing. Divided in half... And people started running. The chaos was unbelievable. We didn't know what was happening, but we saw that there was casualties already laying on the floor. Our parents were running [not clear]... And the Germans came in, moved in.

HG: They marched in, really.

DF: They marched in. Like I said before, why they made an airfield in our town, because we had a lot of ground. They had prepared it to such an extent that all the airplanes, every part like when you teach a pilot, the mechanics...the planes were all taken apart...That was all German thinking. Otherwise, they could not lift themselves up and fly away, whichever we could save. Everything was standing there on the ground. The chaos was unbelievable because right in our town was a lot of Russian families. There was a government going on, so they brought them in. They were working and whoever could, tried to cross the border and go into Russia.

HG: Were the Jewish people trying to escape to Russia?

DF: First the Russians, but the Jews started, too, because they knew. At the time when they divided Russia, and I will tell you just an incident of my own, not the thinking of anybody else. My mother had a sister living in a town in Lodz, which was called Litmannstadt by the Germans. Her town fell into Germany right away in 1939. Little things used to trickle down here and there. People used to tell stories about what the Germans were doing. Nobody believed this. I mean "Why?" One night, we were still sitting in our home town, by the Russians, and somebody knocked on the door and a guy came in. He was in his late 30's and he had our address, our name, and he said that he came to give us regards from my mother's sister. He came into the house and he told us that he was going

out with my cousin, and he told us stories about what is going on in Germany. We were sitting around the table in the kitchen and my parents made us go out, because children don't listen to stories like this. Everybody looked at him and said that he is crazy. I mean he told the real stuff about what is going on. He said that they just took people out and hung them in the middle of the street. They shot them in the middle of the street. They went into the families and just shot everybody at random. They threw children out of the windows; and everybody looked at him and said he is crazy. He is absolutely crazy. Why would people do things like this? So, we were not allowed to hear this. He stayed for a couple of days and then he moved on. He was all by himself.

HG: Where did he go?

DF: He wanted to go across the border and go deep into Russia.

HG: He thought he would be safer there?

DF: Yes, because he already went through what was waiting for us now, but we did not believe him. Now the Germans came in and times started getting very rough.

HG: What happened to the two soldiers living with you in your house?

DF: They ran away as soon as the Germans came in. Whether they survived or not I don't even know, but whatever was moving...They tried to get on trucks; they tried to get 1,000 people on one truck hanging from all sides just to get out. They wanted to go back into Russia, and this is when the real thing was starting.

HG: This was 1940.

DF: 1941, the beginning of 1941.[4] As we know now, the Germans was occupying, going, and their destruction was against the Jews. Their main obstacle, their main thing was to destroy the Jews, so they started right away. For a while they let us live in our own home, then they started making the ghettos. We lived for about six months, I would say, in our own house and then we were forced to go into the ghetto.

HG: How far away was the ghetto from your house?

DF: Within walking distance, but you were not allowed to go back to your house. Your house was then occupied by Gentile people who took over your house. They would take over everything, not only were you not allowed to take a certain amount. You couldn't, there was nowhere to put anything. We lived in one room, a family of...At that time we already had the baby. The baby was already born, so we were already six people and we lived in one room.

HG: With whatever you could carry?

DF: Yes, with whatever we could carry and, first of all, the elders of the town got together and made a *Judenrat*.

HG: How do you spell that?

DF: J-U-D-E-N-R-A-T.

HG: And that was an organization...

[4]After June 22, 1941

DF: It took care of the needs of the Germans.

HG: Of the Jews. Needs of the Jews.

DF: It's of the Germans not of the Jews. If they needed 204 coats, it had to be delivered to them, but instead of going to the houses, they had to be delivered to the *Judenrat*. Otherwise...everything to appease them.

HG: In other words, this was a German or Jewish organization?

DF: Jewish organization.

HG: To appease?

DF: To appease and to keep order, you know. It just so happened that our little town, somehow, I don't know by what miracle, kept on going. They brought in a lot of people from adjoining little towns of Jews to our ghetto. It was already the ghetto.

HG: It was just one ghetto?

DF: One ghetto, and we had to accommodate them all. Sometimes we lived four and five families in one room. Sicknesses and lack of food was great but we still were together and that made up, you know, for other things. At that time I was already, like 15, and we organized clubs, but with no names, just get together. We used to sing, we used to read poetry, we met a lot of people from other towns, like...you know, in my time, you didn't travel that much, you knew the people from your town and this is how it went. When other young people come and they bring other ideas and different songs and different things. We made a cultural club and we used to like to tell little plays. We were already getting to that stage where we were not children anymore.

HG: Young adults.

DF: Adults. We already knew the situation was not good, and everyday the *Judenrat* had to prepare an amount of people that went to work. That was taken care through them.

HG: They would go to the factories?

DF: They would go to the homes. For instance, my father was a very tall man. A tall man at any job took a certain kind of a beating or licking or whatever it is, so me and my sister used to go instead of him, if we could, and at that time we still could. Our job was to knit, and we knitted gloves and socks and knit hats for the German soldiers.

HG: Knit helmets?

DF: Right, so if we could spare my father not to go out to work, which was always outside work, like building or whatever it was, and this is how our ghetto existed. It wasn't good. It was bad, but there was a lot of hope, an awful lot of hope. It was this and the closeness of the families, I think, to stay with the family together, why so many of our people were killed. Because, if, for instance, the parents and the children...if the children would not care so much for the parents and save their own lives, they would run away, which some people did, but very little. The family came first. If you had an older son and four little children and the son came to the father and said, "Dad, they are running away to

the forest. You see what is going on, you hear the stories," and he said, "Now, you are going to leave me, with a family?"

HG: But how could he leave?

DF: He stayed, he didn't go, he stayed with the family.

HG: What chances did the people who ran for the forest have?

DF: Some survived, some did not.

HG: As far as when the Germans would find you, did you see anything that happened?

DF: When they found them from the forest?

HG: Either in the forest or in the towns or whatever?

DF: First of all, they took out the first of what they called the *Aktions*. They took out 16 Jews.

HG: What is that?

DF: It means first group of Jews. For no reason at all, but they were like...maybe in jobs they thought could damage them or anything like it. They took them out and they shot them.

HG: How do you spell that?

DF: A-K-C-J-A.[5] I don't really know...It is hard to spell it.

HG: Okay, go ahead. You said they would take the...

DF: They took out 15 Jews from our town and they killed them.

HG: Did you see this?

DF: I for one did not see it, but one of my oldest cousins was one of them.

HG: And they shot him?

DF: They shot him in the middle of the market place. Started circulating why. Some said because they belonged to the *Bund*. Some said they belonged to another organization. Otherwise they were not the proper people. They could stir some problems or trouble. Then we knew before, but we knew right then that the situation is getting worse and worse.

HG: What did they do with the bodies? Did they bury them?

DF: They buried them, yes.

HG: Did the Germans bury them?

DF: No, the Jews buried them.

HG: Right there in the middle of the town?

DF: Not in the middle of town. They buried them in the cemetery. Then the population in our town started swelling tremendously because they brought in from all around, and we thought that really we would survive then.

HG: More Jews?

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[5]*Aktion*

DF: Yes, they had liquidated almost all of the ghettos surrounding our town. All the little towns, and whoever could make it. Some were walking for two days and nights. Whoever died on the way, that's...The *Judenrat* waited for them and tried to accommodate them, find them a place where to sleep, eat and some clothing, and I always heard people talking that we are going to be the only town that survived the war.

HG: So they would all be taken into the ghetto?

DF: All to the ghetto.

HG: But, the ghetto's walls were still the same.

DF: Still the same, and the sicknesses were great because there were no medicines, and because there is less food, the more sicknesses. But still the families were going on. A family is a tremendous strength. My father was the youngest, I think, of eight or nine children and everybody used to say, "You are so young, why didn't you..."

Tape two, side one:

HG: This is tape two, side one and we are taping Dora Freilich and this is Helen Grossman interviewing. Go ahead.

DF: And so we knew that there are some young people running away to the forest, and my father says, "Just suppose I go and I survive, what good is it going to do me? I have a family, I have four children. What is my life without them and without my wife? I don't need it. If we go, we go all together. Second, we are going to survive because we have a lot of help."

HG: Did you have relatives around, too, at that time?

DF: We all lived in one house. My uncle...I had one cousin who is now in New York, they had a very big rooming house. I think it was the biggest rooming-house in the city for that matter, because the Hebrew University and the Hebrew School was in the adjoining building which belonged also to my uncle. They used to say that he was the richest man in town. And they had a special name that they called him but I forget. Because, as it is here, you wanted to be like everybody else. You didn't want to be the richest but you wanted to have better things, maybe, but there was a certain thing that my mother always used to tell me. "Always say that you are older," because we were big children. I guess it comes from better eating, better living conditions. I was a big girl, because I am a big woman for a European woman, you know. Now they are bigger, but years ago they were smaller. My mother used to say, "When they ask you, say that you are seven," and I would say, "Mommy, I am only five," and she would say, "Say that you are seven." We had bicycles, which not everybody had. I don't know, maybe 10 or 15 families. There was a bicycle for a girl and a bicycle for a boy. We had two bicycles. My father used to say, "Ah, don't go...[Yiddish]." That was "the evil eye." We were big children. We were well taken care of, we were very well dressed. So, we go together or we stay together. It's one or the other. This was, I guess, a Jewish concept, a family concept, and I guess that is why I have seen and read it in many books that the families being so close-knit together, which helped in one way and hurt in another way. Our great hope and our great bond with the family made us...gave us so much more hope. That is why we were killed because we went together. Always hoping that it couldn't be bad there.

The war between the Russians and the Germans was going strong. Poland was nothing to occupy. They went right through and left the people...and they were going deep into Russia. Now the worst, the war was going for them, the worst we got it in the ghetto. One reflected on the other. In 1942, at the end of 1942, there was a group of boys that had run away to the forest. I didn't know them and they came into the *Judenrat* to help them raise money for ammunition, because otherwise you are not accepted. You must present a piece, a revolver, anything, because even in the forest there is always...you know, you are not accepted unless you have some ammunition with you. The rumor goes, although it is not a rumor anymore, because we had just had a book published and I read some stories that I

did not know about my town, which is very interesting to me to read about it. The rumor has it that those boys were caught by two German officials that came in at the same time to the *Judenrat* to ask for silver or some extra boots or some extra linen, etc. etc. etc., and they saw them there and they thought that the *Judenrat* and the boys are connected, which may be in some way they were but not to an extent to do something wrong to the ghetto. Otherwise, the *Judenrat* took care of the ghetto as much as they could, providing them with jobs, with food, providing them with lodging, trying to accommodate for all those people that were brought into the ghetto. And this was the moment that they...they were wearing uniforms, Russian uniforms, German, or whatever they could find in the pile and this is, they say, when it started. They accused the *Judenrat* of being an accomplice and supporting the Jews in the forest, and so they surrounded the ghetto with German soldiers. Now we had a guy that worked in our bakery for as long as I can remember. At that time—I am already going on 16—we still had a little baby, and the ghetto was fenced in but not on all sides. There was some creeks running through...and this guy that worked for my father for so many years came and through somebody said, "Let me have the baby, let me take the baby to my village." She was blond; we were all dark hair but that baby was blond. "I don't know what is going to happen. The rumors are bad what we are hearing." So they were afraid, too. They were not killing them. "Let me have the baby."

HG: This was a Christian?

DF: We debated about it and we decided to give him the baby. After two days the guards from the fences were taken away and we thought the *Judenrat* would take care of everything again. We will work, we'll struggle, we'll die, we won't have any food, we won't have any heat, but we will still have each other. So we started looking at each other and my father said, "We want to bring the baby back."

HG: This was the second day.

DF: No, this was more than the second day. She was already there a week, and he said, "Why should we tear apart a family? Let's get together again," and we gave him notice that we want to get the baby back.

HG: How did you get the message to him? Could you leave the ghetto?

DF: No, through trading on the side with the peasants.

HG: You sent a message?

DF: Right, and he begged us not to take the baby back, to leave the baby with him, with his family. He had a family I think of seven children and he said, "One more, let it be there." I told this to my children when they were growing up. I don't know if I should mix these two things together but it is interesting. Always when we used to go for a ride in the car we used to sing a song about a mother that gives her child away. It's a Yiddish song and every time we used to go in a car, my son would say, "Mommy let's sing that song," because the mother gives the baby away to a Christian family and they look out the window. They are two blond girls and that little baby boy, a little boy with black hair and black eyes, and the baby is crying. In the words in the song, "I want to go with you, I don't want

to stay here," but she is begging them to take care of the baby because I cannot take care of him anymore and that is why I want him to live. So every time we got in the car my son used to say to me, "Mommy let's sing that song."

HG: And what happened with your...?

DF: So he brought the baby back. The baby at that time was a year-and-a-half, I would say.

HG: It must have been very hard for your mother to give up the baby.

DF: Well, we were there in the ghetto already for a long time, and we saw what was going on and the situation was deteriorating and the situation of catching the boys in the *Judenrat*...We knew, we started to, like everybody woke up or something. "What can we do?" There was nothing that could be done. You could not fight the Germans; you also did not have the Polish Gentile population with you. They were just like the Germans and worse. So, the story that we didn't fight back. How can you? If you are surrounded on all four sides by enemies shooting from all four sides at you, what can you do? So one morning, the *Judenrat* announced...and...it's about two weeks since the found boys in the *Judenrat* and the evacuation of our town. We lived in a small town, so we don't have a big train. We had a small train. They called it...it took you to the train that went from big city to big city.

HG: Was the whole ghetto empty?

DF: The whole ghetto was empty. They took off on sleds. It was in January, bitter cold.

HG: In 1942.

DF: The end of 1942, the beginning of 1943. The peasants were ordered to come with the sleds. They told us to pack whatever we can take with us, the necessities, and on the sleds we were taken to the train. Now in a little town and when you are in business you know a lot of people that you deal with and they said, "The rumors." The Gentile people that knew my father said that the rumors that are coming through are unbearable. "They say that they are killing the Jews all over. Where they are taking them?" We don't know; we don't have papers and they took our radios. We didn't have nothing, and my father said that he doesn't want to listen to this. He is going with the family together and this is it and we went.

HG: How long of a ride on the sled?

DF: On the sled the ride was not too long. It was like, I was, say, mostly standing and when there was everybody...and lame people and sick people...

HG: The whole ghetto?

DF: The whole ghetto, and then they took us on the trains. It was like a seven-mile ride by sled. It's two hours, three hours, and then they put us on the train in cattle cars.

HG: Your family was still together in the cattle cars?

DF: Together and on every cattle car there was two Germans on both sides. At that time everybody started looking for ways of surviving and everybody started hollering

at my father. "Do something, do something." So, he looked at us, four small children. He jumped out of the train and he got killed. He jumped and he said before he jumped to us, "If we ever stay alive, we will meet back in our town." And he jumped. I was, I think, 15, my sister was 17, my brother was 13 and the baby was two.

HG: When he did that?

DF: Yes.

HG: And your mother?

DF: My mother was with us.

HG: Was he trying to get away? Was that it?

DF: There was a lot of pressure. We were going through little towns. It was [not clear] even like this. It was in the ghetto, and the town was evacuated in three days. There was not enough left to take everybody, so they took, for the time being...A lot of people in the ghetto built bunkers and they were hiding. Now, I think that we had built the biggest bunker in town. Of course nobody survived in that bunker because the dogs would come and sniff you, that was it. So by the time they started to take us away, my uncle said to my father, "You are so young, you are not even 40. Do something." This was the tragic thing in our family. My mother and my brother and the little baby went on the third transport, and my father took me and my sister and three of my cousins and my uncle and we hid in the bunker for two nights thinking that we are going to survive. When we saw that we cannot do it, that we have not enough food, we don't have lights, and we returned back to our houses and we packed up everything that we had to take along for the baby. Cookies, sugar, things that were very precious to us and...

HG: Any kind of food?

DF: Any kind of food. Food was very important. That was the main thing of survival and we went with the fourth transport. It was the fourth day, we went. Actually my father had only me and my sister. He gave us some money and he said, "Do your best. You will meet your mother and the children there, because we are all going to a working camp, so we are going to meet the mother and the two children."

HG: Did you know which camp you were going to?

DF: No. As we were passing by—I think it was not far from Warsaw, which was very far from our town—they could see through the little windows people working outside, laying the track and they knew how many people went through here and nobody comes back and they were showing that we are all going to be killed.

HG: You just drew your hand across your neck and that was the motion that they used?

DF: Yes. Those people, the repair people showed you where you were going. Because the train was full, so my father decided...I don't know like something goes through your mind, like suicide. You plan on it but you never think that you are going to do it if you are suicidal. And he jumped out. I returned home in 1945, I went back to Russia.

HG: Let's go back. Let's finish with that. After your father jumped, the train was moving.

DF: It was constantly moving. There were two more people that jumped from the same cattle car. From ours; there were others that jumped from other cars too.

HG: When they jumped, I guess they were shot right away?

DF: They were shot but we didn't think that he was shot, but in the long run we have never found him and nobody has seen him in concentration camps. I have looked for him all over. I have returned back home for that reason. So, he was shot probably on the spot. There is one guy that jumped from the same cattle car that is alive. But as the train goes, they jumped from both sides. He obviously jumped from the side that was closer to the forest. That all has a bearing, every little thing, and he could run right away into the forest; he is alive.

HG: How long did that train trip last, do you have any idea?

DF: The train trip lasted, I think, it was two or three days. Three nights and three days.

HG: Any food?

DF: Nothing. People were just dying in the train and it was standing room only. You made where you stood, there was nothing to drink and nothing to eat. Crying and suffering was unbelievable, and there was nothing you can do. You go, so whoever dies, dies, and you stand right next to them. It was me and my sister and 100 other people, neighbors, friends, you know, people that you spent a lifetime together with, that you spent your youth with, teachers that you have been afraid of at one time now are together with you in the car.

And then we came to Auschwitz. And that ride on the train, I have put in a special category. It took me months until I could get myself together and imagine and put it on paper, that ride on the train. And then we came to Auschwitz. We didn't know what Auschwitz is. Lights. Opening of the doors of the cattle cars and everything dead or alive, everything is falling out. From 100 I don't know if there were 40 survivors in our car, and every car the same thing, and there were maybe 40 cattle cars together. We see from far away, we see smoke.

HG: This was 1942?

DF: That was 1943 already.

HG: Oh, '43.

DF: January, 1943. We are already in Auschwitz. In 1942 and the end of '41 we were in the ghetto and the end of '42 is when we started to see that something was going to happen. They surrounded the ghetto and they go away again and this is when a lot of young people run away, young men. And that's where we met the famous Dr. Mengele.

HG: In Auschwitz?

DF: At Auschwitz. I don't know if he was at every oncoming train. But he was at ours. At that time we didn't know who he was. It was left or right, left or right.

HG: Were they separating you, then?

DF: You had to pass by...like they were standing four military men and subconsciously you somehow realized that they are looking for something. They are not looking for the lame people and they are not looking for the sick people; they are looking for the stronger ones that are still walking. So right away, your mind starts working and...I don't know, I never figured it out, but at the moment when you see death before your eyes, your desire to live is so great, that you try right away to do something about it. You straighten up and it is like an animal instinct. I don't know what it is, but this is what it is. Me and my sister fall into a lane that goes into the concentration camp.

HG: She felt it, too, and she straightened up, too?

DF: Yes. At that time it was probably that they emptied out Auschwitz. They used to empty it every couple of months, because in '43 there were people there from four years before; so, every time besides the dead ones that died on the inside, they used to come and empty because they needed new arrivals.

HG: They needed the space.

DF: They needed new strength to work, and that was the time when we were coming in.

HG: You said that Dr. Mengele was right there?

DF: Dr. Mengele was right there.

HG: You didn't know who he was, though?

DF: No. As a rule, from our city there was a big amount of people that survived. We always come together for the last 40 years and always talk about it. We have our *Yiskor* meeting which is conducted in New York, and of course there are few left. It gets less and less. People die of old age. But again, they took care on each other, as much as they could.

HG: Like an extended family.

DF: It was like something caring for each other, and this is where I come in again in that book about things which I did not know existed, that some people could get some medication...We used to get a lot of diarrhea. We were separated; men and women were not together.

HG: In the bunks?

DF: There was two separate concentration camps. One for the men and one for the women. A German soldier would not touch us so there were very few rapes. This is very important.

HG: I thought that it was the other way around.

DF: No.

HG: No. They were not allowed to.

DF: They were not allowed. Also, Jewish people were worse than dogs. I mean this was the lowest, so you didn't have to touch the lowest. There were a lot of Gentile people in the concentration camps that came for different reasons. There were political, and some were criminal. Hard, hard criminals. They were the ones taking care of us. So we

came into the concentration camp, and Poland has a very severe winter. I mean we get winter in September and it stays till April. Auschwitz is a town in Silesia. It has a very long winter.

HG: How do you spell the town?

DF: Auschwitz is the main concentration camp, in Polish Oswiecim.

HG: Spell that?

DF: That was in Polish. But it's known as Auschwitz. Auschwitz is the main concentration camp. We are in Birkenau.

HG: What is Birkenau?

DF: No, that's not the town. This is what they called the concentration camp. That belongs to Auschwitz.

Tape two, side two:

HG: This is tape two, side two and this is Dora Freilich being interviewed by Helen Grossman. Go on.

DF: Now we are in Birkenau in Auschwitz. We are taken—the girls, separate, the men, separate, rather the women, separate, and the men, separate, and we are marched into the concentration camp.

HG: Let me go back to one place. When you said that the people were divided, those who went to the concentration camp and the rest went where?

DF: Straight to the crematory.

HG: Now let's go back to the concentration camp.

DF: All the old, all the young, all the children...everything...

HG: Children, too?

DF: Babies, children. There was such incidents...When I say that the will to live is so strong, that mothers have thrown away their children...given [not clear] young mothers...when they realize in this moment that this is the game that is going to be here...and we are marched into the concentration camp. It is all fenced in with electrical wire fencing and there is an entrance and above the entrance there is a saying, "*Arbeit macht frei*"—work makes you free. Although we are...I am already 16 years old, still you cannot believe that there would be a people, a nation that would want to kill another, for what? There has got to be a reason, but there was no reason. It was only because we were born Jewish. We are taken into a barracks which is called a [not clear]...to give us the protection and...[long pause]

HG: Were the Jews and the Christians mixed up at that point?

DF: This is strictly Jews only at this point. From the ghetto on the train, this was strictly Jews. Whatever we found, whoever we met as Gentiles, were brought to the concentration camp at different times for different reasons. For stealing, for robbing, for political, for all kinds.

HG: And your barracks were all Jewish?

DF: The barracks were mostly Jewish. The ones who were taking care of us, the overseers, were the hardened criminals that were Germans. Now they had the power over us. The ones that had already been here for years and years in the concentration camp, sent there for different reasons, they were now over us. Now we come into that place and we go through...First they shave our heads, then they shave our armpits and our private places with dull razors, and then comes the tattooing of the numbers, and we look at each other like, "What is going on?" It's like masses coming, one after the other, and we hear a voice which I also put in writing, "It's better than taking the heavenly express." You still have a little time on your hands. One thing, try to keep yourself as healthy as you can under those conditions and maybe you will survive. And Auschwitz is not [unclear]. Now this is the

worst. I don't even have words. I don't even know a people that have ever done anything so brutal as was done in Birkenau. The burning, the killing...

HG: Of the people?

DF: Of the people. Here we are all young females. It is strictly females. I am talking about my concentration camp where I am.

HG: You are talking about burning there in front of you?

DF: In front of us. The crematoriums are in this sense that we can see. This never stops for one minute. The clouds of smoke go up constantly, and if that cannot do it well enough, they take out the corpses and they stack them up and they put them on fire. And this is all done...

HG: In front of you?

DF: In front of us.

HG: You were forced to watch this?

DF: No, we were not forced to watch this specific thing, but we cannot avoid it. You see it. It is going on day and night until Eichmann shows up in camp.

HG: Did you see him?

DF: I have seen him. I did not see him personally. We knew...there are always rumors coming around to the camp when some very big official came. He came with a big proposition that Jewish people are not getting killed...fast enough. The process is too slow and he looked in. We were told then...about it after the war by people that worked in the crematorium. You know people had to work at it, too. They kept them for only a certain time, mostly men worked at it. No women.

HG: Jewish men?

DF: Jewish men. Jewish and Gentile, I guess. Mostly Jewish. They had to shove them into the showers, supposedly. And they kept them for a certain time, those people, the Jewish people that worked on them and then they killed them. Otherwise...if anything happened, they should never...They thought they could catch it in time that nothing will come out how this was functioning. Well, at that time there were rumors that Eichmann came into the camp and that he was a very high official and he has a certain method that is going to speed up the killing of the Jews. And he brought in the X...whatever it was called, that zyklon, that killed the people in less than four minutes. The majority was killed, the majority was gassed.

HG: The zyklon was the gas?

DF: This was a better method. It was a stronger gas and it was doing a better job. Well, a lot of people were still alive because they gave you just a certain amount of time, five minutes, and then if you dropped dead, you are dead, and if you are not, you are going to burn anyway. If people was still there, you had to burn them. Where do you dispose of so many bodies? There were millions and millions of bodies. [long pause] Well, life in Birkenau...I don't have words to describe it. I don't know why I survived it; I don't know how.

HG: What was it like, in the morning?

DF: We got up about four in the morning. They woke us up, and we stood in front of our barracks, five in a row.

HG: How many people would you say, 20, 30, 40?

DF: In the barracks, there were a couple of hundred people.

HG: Five in a row.

DF: Five in a row. We stood until there was a little bit of light coming through. They counted us constantly. One thing that the Germans said [had?] dead or alive, the number must be there.

HG: If somebody died during the night?

DF: Not some, but many. You brought them all out and you piled them up in front of the barracks.

HG: Everybody would carry out the dead?

DF: Everybody would carry out the dead and put them in front of the barracks and that is how they were counted. Dead or alive. If from work, we used to carry them with us, and if one of those...This was after being already about seven months in Birkenau, and the girls were dying left and right. Sickness. No food. Lice. The lice ate us up alive.

HG: There was no chance for any kind of washing, or bathroom facilities, I'm sure.

DF: This was a hole and they only give you only this much time in the "bath-room."

HG: That was the hole.

DF: This was the hole and they only give you this much time in the "bathroom" for everybody together; finished or unfinished, you go. The ground in Birkenau is lime and you sink into it. You just sink into it, and in the wintertime with the wooden shoes, if you get stuck into it and you can't get out you die right there.

HG: Like cement?

DF: Like diluted cement. I don't know what you call it here. This is the kind of ground it is.

HG: It was probably lime.

DF: It was lime. But the snow and the rain and everything together diluted and you get mud, and if you go with your wooden shoes and you get stuck, then you can't pull it out. Everyone went down to the weight of, I don't know, 40 or 45 pounds and every day there was less and less girls. Every day we walked to work and our work consisted of doing a lot of nothing but heavy work. We took...we built highways. We carried heavy stones, gravel, everything that had to do with building construction. No matter how many we walked out with in the morning, we had to bring everyone back with us into the camp.

HG: Was there any food in the morning?

DF: In the morning there was just black coffee.

HG: And then, I am sure, at mid-day there wasn't any.

DF: Mid-day they used to bring soup, and this is where the accident with my...it wasn't an accident. My sister was with me and we walked out this morning to a commander to work. Approximately...the rumors get around...sometimes there is someone who is a little better...a little bit more hard[5] even in a German, who would leave the girls alone. You know, let them work but at least she wouldn't beat us while we were working, because the working and the beating was unbearable, and somehow we could not get into that unit. The running...the commotion in the morning was so great because everybody wanted to run to the unit that they thought was better. So right there in the...you got killed, you got shot. The *Lagerstrasse*, the street where you walked out, you had to parade. Every morning. When you walked, the orchestra played. They were the best players there in white suits playing songs.

HG: Men and women?

DF: Yes.

HG: How big of an orchestra?

DF: I would say about 30 or 40 people.

HG: Were they Jewish at all?

DF: Yes.

HG: They were chosen probably because they were from symphonies themselves?

DF: Right. Like "Playing for Time." She [Fanya Fenelon] was playing in that orchestra. And then when we marched to work, we had to sing. We had to sing German songs. For not singing, and for not keeping up, you could be shot on the spot. So here we marched on the highway and people are going back and forth and seeing a crowd of very happy girls going to work, singing loud and clear.

HG: Civilians would see you marching, passing by, and they would know you are from a camp.

DF: They would know that we come from somewhere. They knew...They saw the smoke that was going for miles and miles and yet after the war everybody said that they didn't know anything.

HG: I heard it constantly.

DF: Now, this one time we could not get into a unit that was halfway decent, what we called the [not clear]. You worked but you didn't get beat up. And we fell into that unit when we walked out with four Germans and six German shepherds. This is how the unit worked out, 200 girls; and we came to a place where we had to carry mud. We put our coats, whatever we had, with the buttons in the back and we carried...

HG: Why did you do that?

DF: That is what they told us to do. On top...We were like in a valley and on top there was standing Gentile girls, also from the concentration camp, and they were...We

[5]Perhaps "less hard" is meant

used to pass by them and they would put in the dirt, the heavy, wet dirt into our coats, or, if there was not enough coats, they used to give us, like [not clear], and that day, I think, was the worst day. We brought from that day about 20 dead girls...from this work day.

HG: What was the purpose of wearing your coats that way?

DF: That we could have the [not clear] to use the coat to carry with. Also, this was our Sunday. Also done for the same purpose. Sunday we did not go out to work but we did the same thing in the concentration camp. Their enjoyment was our agony. The more agony, the more they enjoyed it, so they used to think of things to do.

HG: To harass...

DF: They stood there, and they were young soldiers, and for instance, they would say to each other, "Let's see. Can you shoot her? Shoot her from here?" And he said, "I will try," so he did. He said, "If you don't do it, I will do it." So he got her. Another one put on the ground dead. And this is when my sister got killed.

HG: Because somebody was playing games?

DF: Just playing games.

HG: She was shot for no reason?

DF: No reason. They were bringing down...The truck went by and they left this soup which was given to us at noon time. The soup was brought in...It was like barrels, but they were made out of steel, and...I guess they used them for soldiers here to, like...I have seen it, but...

HG: With the top clamped on the side?

DF: Right, with the tops clamped on the sides. Right, and since we were in a valley, they left this on top and the girls had to go up and bring it down and they were heavy, so this was a picnic for the soldiers, because this is when they could see real agony at play. They sent up like six girls, and one of the things with the soup opened up while they were sliding down with it and they all got burned. Not all burned right away...hands ...and then they shot them. We had brought back that day 20 or 24 dead girls to the camp.

HG: And you had to bring your sister back?

DF: Yes, I had to bring my sister back. We carried them...We always walked out...They were made out of wood; you always took them with you...I don't know what you call them here...You put it on your shoulders. You always walked out with this because you knew that you were always going to bring back some girls dead. There was no other way. This was the way of life. But to bring back 22 or 24 dead and to carry them, it was almost every row...We marched in five, and almost every row carried a dead girl. The applause that they got entering was unbelievable. A job good done...

HG: The soldiers...

DF: This was for them something...

HG: These girls were not buried when they were brought back?

DF: These girls had to be brought in and brought to our barracks where we belonged, put down on the floor and counted together with us. Then they were burned. They

were put on trucks and taken to the crematorium. They were dead already, anyway, but you had to bring them back, because everything had to be accounted for.

HG: They were very systematic, the Germans? Very systematic.

DF: This was how it worked.

HG: Tell me what the situation was. Did you become friends with the other people? Some of them you knew.

DF: Well, most of the time...

HG: I am talking about the other girls in the barracks.

DF: Yes. In the beginning when we walked in, it was all, like from our town. All girls that we knew, all girls that we went to school with. There were girls that came into our ghetto from the neighboring towns that we got acquainted with and again, it was like a helping hand. Everybody tried to encourage everybody else. The older ones tried to do it to the younger ones. By older, I mean by 25 or 27 year-olds looked to us like we were children. They are the older so they tried to encourage us, to try to keep clean, to try to be good to each other, to try and not steal the food from each other, and we always paired off like two together. If we got a portion of bread, we ate one in the morning and we kept one. Otherwise, we put together both of our portions. We ate one and we kept one, to save. I was with a girl that was not from my town and she was from Grodno, Poland, and she was in our ghetto.

HG: How do you spell that?

DF: G-R-O-D-N-O.

HG: Uh huh.

DF: And her name was Dora, too, and we, for a little time, shared our life. We slept on the same bunk together and we shared our food together and she used to tell me, "You'll see. We live. I have an uncle in America, and he is a big actor, and we will come to him. He is my uncle and you will see, we will have it so good." Her uncle was an actor.

HG: Her uncle was really an actor?

DF: Yes. What was his name? He played in *Papirosin*. Jewish stage, yes. I don't think he's alive now. He played in *Papirosin*. I can't remember his name now, with his wife, and that was her uncle, that was her father's brother, and they stayed in contact closely, because she knew that he plays the Jewish Theater. She even knew Brooklyn...She called it "Broklyn"...Can I offer you something? Would you like a drink or a coffee, or a soda or something?

HG: No, I just want you to go ahead with your story.

DF: And she said, "You'll see. He will be so good to us because he always sends us money. The families did help. He sends us for every *yomtov* and he sends us money and we have something to live on. We'll be with him. He lives in Brooklyn."

HG: It sounded like heaven.

DF: It sounded like heaven. It gave me a little bit of hope, and there was very little left. Very little. At that time on the bunk, there was like three tiers and we slept in the

middle. There was me and my sister and four cousins and four friends. We slept like this because everybody wants to be together. It was me, the only one left. They all died at work, or of sickness, or shot for play, or taken for experiments, which was another very bad thing.

HG: Tell me what you knew about the experiments.

DF: Okay.

HG: You mentioned Mengele before?

DF: Mengele was the doctor, who they say is still alive. Mengele had his own way of doing things. First of all he rode on his motorcycle on the *Lagerstrasse*. Now the *Lagerstrasse* was the main street of the camp. On both sides were the barracks, and if my unit was ready to go, we marched out on the *Lagerstrasse* and we had to walk straight out to the entrance, be counted again...Everything and everybody had to be accounted for.

HG: Spell *Lagerstrasse*.

DF: L-A-G-E-R-S-T-R-A-S-S-E. So in the middle, as the unit of 200 or 150 girls used to walk, he used to suddenly run through with his motorcycle and whoever got killed got killed. No business of his. That was his pleasure. On both sides of the *Lagerstrasse* were two canals and that is where the girls fell in.

HG: Into water.

DF: Into the mud, and when he was through with his enjoyment and we put together back the unit of people, of the girls, if 20 were dead, then there were 20 available right away. I mean put them back and go back to work. That was Mengele's enjoyment. His enjoyment was also his friends taking beautiful young girls and cutting them up in pieces and making all kinds of experiments with them. This was by the end of 1944. At that time I am already two years in Birkenau—that's Auschwitz. There was very few of us left. By few, I mean the ones that I know.

HG: Excuse me, did you know any of the people that were taken? Did you know the people personally that were taken for Mengele's experiments?

DF: I knew one girl and she was alive after the war, I had met her after the war.

HG: And she survived?

DF: She survived. The experiments were many, of different kinds. They could do whatever they want; so if they performed an operation, they didn't have to sew you up. They wanted to see how it did inside without closing. If they made like they call here now a...

HG: Hysterectomy?

DF: No, not that.

HG: Where the baby is taken from the womb?

DF: Yes, the baby is taken from the womb or artificial insemination, they did that but they had to watch how it grows, what it does, and for them to cut up a Jewish girl and see how this is doing inside...

HG: Probably without pain killers?

DF: Without pain killers. The girls...

Tape three, side one:

HG: This is Helen Grossman and I am interviewing Dora Freilich. This is tape three, side one, and we are going on with the experiments at this point.

DF: Now, the girls that were chosen to go to the experiments were chosen from the healthiest between us. They were separated from us and taken to a completely different barracks, and they say, I am not sure if that what I heard...that they were kept on a better diet than us, to give them a more normal way of life so that they could get a little bit stronger. They also did not go out to any physical work but we saw them going out to pick flowers.

HG: Excuse me, but did your menstrual period keep going through this?

DF: No, they put stuff in the food that took the menstruation away right away. We did not have it all through the time that we were in the concentration camp.

HG: What do you think the girls did that were taken for the experiments?

DF: I guess that this is what they tried to do. That's why they fed them a different diet. They did also not work physically as hard. Their conditions were a little bit better than us in order to give them a more civilized way of living so that they can experiment on them and see what is happening. Because if they took any from the concentration camp, they would not survive because we had only the skin to keep together the bones.

HG: Did they survive?

DF: As I said, I met one girl that survived. There might be others, I don't know. She had a complete hysterectomy, which we knew about hysterectomies then, and we knew what they are doing but obviously she never married. She could never have children. They did the same thing on the men's side too. They took men too for the same purpose.

HG: The healthier men?

DF: The healthier men. They kept them and they did the same thing to see how they can operate, what they can do to them, for their own professions, for their medicine. For guinea pigs. This girl I know, I met her after the war and I don't know if she's alive any more, but she was as young as me. She was 19 and she told me then that she will never be able to have children and I said, "Well why?" And she said, "Because I think they took out something that a child has to be born in." We didn't know what it was, and back home you did not sit a child down and sit him down and say, "Listen, you are going to get a menstruation." You just didn't do things like that. You went to the library and you looked up some stuff if you wanted. Sex and things like this, that was not a habit. Sex waited until after marriage. There was no fresh thing. If you knew about somebody, and somebody told you, and somebody else brought it...and that this girl was bad and maybe she had sex, my God, the whole family was like...Ach! Nobody wanted to be associated with her. This was what it was like.

HG: In the camp there couldn't have been anything like sex. It was impossible...

DF: No, the Germans would not touch us with a ten-foot pole.

HG: What about the people that were guarding you that were not Germans? They were the other prisoners.

DF: They were already like Germans and worse. Mostly they were Germans. Volksdeutsche, they were called. Germans living in other countries.

HG: Explain that.

DF: Volksdeutsche. Germans living in other countries.

HG: Misplaced Germans.

DF: Misplaced Germans, and they were brought into camp for different reasons. Like for reasons that were political. Even prostitution. They were a black...like, for instance, we got the numbers, and on the bottom you can see it's a half Magen David, half a triangle. Now, the politicals had a red triangle. They didn't have no numbers on their arms, but they had it on their uniforms. The prostitutes had a black triangle.

HG: Were they Jewish prostitutes?

DF: No, not necessarily. German.

HG: Any?

DF: Any.

HG: But they were marked as prostitutes?

DF: Right. Even gay people were marked. Homosexuals was not allowed.

HG: Were the prostitutes treated any differently than anybody else?

DF: Well, it depends on the time of the year that they came in and how long they were there. Otherwise any one who had been there before, took over the command over us. Everybody was boss over us. Might be Volksdeutsche, Polish. Whatever he was, as long as he was there a year, a half a year, three months more than us, then he had the command, he was our boss. This was Mengele's main thing, to find out, to see how he can function on human beings to do all these experiments, to do all these things, to do all these operations and not close it up, to see it growing, to see it functioning.

HG: And observe?

DF: And observe.

HG: And keep records.

DF: And keep records.

HG: You probably heard about the skin lamps.

DF: The skin lampshades.

HG: Were you aware of that when you were in the camp?

DF: No. Neither were we aware of the soap that they were making from the fat when they burned the people. Our hunger kept us so occupied that everybody thought, "I am going to be the one that survives." And this I see now in many books: people that survived, that everyone...you never said it aloud, and you didn't say that I am going to survive, I am going to write a book about it, etc., etc., because that was in every, not corner, but in every minute around you, but somehow deep inside you felt that you must survive.

You must do the utmost to survive and see what you can do about it, to show the world what happened.

HG: You have heard of the artwork that came out of the camps. Were you ever aware of any of this?

DF: No. You mean like in Theresienstadt?

HG: There particularly.

DF: I don't think that there was any artwork in Auschwitz. Theresienstadt, I think, was the camp visited by Red Cross, and I think that it was kept a little bit under better conditions. As an example. Right. The rest was, "Just kill as many as you want. Enjoy yourself as much as you want. There are no restrictions. You are not going to be punished; do whatever pleases you the most," and what pleased them the most was killing.

HG: To get back to the experiments: they would keep the women alive, but not with pain killers. They would just live as long as they could and then expire?

DF: As long as they could, and then expire. I know of a woman here. She is much older than me, much older, 15 years older, and she had been in the experiment group, too.

HG: What did she say about it?

DF: Well, as a rule, this is still...they do not talk about it much. If you know of somebody that was in that particular group, you don't touch that subject. I mean, you would tell all of the horrors that you went through and everybody on their own went through; besides as a group, we all went through our own beatings, our own sufferings. This is not a subject to touch because it is too private. She doesn't have no children, so I know that this was done to her. As we grew older we learned what it is all about. So I know that she was there, and she never had a family. In 19-..., by the end of 1945, no, 1944, rumors started going around in the concentration camp, there was always rumors... The men used to come into work, like the electricians, or mechanics, or sewer workers, all kinds. They could get hold of a radio or something more easily, and they were more interested, and mostly they heard from England on the BBC it was. And they knew that the Allies are in the war...whatever. They knew that the Germans are getting a licking on the Russian front. The winter was very bad, and this was their only hope, the Russians, that they couldn't survive the winter there. So that the men used to come in...They used to leave word, here and there a word to a girl, saying, "We heard this and this. Try and help yourself and we will help you too." Bring in an extra portion bread, beans or something, to give to the girls, sharing. "Try and stay healthy. Try to get a little water and wash yourself, try and get rid of the lice." The lice was eating us up.

HG: There was no way of getting rid of the lice?

DF: They were embedded into the skin, sucking the blood. You could not pull them out; so by the end of 1944, they made an *Entlausung*, which mean to get rid of the lice.

HG: Spell that.

DF: E-N-T-L-A-U-S-U-N-G.

HG: To get rid of the lice?

DF: To get rid of the lice. Okay, this is the way it went. Each and every one of us took off what we were wearing.

HG: This was an order from the camp?

DF: Absolutely.

HG: They wanted to get rid of it too.

DF: They wanted to get rid of it too because they were in the boards of the barracks and everything. So, whatever we were wearing, pants—torn, not torn—shorts, long sleeve shirts, a belt and of course the wooden clogs—which the girls wear it now and enjoy it so much. We never took it in to sell because every time I looked at it I thought, "My God, my God." So we had to take it and tie it together; we were completely naked. That was the end of 1944, in December, and the snow was three or four or five feet high. They closed the barracks and exploded bombs in the barracks.

HG: Where were the people?

DF: The people were out. They put on top of the barracks, and in the middle of the Lagerstrasse big boiling things of water.

HG: Cauldrons.

DF: Yes, and we threw our clothing in there. Then when it boiled—meanwhile, we stood naked for a whole night and a whole day—then they took it out from the water and they threw it on the roof so it froze. Then they pulled it down from the roof, and we had the numbers, besides on us, on our jackets; in other words, you were a number, you had no name, you were called a number. Then you take the frozen clothes and you take them apart, and it breaks, it tears; you put it on because it is yours, it has your number and everything, and we are left with one leg and one without; you have half a shirt or you have no shirt at all, it fell apart completely. So they have one big thing with extras, like, and these are from soldiers, worn and worn over and over again, and if they see that it is very bad, that you have nothing, you get something, maybe a pillow, anything, just to cover yourself. This was the *Entlausung* of the camp. It didn't help any, maybe a little, but rumors started that they are going to take us to another camp. There were rumors that another camp was forming. Girls were always afraid of something new; something new always spelled disaster, worse than this. You already knew how to protect yourself a little bit unless you got shot in the back of your head, but you have already conditioned yourself a little bit. Then a group of us said, "Well, what can be worse than this. We are left just a couple of us." A lot of them went berserk; that was another catastrophe. They went crazy right away the first couple of days.

HG: Right away in the beginning?

DF: Yes.

HG: And after that the survivors were able to cope.

DF: After the first initial couple of months, had a greater chance of surviving. Eastern European Jews, that was proven statistically, were more survival prone than any other brought in from any other country. Why, it was not proven; they say that people that were brought in from countries where the level of living was higher had a less resistance. They brought in girls from Yugoslavia. Now Yugoslavia was a very advanced country, and they brought in girls from Belgium which were the same, and they brought in girls from France, and they just fell like flies. In three days, there was nobody left.

HG: From all of these.

DF: Yes, they used to bring in transports. When we came in the railroad stopped at a certain point and we had to walk to the barracks. At that time they had built already the railroad and it brought you straight to the crematorium, or otherwise the concentration camp was overfilled. We worked under contracts, not our contracts—they had different contracts. Did you read the book, Schindler's List? Very interesting book. If not enough died in a specific time or not enough were shot in a specific time and it was getting overcrowded they just brought a truck, piled them up on the truck, and took them to the crematorium. This was a daily routine and you get so used to it. It's like a doctor performing an operation, it's nothing; you sleep with the dead and you eat with the dead, and you lay near them, and you are like an animal, stripped of everything. Your only object is for food and for survival, and after the war that was the thing that most of us thought. I must do it, I must survive and tell the story. And they decided that they are going to liquidate Auschwitz after an incident that happened. Birkenau, rather. They had a factory that made ammunition. It was on the way to Auschwitz, between Birkenau and Auschwitz. Auschwitz was the town and Birkenau was like on the outskirts of the town, and there were a lot of girls that worked there too, and a lot of girls stole a lot of ammunition, and as in the ghetto there were a lot of little groups coming together and trying to fight back, and they blew up part of the crematorium.

HG: Is this in Schindler's List?

DF: I don't know; maybe he writes about it too.

HG: And they blew up part of the crematorium?

DF: Yes.

HG: What year do you think that was?

DF: 1944. Of course they attributed it right away to the girls that worked in that factory because this is the only place that the ammunition could come from. They brought it in with them. Because they were searched when they came out, so they probably brought it in like powder and gave it to the men and the men used to make the bombs. They hung four girls.

HG: Did you see this?

DF: Everybody had to see this. Two girls were hung in the morning for the ones that were going out to work, and the ones that came in had to see.

HG: That was for the explosion.

DF: Yes. And they hung four. Also, there were a few, and one girl was from Belgium and she already advanced to a point where she worked in an office, very pretty, very blonde, a very beautiful girl. She could walk out with the papers from the concentration camp and walk to the crematorium; that is how much faith they had in her. That is how good of a worker she was. She helped a lot of Belgium girls, put them in better position, you know, like maybe into the kitchen to work or on laundry which was under a roof, not outside to work—outside work killed you completely—and she got together, I guess there was a lot of planning into it and she ran away.

HG: And she escaped?

DF: No.

HG: Oh, she didn't.

DF: No, they caught her and she was already out of Auschwitz and out of the city, and she was in some kind of restaurant sitting; her name was Mala.[6] And the search was on for her because they say that one of the German Gestapo was in love with her. There must be some truth to it because she had possession of papers; she used to go out from the concentration camp and bring the papers. And he made it his own, like he gave it his all to bring that girl back, to find that girl, to show the camp that no one, but no one escapes from Auschwitz, and they found her.

HG: This was a Jewish girl?

DF: Yes.

HG: And?

DF: And while the whole concentration camp—we came in from work, and you never know, there is always some instinct, like an animal, there is something in the wind, you can feel something is going on and you start feeling that something is in the wind—what is it, and it came out that they caught Mala. He sent out I think half of an army—it was to increase his prestige—and they brought her in and we all had to stand in front of our barracks, and she was put into a wheel-barrow with her head hanging down.

HG: In the back.

DF: Yes, and as they wheeled her through, her head kept going clank, clank, and banging into the asphalt, but she kept her fingers like this for the girls.

HG: She was still alive.

DF: Yes, she was still alive; they caught her alive.

HG: Was she tied?

DF: She was tied but she cut herself with a razor blade.

HG: How?

DF: She had it on her.

HG: She cheated them.

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[6]Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Vol. 1, p. 115, "The best known and most dramatic escape was that of a Polish-Jewish couple, Mala Zimetbaum and Edward Galenski. They were caught and executed on September 15, 1944, in front of other prisoners who were forced to watch." See also Volume 4, p. 1735.

DF: Yes. And maybe she died or was close to death before they burned her.

HG: They took her to the crematorium?

DF: Yes, but first they took her through the whole *Lagerstrasse*, the whole camp, for everybody to see. We had written a song, and somewhere I have it, and it was written in Polish or Yiddish, something about Mala, but she said while she was banging her head, to the girls, "I have told people on the outside what is going on."

HG: And she had her fingers up in a V? For Victory?

DF: Yes, doing the sign, and then she cut her wrists, and the truth...Nobody knows if she was dead on arrival to the crematorium or they brought her in barely alive, but they found her. This had put a lot of fear in us. Not that girls were not trying to escape; they were trying to escape over the electric wire fence, and you fell right there, that was it. So they said that they are going to close up Birkenau—that was the concentration camp where we were—and they were going to bring us into Auschwitz. The rumor started coming in that the armies were getting together and that they were trying to take us away from Auschwitz and take us into Germany, because Auschwitz is in Poland. They took us to Auschwitz, and we were in Auschwitz for about two or three months in the concentration camp, and then it started that they have to evacuate us because the Russians are coming and they are going to kill us all. Like they did not kill us yet enough. So the Russians are going to kill us now, and Auschwitz was being evacuated. The men went before us. The girls...

HG: Evacuated to where?

DF: Just walking, go; we were going to Germany and we walk on foot.

HG: With guards?

DF: Absolutely. Guards and dogs and everything, everybody goes. This they called the "death march." It killed half of the people that were still alive.

HG: And they were headed where in Germany?

DF: Any place, just across the...

Tape three, side two:

HG: This is Dora Freilich being interviewed by Helen Grossman and this is tape three, side two, and we are starting with the death march from Auschwitz to Germany. Go ahead.

DF: It was 1945, January. The winter was unbearable. The men that had walked before us were probably dead because the highways were strewn with dead men, with bodies laying on all sides. We walked and walked and a lot of our girls that had survived so many years in Birkenau found their death there on the highway. We came to a place, I don't recall exactly the name, that was after three days of marching day and night, day and night without a stop, with no food, with nothing. They brought us to a little station and they packed us into open wagons. It was probably in Germany, because Auschwitz is like not far from the German border before the War too, like Silesia, because there were so many Germans living in Poland taking out their animosity on us. That march put away over half of our girls that survived two-and-a-half to three years in Birkenau and they got killed on that death march. I was brought into Ravensbruck on that train. It would be R-A-V-E-N-S-B-R-U-C-K.

HG: That was a camp?

DF: That was one of the most famous concentration camps made before the war, for the German people if they did not behave.

HG: As a penal colony.

DF: Right. The walls around that camp you could not see the sky. They were maybe 100 meters [she probably means a distance equal to approximately 100 feet. -ed.] high and made out of cement. Now, we came in there, whatever was left of us, and there was already there in that camp about 3000 women that came in from different camps. There was not a drop of food, there was no water, there were no toilet facilities but open holes. There were no places where to sleep, and we stood there in the barracks where once there were some bunks, but the girls that were there before, the women that were there before, took it out and burned it outside to keep a little warm, so there were no boards left anymore. So if you wanted to lay down, you kept the boards inside the back of your pants, and I was with another girl, so she kept one and I kept one, so we put two boards together if she wanted to lay down for an hour and then I would lay down for an hour, and they could be stolen every minute of the day from you. Somebody could run up in the back and take it away from you because that was the only way of survival. We were there in that camp I guess for two months, just starving to death and dying, doing nothing.

HG: Were there anybody left in your family at that time?

DF: Nobody; from my family everybody was gone in the first year in Birkenau. I had nobody left, and that was when my sister died, and that is when I brought her into the camp carrying her in my arms dead, and then all my cousins, all my girlfriends, there was nobody, nobody left, but a few friends who one is now my sister-in-law. We were both

from the same town although I did not know her because she went to a different school. She went to a Hebrew school and I went to a Polish school and it was like a different environment, and in Birkenau we got acquainted and we stayed together all the time, and then we married two brothers; so she was with me and it was terrible. We didn't work, we didn't work and there was nothing to do. We were just standing and dying. The sicknesses were unbearable. Diarrhea, you just stood in it and you lay in it, slept in it, that's all you did. Then they started getting together transports to take us to other camps.

HG: In Germany.

DF: Right, we were already in Germany. Ravensbruck is already deep in Ger–many, it's like near Munich; it's in the middle. They say it's about an hour from Munich. I don't know, maybe one day I am going to get up enough courage to go back, which a few of my people did now, go back to Auschwitz, to Birkenau, and see.

HG: Now it's a garden.

DF: Right, but my husband says I am crazy for even thinking about it; but I feel it's a bonus to me for surviving it—not because I tried that hard—and I really don't know how I survived. I don't know. I want to go someday and see it again. There is so much... [unclear] in vain. There are so many dead bodies, and so many dead babies were thrown into the open flames, and we used to look out the windows and those flames never stopped for one minute. Not for one minute, but there were constantly fewer. When they made the railway to the concentration camp, then they didn't bring them in if the concentration camp was full. They took them right away to there. We had seen brides in their veils through the windows walking to the crematorium not knowing what is happening. Because as Hitler had said he is going to do something that the world is not going to believe and he did. Families with children dressed, coming from picnics, from anything, thrown into trains and brought straight to Auschwitz to the crematoriums.

HG: Let's go on to the Ravensbruck.

DF: We stayed there for about two-and-a-half to three months I would say, and they saw that everybody is dying, and the thing was that if you had somebody to take care and you are in Germany and not on the Russian front; this is how whole construction works. You know Schindler, as good as he was—and he was a fantastic guy to save so many Jews—but it was also to his advantage because he had worked for the Germans, doing for them things that they needed. He was very young and it was very ironic that a young guy like him had the guts to go against the Germans because he saw how they are killing people, and he took it upon himself to save them and he called them "meine Juden".

HG: My Jews.

DF: He had factories. He made the grenades, but what he did, he made false grenades, they were fake. Only when he knew when there was going to be an inspection, then he prepared live grenades for the inspectors to see.

HG: He was German, right?

DF: He was German. It was a very interesting book, because you seldom come across what you call nowadays, Righteous Gentiles, which there were, of course, and he in that age, where Germany was so popular, and Hitler was so good, that he took it upon himself to save his Jews. And you know that there are differences, and you know that he was spit at in Germany for it after the liberation? I think he later died in Israel.

HG: Is he in the Righteous Gentiles in the *Yad Vashem*?

DF: Oh, absolutely. I am sure that he is there. I am positive that he is there, because not only did he save one or two, but he saved thousands, because he had the factory and he worked for them but in spite of this he saved his Jews and in spite of that he went against the Germans.

HG: And he survived.

DF: And he survived. Everyone that saved a Jew put his own life on the line and he did it.

HG: Were there any other Christians that you are aware of as you were of Schindler?

DF: Not that I know of, but I come across by reading that people are finding a lot of.

HG: No, I meant when you were in Germany. What happened when you were at Ravensbruck?

DF: We stayed there for three months and then they took us away.

HG: To where?

DF: They took us to a place called M-A-L-T-H-O-W [Malchow?].

HG: And you were moved by truck?

DF: We were moved by train, a regular, normal people's train.

HG: With seats.

DF: With seats and with windows that look out. We didn't know where they were taking us but this is where we were put.

HG: That was a camp.

DF: That was a camp, yes. That was a camp that was stationed next to a camp of war prisoners.

HG: Do you know the name of that?

DF: No, Russian. All I know is Malthow [Malchow?]; the other one I do not know. They were war prisoners, and they were Russian and they were French and they were all kinds, and I guess as I know now under the Geneva thing that there are certain things that you can not do to a prisoner. A prisoner is a prisoner of war, not sent by himself; he is sent by a country, and so they are in a little better condition, supplied with food or bedding or clothing or etc., etc. When we used to walk by like to go out to work, the work was again the same story. It wasn't under such strenuous condition because they themselves knew that the end is there.

HG: This was 1945 by then.

DF: 1945, so the war prisoners used to throw over their fences some food to us, like you know sometimes a piece of salami, a piece of bread. The women I always used to call girls because we were girls, young, and there were older ones and they used to teach us how to be close, how to behave, how to care for each other, and it helped a lot because hunger can do a lot of things to you. It can actually turn you into a beast; you don't care where it comes from. It's like LSD, you don't care where it comes from as long as you have it; so you steal, and you rob, as long as you have that piece of bread. So they used to do that. They always talked about food, and somehow it relieved a little bit the pain, and as we came from different parts of Poland, the same thing like in the United States, there is different menus and different ways of cooking and everybody used to tell, my mother used to make *varenikes* this way, and my mother used to make it that way and we used to do it for a whole night and this kept us going. This constant reminder of the past, this constant talking about it and the keeping in touch kept us going.

HG: It made you feel that there was going to be a future.

DF: Right, not knowing. We always pretended. We knew that people were killed, that people were burned, we knew that there was a crematorium going day and night, we knew that there was nobody left, but you somehow hoped that maybe somebody run away, maybe on the outside, Yablokow...

HG: What is that?

DF: That is the name of the famous actor that I knew.

HG: Spell that.

DF: Y-A-B-L-O-K-O-W. J or Y, I don't know how he spelled it but that was his name.

HG: And it's the actor.

DF: And he played on the Yiddish stage, in Grodno. In fact when we came to the United States he was still alive.

HG: Now, when this is edited they will put it in the right order. I knew that you were going to remember it. Now go ahead about the camp. The...

DF: Malthow [Malchow?].

HG: Right.

DF: Then one day all of a sudden, they said that there are some trucks being exchanged for prisoners, and that we are going to get food and they are going to take us to Sweden or Switzerland; and the truth of the matter is there was something like this, not carried out all the way. There was a promise, there was a thing they were putting together, worked out with FDR for the exchange of 100 trucks for 1000 Jews. And he said what is he going to do with 1000 kikes.

HG: Who said this?

DF: Roosevelt said this; this is recorded history, that in 1944 or '45, when that guy who burned himself in front of the English Embassy, the American Embassy, the English Embassy in London, trying to tell what he knows was going on in the concentration

camps, and knowing that people know here and are trying to bring it to the attention and nobody wants to listen. Greenspan...was his name.[7] He burned himself in front of the Embassy, of the American or the English Embassy, I am not sure, and there was a Rabbi Weiss that knew very well what was going on.

HG: He was in New York at the time.

DF: Right, and it was some kind of a deal made. My husband knows much more about it because it was brought to their attention, in the camp yet, that they needed 100 trucks and they would release 1000 Jews and Roosevelt said, "What am I going to do with 1000 kikes? Don't rock the boat."[8] So this is recorded history and people knew about it.

HG: Did they know about it here, do you think, at the time? I don't think it was brought out then.

DF: I don't think that the average public knew the atrocities. I think that the higher echelons did know what was going on. I think that there were a lot of pictures sent from soldiers which is now proven. Like we had, he was a principal. As a 19-year-old boy he was in the army and he liberated Dachau and he now speaks before our symposiums. He is the first speaker there always, and there were a lot of pictures then taken. All of the pictures that we see now were taken by the soldiers.

HG: When they released Dachau.

DF: All of the concentration camps. They weren't taken by us because we had nothing with us. We had no cameras or anything; we were just beaten people, starved to death.

HG: Weak.

DF: That's all. And all the pictures and everything were sent by German soldiers to their families, or by American soldiers, French, English, Italian, or whatever; and he tells the story when he liberated Dachau. He said that in all those years, until we came to talk about the Holocaust, that every time he thought about it he pushed it away and said, "That's not true, because I haven't been there," and then when it came out...You know we had the organization here, the Holocaust Survivors; we changed it now, it was the Jewish New-Americans, we changed it last year. We would rather be called the Jewish Holocaust Survivors. And we do a lot of work; we are preparing now, you know, we are going to be hosting in 1985 the gathering of the Holocaust survivors, like it was in Washington.

HG: Yes, and that is going to be where...

DF: It is going to be here in Philadelphia. We know about this for a couple of months, but the mail is now being sent out in preparing for everything that is going to be going on. When he heard people like in the neighborhood where he lived and he saw people that survived, he said he might as well talk about it too. He had to get it off his mind and he comes to us, to the symposiums which go on already I think for the eighth year.

HG: For the symposiums.

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[7]Mrs. F. means Shmuel Zygelboim.
[8]Mrs. F. may be thinking of the Eichmann-Joel Brand negotiations in Hungary in 1944.

DF: It's been already many years that the symposiums go on. I myself have already been to seven of them in Gratz College that we have and...

HG: That is the youth symposium.

DF: Yes, this is the youth symposium.

HG: Tell me what happened at that camp then, at Malthow. You didn't get any trucks?

DF: No, and we didn't get no food and we didn't get no trucks, but we saw that there was something happening; we didn't know what it was.

HG: This was what month, do you think? Oh, this is January?

DF: No, in January we are in Ravensbruck.

HG: Right.

DF: By March and April we are there and there is something going on because we see already that the Germans are changing. They are taking off their uniforms and they are putting on regular suits.

HG: Right in Germany?

DF: Right in Malthow, in the concentration camp. There was not so much beating; there was nothing to beat already. They were falling like flies anyway. They were laying down and dying. No food, nothing to drink. We used to get up at 3:00 in the morning just to get the grass that grew overnight. Shrunken like this. If I weighed 40 pounds it was a lot and I am a big girl. I'm five foot six. So, we all think this is the end. So, all of a sudden they are throwing their uniforms, and one morning...They upheld the morning things that go on. Dead or alive you had to get up and be counted. This must go on. There were lists and lists that have to be preserved and everything had to be accounted for. They say that they are going to take us out of the camp and that we are going to march into the nearest town. They don't know the reason themselves but they are already changing their clothes. With us, there is nothing that we can do anymore. We go out on the highway. Now, the highway is just Calamity Jane. Trucks, horse and buggies, motorcycles, cars, open trucks, closed trucks, German people with children. It is the end of the war, but they don't know where they are going. They don't know which way, who is going to occupy whom, so they all are trying to run to the American side, but we don't know, we have to march. They are marching near us, and they are marching where they are going but we can't do a thing, so we march. I have a friend of mine that is in Israel. She was the oldest of us and she kept us all together. Also four years ago I lost a friend who died suddenly. We were like her two daughters, and she said we are going to just walk off the road after it gets darker and we are going to walk into the forest, because you see what is going on. I don't know if you can visualize, but you can only see in a film: people running in different directions. Nobody knows where to go but we had to stay because first of all we are in uniform, we had no hair.

HG: Your head is still shaved.

DF: Still shaved, and we are in these striped uniforms and we can barely walk. Each and every one has boils all over because we are so thin and the lice are so thick that they sucked out the blood, and our infections are unbelievable. Everybody has a blood infection. Everybody has diarrhea. So she says to us, "Let's just do it, because one way or the other we are dead; we are dead this way and we'll probably be dead that way, so let's do something." So we get together, I think it was 11 girls, and as we walk we are nearing to the end of the column and walking down into the forest. The forest has Germany and Poland on both sides, full of them. And in the forest when it gets dark we see a lot of Germans, officers coming in and taking off their uniforms and changing into civilian clothing. Now a lot of boys—and this my husband told me many times—got shot because they have taken the German uniforms because they were naked and they wanted to warm themselves, so they put on the German uniforms and the Allies mistook them for Ger–mans by the end of the war and they shot them. I was liberated May 8th. Now at that time there were already some camps that were liberated. When we left Birkenau they say that I think seven or eight days the Russians were there.

HG: In seven or eight days.

DF: In seven or eight days, and this is how the procedure was going. They knew that this is coming to an end; they were doing very bad in Stalingrad and they were just dying there of hunger, of cold, of everything. Freezing to death, that was their only rescue for the Russians because they knew that they cannot survive a Russian winter. So we walked up and they didn't bother us anymore, the Germans at that time. They saw that we are looking at them. Some left the clothing laying there and some took their guns with them.

HG: The guns were the only protection that they had.

DF: Yes, but they wanted to mingle with the civilians; they didn't want to be any more Germans. They had clothes with them.

HG: Civilian clothes.

DF: Right. I am not talking about the population. I am talking about the ones that take care of the concentration camp.

HG: Right.

DF: And, they changed, they see us, but they don't touch us. Otherwise, they are concerned now for their own lives, so they don't care. We can walk this way and we can walk that way. It doesn't matter to them anymore.

HG: You can just walk away.

DF: Yes, we stayed until it got real dark in the forest.

Tape four, side one:

HG: This is tape four, side one and we are taping Dora Freilich and it is a continuation. This is October 31, 1984. Dora, can you tell me when you were liberated and take it from there?

DF: As we were, in 1945, it was in May, and they took us out of our last concentration camp, which was Malthow. Where they were taking us, I don't think they knew themselves. They started taking off their German clothing (which I think I am repeating now because I think I already said this) and they really did not care what we were doing anymore; they wanted rather to save themselves. We were a group of 11 girls that stuck together and we hid in the forest, and then when it got dark we crossed the little bridge that was leading to a town, a small town.

HG: Do you remember the name of the town?

DF: Yes, B-A-R-K-O-W. It was in Germany. We came to that little town and we came to a big building. I think it was a high school or whatever. It was a school. There were thousands of people there. There were Germans. There was us. We didn't know what was going on but we knew something was happening but nobody knew what was happening. We were very tired, we were on the go already for about two days, day and night. In the morning...

HG: You were walking.

DF: We were walking. In the morning we woke up and we walked out to see what was going on and we saw a Russian soldier and he said that the war is over and the Allies are coming from all sides.

HG: There is no way that you could remember that date, could you?

DF: The date was May 8th, 1945; that is the day that I was liberated. We spoke Russian with him because we come from Poland and we were always under Russian occupation so we spoke Russian to him and he told us unbelievable stories what was going on, how they conquered the Germans and he said, "Just try and keep well." We went and we occupied a house, a German house.

HG: How many people were with you? They were all women?

DF: We were all women and then some men came around also, some prisoners of war and some other kind of men, and some men that were prisoners that were not Jewish, that were Gentiles; it was a chaos. A lot of Germans that were hiding, they were running. They didn't know where to go. And we occupied a big house that was beautiful; there were still pots standing on the oven and cooking. People left the house; they were running away.

HG: I wonder where they ran to.

DF: I don't know. We stayed in that house. We were 11 girls, 11 friends that survived together. And we were very hungry and we started eating everything that was in sight and we got very, very sick, very, very sick. And between us, we were like the youngest ones; we had a few that were like 10 years older. They were like more clever than we

were and they started taking like command over us. And they said, "We are not frying anything. We are not eating anything that is fat." We have been without food for the last three months, barely having anything, one bread for a week for 10 people, just a slice of bread, under-nourished, full of lice crawling all over, beaten up, blistered. I don't know what you call it here, but it was like boils. It was from dirt and it was from undernourishment.

HG: Infections.

DF: We took baths. I don't think they had showers. I don't remember really. We threw away the clothing.

HG: Was there clothing left in the house?

DF: There was everything left in the house. There was a house full of everything. The pots were still boiling. The Russians occupied that town; in other words, we were liberated by the Russians. The only ones that took really revenge were the Russians. That's one thing you got to give them credit. There were Russians in Malthow in Germany.

HG: And they were still around.

DF: They were just coming in and they were going yet further.

HG: North.

DF: Yes. They occupied the town and they said, "Anything you want, just tell us what you want and we are going to get it for you." Otherwise they gave them a free hand. Whatever you want to do. Kill. They had raped this town from nine years old to 90 years old; every woman there in that town was raped. We stayed in that house for about four weeks. They slaughtered a sheep for us, they got food for us, and we dressed ourselves in some decent clothes, but then they started to attack us too. You know it's a funny thing, but we are girls and they are boys and they are young. They have been away from home for a long time and the war was dragged out for many years. They have been hungry, they haven't seen any women, and we saw that it is not going to be good. We were brave, I can say that word, because we went through so much that we were not afraid of anything any more. So we went to the highest General in the Russian Army that was stationed in that town and we told him the story, that they are coming in at night, the boys, the Russians.

HG: Do you remember his name by any chance?

DF: I did remember for a time but not any more. He said, "Look, I can not stop them, because you don't know the hell that they went through. You know that the Germans were close to Moscow and they have destroyed city after city; they have raped every woman in sight in Russia, they have been hungry. We will help you live this time. Just go away. I know how you feel. I know what the war was. Just go." And so we decided that we must go. They got for us a covered wagon like Gypsies used to travel in.

HG: With a horse?

DF: Two horses. They helped us pack. We packed a lot of food, everything that we had with us, you know, and we started traveling towards Poland. Why did we do it? There were a lot of reasons. First of all my reason was that my father had jumped down

from the train as they were taking us to Auschwitz, although at that time we didn't know where, and my father said if any of us survive we will go home, and I said to the girls that I must go home and of course everybody looked at me like I was crazy, but we all traveled together.

HG: Were they all from Poland?

DF: Yes.

HG: So they were all going in the same direction.

DF: Yes. We traveled in that covered wagon for about a week until we came to a town. I don't remember the name of the town now, but you had to wait there until you had to cross a very big lake—this I remember—and we for sure could not do it, the girls on our own. We had to put some braces in the wheels of the wagon, and we decided that maybe we should leave the wagon right there and go find other transportation, and this is what we did. Our journey home, which I always put it in my speeches, took three months of walking and riding, day and night in constant fear. And through that chaos we search–ed; every town that we came to, people were there before us. The bigger towns had like little communities forming and people left their names and the names of relatives, con–centration camps where they were, maybe there was somebody before you. Some people found somebody. They used to leave their name, the concentration camps where they were, family names, brothers' names, married names, whatever; and there were big lists of people and this is how it started. First you went to that place to look for the names.

HG: This was like a community building.

DF: Yes, like a library. And that was all through Germany and of course I didn't find nobody but we still proceeded to go towards Poland, and we didn't know how we were going to make it but we tried. We were in the station where the trains were leaving and there was a train going to Moscow and we spoke there—it was a military train—and we spoke a good Russian so we went over and we spoke to a general, whatever, and he said if we will get on the train without being noticed, he will stop in a little town where he will let us off. He will not stop but slow down, and we should jump. That was exactly the same little town where we got on the train going to our death. We decided that we are going to do it, and so we jumped on that train and it was like an express line. The Russians have taken Germany apart. They took everything. They took apart factories, they took apart houses, they took out everything that was moveable and took it back to Russia, because they had nothing left there. So as the train slowed down we jumped off the train in that little town. We were standing there, 11 girls, and this story I always tell because it is a very sad story. As the train proceeded going, we stayed at the station and it was Russian again. We were in Poland already now but it was under the Russian occupation again. Otherwise Poland is divided into Poland and Russia and my part where I come from is occupied by Russia again. It's confusing. And he comes over to us and he has one arm. In other words, he lost his arm in the war, a young guy, very bitter. And he looks at us and he says, "Where

are you coming from?" And we tell him and he says, "No, you must have worked for the Germans; there was nobody that survived."

HG: Was this man Russian or Polish?

DF: Russian. So, far away, I see a guy coming over to us and he comes over and he looks at me and he says to me, "Are you the girl from Pruzany? Did your parents have a bakery?" And I said, "Yes," and he recognized me. He said, "Are you alive?" I said, "Well, I am." He said, "I used to work for your father. You don't know me but I used to deliver bread for your father. What are you doing here?" And I tell him the story. I say to him that my father had jumped out and I came looking for him and maybe he knows if my father is alive. He didn't hear about it. I said, "Is there any Jews in my home town?" He said, "Yes, there are a few, but they are all from the forests that came back."

HG: They had been living in the forest all that time?

DF: Yes, this was the group that had been living in the forest. Many of them died, many of them were killed. And he said, "I will take you there. I have a horse and a buggy, but I cannot put you in there because my horse cannot carry you all. Just put your belongings, whatever you have." Each of us had something and we put it on the wagon and we walked after the wagon and we told him what the guy said to us, and he said, "Get away from him because he is a murderer. He is so miserable because he lost his arm in the war." And we came to our town. We walked I think seven kilometers, I don't know how many miles, and it is very sad time for us. As we approach our town you can see almost from the outskirts into the middle of the town. The war as it was going on, the Russians coming in, the Germans marching out and vice versa, everybody was bombing everybody and destroying everything and there was very little left of the town. And he said, "I will take you to some Jewish families that are there, and in the morning we will find a place where to stay." And this is what he did. We stayed there in a house, all 11 of us, and whoever was there from the survivors from the forest came. They brought us some food, bread and soup and tried to make it as comfortable for us as possible. They also looked at us, because we were the first ones to come into the town that survived the concentration camp.

HG: They didn't believe what they saw.

DF: No, and at that time we realized that we are just different, that we will have to go on explaining and telling the story of what was going on And they too went through a lot; they had their own stories to tell. At that time the Russians decided that we are not a desirable element. They could not decide if we worked for the Germans or are we really survivors of the war. There was not the name Holocaust yet, and they started taking us to the, it's like the CIA here, NKVD, and they took each and every one of us to tell the story separately.

HG: To make sure.

DF: Of what happened to us.

HG: And this was in your hometown.

DF: In my hometown in 1945, I would say about July or August. I had met a boy there that went to school with me together, that survived in the forest and he now worked as a part-time policeman and he came and we told him what they are doing to us, that they are asking us and writing down things and that they really don't believe us and they think that we are a dangerous element. So after we were all separately asked about our experiences, as to almost to explain a day in Auschwitz, when it began, how it was, what it was, and finally came to the conclusion that since this is a border town and since it's an occupied town, we will not be allowed to stay there. Russia is a very funny country. You are with them or you are against them.

HG: Everything is black or white.

DF: You got to be with them, you cannot be against them. Everybody was spying. The wife is afraid of the husband, the husband is afraid of the wife. This is the truth; this is how it is going on now too. This is their regime. A normal human being who lived under normal conditions cannot realize the freedom, the opportunity, the beauty that we have in this country. We take it so much for granted that this is how it is. It is not.

HG: So the Russians didn't want you.

DF: No, so this guy that I went to school with said to us, "I want you to go away from here because otherwise you will be sent to Siberia. This was the final decision of the cabinet." We were 11 very dangerous people. I mean we could probably make war against Russia. At that time a law came through that if you were born in Poland, and lived in Poland up to 1935 [November 1939], you could leave for Poland. Otherwise...

HG: You could leave.

DF: Yes, you leave the Russian-occupied zone and go back into Poland.

HG: I see.

DF: And a lot of people started doing this, and we decided that this is what we must do, and we started preparing ourselves. At that time I started looking for a few of my friends that I went to school together. I did not find many. They had left and went to Poland; they did not want to live under the Russian occupation. I found a few older people that worked for my father, and I went to one of them that was the main baker in our bakery. He had worked for my father many, many years, and to whom our little girl was given away during the ghetto. And I came there and I knocked on the door. I came with another friend of mine that was between the 11 girls and he opened the door and he looked at me and he called me by my Jewish name which is Dvorah, and he says, "My God, is it you?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Is anybody else alive?" And I said, "No, not that I know of. I came to look for my father." And he said, "Your father was not here, we have not seen him." It is now 1945, they had been liberated before because we were deep in Germany. He said, "No, I don't think that your father is alive, but there is one thing that I want you to know. I have a few things that belonged to your family and I want you to have them. I also will tell you who else has some stuff of yours, and I want you to go and take it." And he gave me quite a few things: for instance, he gave me my father's hat that was made out of Persian

lamb. You know, this is what they wore then, the high Cossack hats. He gave me my father's, it was not a coat, but something you wear under a coat to keep warm; it was very expensive fur. It was removable and you can wear the coat with or without. In the winter you wear it and in the summer you wear the coat without it. And he gave me like covers for a bed; they are like spreads but they are made out of, I don't know what it is. At home you called it plush, it is not used here but back there it was a big thing. You hung it on the walls.

HG: Was it a coverlet?

DF: It covered the whole bed; you also used it as a table cloth. It was quite expensive. As a child, I did not appreciate it. I think it was only put on the bed during the holidays; it was not used during the whole year. He also gave me a lot of white material: you know, bales of white material and red material, that they used to make like pillow cases and bed sheets. Now, we were girls without bras, without pants, without anything, so we cut it up and made some clothing for us. He said, "What are you going to do here?" And I said that I don't know. I came to look if my father is alive. He said, "Your father is not alive and nobody is alive from your family." And he said that he doesn't think that I should stay there, and I said, "I am not." At that time we knew already that we are going away. He didn't feel that it was safe for us and I told him the stories about how they interrogated us. And he said, "I don't want you to stay here. Just tell me how did you survive; you didn't know how to butter a piece of bread in your life?" I said, "I don't know." And he said, "You see, if you would have left the baby here you would have had a sister here."

Tape four, side two:

HG: This is tape four, B, continuing with Dora Freilich. Go on.

DF: He said, "What can I do to help you while you are staying here?" I said, "The only thing that we don't have is we don't have any food." We were just plain hungry. He said, "All right. I will give you some potatoes; I'll make ready some meat for you, that I will chop up and we'll put in a barrel." I don't know how it stayed fresh. We did not have any refrigeration.

HG: This was August by then.

DF: Yes.

HG: It was probably salted.

DF: Yes, we did have cellars. They were cold.

HG: It was probably a cold cellar in the ground.

DF: "Yes," he said, "I just can't believe that you are still alive." He said, "The more I look at you, the more scared I get." I said, "My gosh, you have been with us for so many years, you know it's me." He said, "I know it's you, but how did you do it?" I said, "It's a long story and I don't know where to start." He said, "Is anybody else alive, I mean, from the town?" He said, "I know that there is people that survived in the forest, and some came back and some did not. Who is with you?" So I told him of the girls that were with me and he came to visit us once and he cried, just cried. He was then a man I would say in his 50's. He said that he just can't bear looking at me without my family.

HG: It was too painful.

DF: He lived with us, that is, he did not commute to work. And he used to go away for the weekends. He was also a big drinker, and this is why it stands out in my memory. My father used to always go and pick him up. He loved to drink and he used to get drunk and my father used to go and pick him up from the bar, because the bakery was mostly worked at night, put him to sleep and give him something to eat. And we children knew about it. To us it was like a game. We said, "Did Daddy pick up already?"—his name was Wally—and at night he used to work and he said to me, "What are you going to do now?" And I said, "I don't know. I really don't know; one thing I know is that we must leave this town." I went to our house and there was no house. I went to our bakery and there was nothing left; it was all grown over with weeds.

HG: What other things did you find from your family?

DF: We found a few copper things. Copper was an expensive thing then.

HG: Like pots?

DF: Yes. He also had a silver candelabra.

HG: It had belonged to your family.

DF: Yes. He also told me of a guy who was my father's barber and was also a Gentile man and he said, "Go to him; I think your father gave away some stuff to him too. I want you to have it. It belongs to you. I know your father probably had buried some stuff

but I don't know where; I wish I knew. You know that everything would be yours now but I don't know where it is." I said that it's really not important to me because I really don't know what's going to be with my life. The only thing that keeps me going is my hope that maybe, maybe I will find somebody of my family. If not, I am not too thrilled about the whole thing. And so I went to this guy, this barber who also had a few things, like he had a few pieces of material that you make coats and suits out of and he gave it to me, and they all looked at me like I was a ghost. They could not actually believe that anybody survived. They did not know what happened. There were rumors coming through but it was too early to reach there. And finally we decided to leave the town; this was it.

HG: With the girls.

DF: With the girls, all of us. There were trains going and we went and I think we had to pay for it, a certain amount of money.

HG: Were you starting to gain some of the weight back?

DF: Yes, we ate and in fact we gained more than necessary because we ate more than necessary. We were very hungry, and at that time we looked already halfway decent. That was already, June, July, August; it was three months after the war. The train, whoever wanted to leave, they had things like cows and horses, and you could take it with you. It was like, what they called, I don't know how to say in English, it was like transferring from one. It was allowed if you were born in Poland and you lived in Poland until 1935 you were allowed to go back. You were a citizen, a Polish citizen and you were allowed to go back to Poland and not live under the Russian occupation. And so we boarded that train and we came to Lodz. Lodz was one of the biggest cities in Poland and had a big Jewish population. It was a big textile city.

HG: What?

DF: Before the war they had a lot of textiles.

HG: Oh, okay.

DF: And we came to that city and it was just before the holidays I think; it was in September. I don't remember whether it was the beginning or the end of September, or the middle of September, rather, but it was in September. And here we are again, no money, and no home and no food.

HG: Were there a lot of people on the road?

DF: A lot of people; the chaos that the war had made was just unbelievable. People were traveling from one city to the other looking for people, returning to their own cities, trying to find somebody that was alive, trying to see if their house was still standing, looking for some familiar things, to start over again, with something, to make ends meet. I don't mean monetary, to tie the loose ends together rather. Some people found somebody, you know. I did not. The closest I had was three cousins that survived: two brothers and another cousin from another family. One is dead already who lived in Israel, and two are here in the United States; they live in New York. In Lodz we didn't have where to live; we

didn't have a home, we didn't have an apartment, we didn't have anything. There was a Jewish-like committee that took care.

HG: Do you know the name of the committee?

DF: It was probably what they called the Yiddish *kehilla*. I don't know the name. And we went to them and they gave us like rations, a half of bread, a can of sardines and a can of tuna fish, and we moved into one room where we lived maybe 20 people together, in one room.

HG: And this was all the girls?

DF: All the girls, and there was some other people that lived there before, that came before us, and he was a cap maker and he opened up like a little shop, and he was already like a little better off than us, and when he saw all of us and we were like, three girls from the same town and the rest was all from adjoining. They were in the ghetto with us and we knew each other and we stuck together during the war. So he gave us this room and we lived there in that room, like my husband said, we covered ourselves with one jacket, all 11 of us, and this is where I met my husband. We started going out. We had to make a living somehow, so we used to buy like things from other people that were already in the business, and there was a market in Lodz, like a piece of material for a suit, a watch, and we used to go out and buy it from them and then go out in the market and sell it. It is very hard to explain how this started it, how this thing worked. The ones that were more in it used to travel out of the city and bring it. We used to buy it from them; we used to go out and sell it and make a few *zlotys* (that's the Polish money), and finally one day I had enough money to buy a pair of shoes. I did not have a pair of shoes yet that fitted me properly. I was at that time with my girlfriend who is now my sister-in-law too, and finally bought the shoes and we had a very good day in the market. We sold I think a watch and we made a very good profit. It is funny, but this is the only way we could make a living. We didn't know anything else how to do. And she had met a guy, you know, we were young, and he started taking her out and he said to her, "You know, I have a brother too; maybe your girlfriend would like to meet my brother." And she said, "Well, why don't you come up with him sometime and we will get acquainted?" So they came up one evening, and they were doing the same thing, the two brothers: they were also selling and buying but in bigger extent than we did, and we got acquainted and he said, "How about we go out one night to the movies?" You had to start living again. You had to connect things, you had to somehow start mingling with the world, with the free world.

HG: To live again.

DF: Yes, you had to learn to live again. And one day he made a date with me and he came to pick me up and I was looking for my shoes. I told him that I bought this week a pair of shoes, we had a very good sale, and I couldn't find the shoes in the room and we started joking around and he said, "You probably don't want to go and you hid the shoes." And I said, "No, I didn't." Any way, somebody stole the shoes and sold them.

HG: You were barefooted!

DF: I was sitting there barefooted again. We made it into a big joke, and after this thing my husband tells the story...

HG: He wasn't in the shoe business at that point.

DF: They were going in.

HG: That is probably why he picked a barefooted girl.

DF: Probably. His family was always in the shoe business and they were now deciding to open up a little shop. He was the shoemaker and his brother who was older than him, he was the upper-maker, like he used to make the upper of the shoes. He said, "I don't believe it, that somebody in this room stole the shoes from you." I said, "Well, I don't know where else to look; we looked all over and they are not there, they were brand new." And I was sitting on the bed, without shoes again.

HG: Tell me, did you have any medication at that time; were you able to get any, did you need it, was there any medical care at all around?

DF: You know, the young people recuperated very fast.

HG: Once your stomach settled down.

DF: Yes, and once we started eating we didn't have no problem, not in my age group, we didn't have no problem. I mean an occasional headache but that was nothing. Our menstruation came back, we started menstruating and then, I don't think that we went to doctors or anything like that. We went to a dentist. And we kept together, the survivors. It was something, there was a silent bond between us that remains up until this day. We tried to live near each other and to come together, go together. We talked, we went to the movies, we went to the theater, we started to live again. We were also trying to decide what we are going to do with our lives. Otherwise staying in Poland was not our priority, because even after the war, there were times when people were killed, there were pogroms again starting and...

HG: Did you see any of this or did you just hear about it?

DF: I heard about it. We lived in Lodz. The concentration of the Jewish survivors was concentrated in the bigger cities. After they went to the little cities to see if there was anybody still alive and came back with nothing and they concentrated in the bigger cities, and this is where we stayed, in the bigger cities. And everybody had friends, you know, we started writing letters and people started remembering that they had relatives somewhere in Canada or Cuba or America, and writing letters to relatives and things like this and deciding where to go. The Polish people as a rule in Lodz were not thrilled with us. We knew it; we avoided contact with them and we were also issued like passports; you had to carry it with you.

HG: Was that the same as identification papers?

DF: Something like it. It was an affidavit that you needed from America.

HG: Proving that somebody was ready to help you.

DF: Somebody was ready to bring you here, otherwise you could not come unless you were provided with a job or a place to live. This had to come from somebody. The

HIAS and the Joint did not help much. There was help from the Jewish people; I don't know how much of it reached us. But everybody started, you know, there were people that were older than us and had trades and started opening up all different things, not to stay there but to survive and make a living, to be able to bring food on the table. But one thing was in mind, that we must leave Poland, nobody wanted to live there. Poland was just not a place for Jews anymore. So we started to get ready to leave Poland and to go back to Germany.

HG: Again.

DF: Again, the cycle was all around.

HG: You didn't have it in your mind to come to the United States? At that time?

DF: We had in our minds, but you could not travel from Poland. The Polish quota was so limited that probably they let in maybe ten people during a year.

HG: What year was this?

DF: It was 1945.

HG: Still the same year.

DF: At that time we decided. We were going out, my girlfriend and me were going out with the two brothers and they wanted to go to Israel and we registered in a group as Greek Jews to be smuggled into Israel with the *Aliyah Bet*. We were all given names and places where we are going, how to behave, how not to speak, etc., etc. And the time came—I think it was in December, 1945—when our group was ready to go. At that time, the Polish government knew and learned that there is something going on. There were a lot of people from Palestine (it was not Israel yet) sent to look for young people, to save them and bring them to Israel, and they caught us on the way. Our group was caught, and in order to avoid any brutality from the Polish police we said that we were going looking for relatives, and maybe we will find. We went to a town that was called Kato–wice.

HG: How do you spell that, C or K?

DF: K. K-A-T-O-W-I-C-E. This is how it's spelled in Polish. We stayed there in that town and they took us into the police station and they searched us just like the Germans.

HG: The Polish.

DF: The Polish police. Their excuse was that they were looking for guns, did we carry guns. Now, they knew very well that none of us was carrying a gun.

HG: Did they have women to help search you or did men do that?

DF: The women searched the women and the men were searched by men. And the whole thing was coming back to life that this was going to be a repetition.

HG: What month do you think that was?

DF: That was 1945, in December.

HG: All right, go ahead.

DF: After, of course, they did not find any ammunition on us and there was nothing else that they could blame on us. My husband hates it when he tells that story. He feels so much hatred for them.

HG: He is still angry.

DF: He's still angry, and we decided to return back to Lodz, and we decided that we are going to get married. I mean you have to have a beginning. And we got married together, three couples in one evening. Me, my girlfriend who is now my sister-in-law, and another couple that was with us together, they were going to the market together, and we got married together. And we were getting ready to go to Israel. We wanted to go to Israel very much but we must leave Poland, that was our aim, the antisemitism was just starting very bad and we knew that if the Poles had their way, they can do a better job than the Germans. The Germans just taught them how to do it and they will do a better job yet. So we came to Germany. We lived in a displaced person camp in Feldafing, that was on the outskirts of Munich. It was one of the biggest DP camps in Germany. There were a lot of youths there, a lot of people that survived. F-E-L-D-F-I-N-G [Feldafing]. There, of course, it was all survivors. They made schools, they started opening up trade schools, teaching youths a trade, something, and of course preparing us that we will go to Israel, and most of us wanted to go to Israel.

HG: This was a camp?

DF: Oh, you could walk out of it.

HG: It was where everybody could meet but it had been a camp.

DF: It was not a concentration camp; they say it was a camp where they used to send soldiers for rest and recreation. It was a very picturesque place; it was very beautiful there. The barracks were nothing to rave about, but the place itself was surrounded by a sea. It was wooded area, and it was made like into a city for us, otherwise. There was like a management thing, where you came and you registered, you got a card, there was work to be done. I think Eisenhower was at Feldafing.

HG: It was run by...

DF: The Americans. I think I saw Eisenhower the first time there. I didn't know who he was...

Tape five, side one:

HG: This is tape five, side one, of Dora Freilich's story and this is Helen Grossman doing the interviewing and she is at Feldafing. Go ahead, Dora.

DF: Feldafing is a displaced persons camp, DP. It was run like a little city, with a little government and schools which we need. We have to be attached to something with somebody.

HG: To get your life back to normal.

DF: To get our life back together, although we did not know about psychologists and psychiatry. But we did have meetings and we talk about it, and the Americans are sponsoring it. Feldafing is in the American Zone.

HG: Is this still 1945?

DF: This is 1946.

HG: All right, go ahead. How long were you at Feldafing?

DF: We were in Feldafing from 1946 until 1949, until we left to immigrate to the United States.

HG: But in the meantime the organization at Feldafing helped. Tell the story about the policeman before you go on.

DF: As I said, we had our own little town, our own little government. We opened up shops and everybody tried to do something. One sold potatoes and one sold onions and one sold a chicken in the market, and cucumbers; and my husband and brother-in-law opened up a little shop and made shoes. Some were tailors and you started to get your life back on the road again. And we had meetings, we had dances, to which we went. It's not funny, it's not cruel.

HG: You had to live.

DF: Yes, unless you commit suicide, you must go on living and you wanted to live. Somehow, the will power to go on living was so strong you felt like you are the only survivor of the family and you must carry on in honor of your family. You go on living, and it was not easy. It was not easy. But everybody being in the same boat, it was easier. Each and every one of us went through their own little hell, so somehow we all tried together to help each other and we stayed there. And one day this policeman got killed at the station in Feldafing. The train arrived or the train was departing, I don't remember exactly what it was, but a Jewish policeman to be killed in Germany after the war!

HG: Killed by...

DF: A German.

HG: By a civilian, or another policeman, or a soldier?

DF: I don't think that they ever found out who killed him. The demonstrations that we had; we had marched into the city, as civilized people, with banners. We had a funeral for him and the whole camp attended. I call it camp again but it was a displaced persons camp, and we all marched. We wore white gloves and black ties, and black skirts.

This is my girlfriend who lives in Miami now; she is alive and I see her on occasion when we go there.

HG: Oh, you had a banner, a flag, oh my. Would you call this a magazine or a program? (Dora is showing me a, what is it called?)

DF: It is a program from Feldafing, with her own picture, marching, holding a banner, when the policeman was killed. When a Jewish policeman was killed. We were demonstrating.

HG: It is marked 1946 here.

DF: Right.

HG: That is great that you have that. Then you decided to come to the United States.

DF: Everybody was registering different places. People started to get letters from families, from Canada, from Cuba, from the United States, from Argentina. A lot of Jews had emigrated before the war to Argentina. And I knew that I have two uncles here. I didn't know exactly the addresses or anything but my younger uncle was in the army and he had looked for me, not for me but for somebody from the family and somebody had told him that they think that I am alive. They had not seen me but rumors used to go because people were constantly going. This was the thing after the war, you went from city to city and you constantly looked, and to this day, I constantly look; it is something in me, I always look and this one looks like someone and this one got older. I always look; maybe, maybe... My daughter is now interested in tracing the roots. The roots now is a very big thing and they had a meeting and you asked me before about if they are united, the children of the Holocaust survivors. They had a meeting a couple of weeks ago and they had a guy, I don't know his name, but what do you call a guy, they have a special name for one that goes in and looks for the roots? They had invited him to speak before them, and he had spoken. And he told them that he himself is not a survivor; he is an American-born person, but they had invited him to speak, and he told them how to go about it. How you can find things, and this is what my daughter is now completely interested in. She wants to go as far as she can go. I said, "Go ahead, we will see how far we can go." She has it all written down, but he said, in the remotest places, where people wouldn't even think of looking, people have different documents, cities, magistrates, are laying around that nobody is interested in. He said that once he had to look for a document in a cellar, and he had to spend almost the whole night there and he looked like he was in a chimney, but he found things.

HG: Tell me how you felt about yourself after it was all over.

DF: Well, after it was all over, I don't think it hit us yet; the impact of it did not hit us at that moment that we were liberated or for that matter even when I traveled to my home town. You still had in the back of your mind that maybe. The impact really hit me when I was already free, in a free country, between free people and being the mother of a child, and this was the most critical time in my life. I used to sit and look at a child and think of what a precious past I robbed her, because if she had been born to somebody else

she would have had everything that I took away from her, grandparents, aunts, uncles, places to go...

HG: You didn't take them away. They were taken from you.

DF: But I felt that if she had been born to somebody else, because she was mine she would have to struggle through life together with me, and I was not thrilled about life. I still did not know how to go on living. I was existing. I was just pulling through day to day. I was now on my own; I was not surrounded with all my friends no more. I mean it can not be for a lifetime. You move. And we established a life on our own, and you have to mingle with people, with free people, and you have to learn how to do it and it is very hard. And I think that this was my most critical time in my life.

HG: You used the word guilt before, felt guilty.

DF: Very, very guilty.

HG: Because you survived?

DF: Because I survived. In fact, I used to get angry when people said to me how lucky I was. I was not lucky at all, I didn't think I was lucky. I thought that I was being punished for being alive. I thought that this is a continuation of the same thing. So I was not in a concentration camp, but I was alone, I was still alone. I had nobody to talk to, I had no family.

HG: You were married then.

DF: I was married and I had a child. My husband went to work. I had a little furnished room, but besides this I didn't have nothing else, and this is what people could not understand. They thought that just by being alive that I am lucky, but that is not the way that I felt.

HG: In other words, it was your family that you missed.

DF: I missed the family. I missed somebody to tell good news, to tell bad news. I didn't have nobody to tell it to. One thing that sticks out in my mind, and this is after I came to the United States, and I probably started going into labor, but I didn't know what it was. Nobody ever told me about it. My aunt was away and she had a hotel and she used to go away in, like in April, to set it up for the summer.

HG: She was in the mountains?

DF: No, she was in Sharon Springs.

HG: All right, go ahead.

DF: She left me in the house, and there was her son who was at that time 13 years old, who, I can put in, is now a Supreme Court Justice. And my husband was not back from work yet.

HG: What was his name, by the way?

DF: Melvin Tannenbaum. That was my mother's maiden name, Tannenbaum. And somebody had told my husband about an apartment and he said that on the way back from work he is going to stop and look at the apartment because he knew the time is near that I am going to have a baby and that we will have to move out. I felt uncomfortable.

They had a little girl of five and a boy of 13 and it was kind of crowded. I went into the bathroom and I started...I wasn't feeling good and I came out and I said to him, "I don't feel good." And he said, "What is wrong with you?" He was 13 years old or 13-and-a-half. And I said, "I don't know." I didn't know how to tell him that my water had busted. I didn't know what it was. Nobody had ever told me. He said, "You know what? We are going to call my aunt and tell her what happened. You tell her in Yiddish, if you don't know how to say it in English." And he called her up. Her name was Frieda and he said, "Dora wants to talk to you." And I said, "Frieda, something happened. I don't know what happened but something is wrong." She said, "What happened?" And I told her, and she said, "Do you know what? Tell Melvin to call a taxi and go to the hospital and I will follow as soon as my husband comes from work." She had two small children. I came to the hospital and my husband didn't know. He was looking at an apartment, and obviously, I wasn't ready yet. I saw the girls walking around, everybody getting ready for her time and now I could understand it, but at that time I could not understand it, why she put around my bed the curtains and also the sides up on the bed. I was only two months in this country. I came in March, and the baby was born May 19th. And I could not understand why she was doing this to me when I have to go to the ladies' room constantly, and she said that you don't have to go anymore, and I said that I have to go, and I thought that if I only could speak English and explain to her, she wouldn't do this to me. I thought that people are doing things to me because they don't understand me. She was doing it because I was probably ready and she did not want me to get out of bed anymore. But not me. I climbed over the thing and I went anyway, and when I came back they said, "Where were you?" And I said, "I went to the ladies' room; that was where I had to go." And she said, "Well, you are not going anymore." This I understood, and then my baby was born. I had a little girl.

HG: I can't tell you how much we appreciate your giving us your story. It is going to mean an awful lot to the Archives. It will be used seriously, and for this I thank you very, very much.