KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 1

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

(beep)

(BS--Wentworth Films, Kovno Ghetto Project, May 5,

1997, interview with Brigitte Altman, B-R-I-G-I-T-T-E,

A-L-T-M-A-N, sound roll 6, continued camera roll 12 at

the head)

(Mark 12)

SB: Tell me when and where you were born.

BA: I was born in 1924. I was born in a small coastal

town on the Baltic Sea. In those days it was called

Memel, M-E-M-E-L, a rather old town with a German

culture. It was on the northern most port of the last

German empire. After World War II, it became known as,

I mean after World War I, it became known as Glipheda

and when I was born it was no longer German territory

but Lithuanian territory which Hitler took back in

1939.

SB: Tell me your recollections of the start of the

war.

BA: Start of the war, I guess we could put a point in

time as 1940, 1941. After we had had a short Russian

occupation in Kovno, very short, may have lasted a

year, the collapse of the Molotov Ribbentrop pact of

non aggression. And the entry of the German troops,

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 2

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

I'm not even sure of the month or the year but I might

say maybe June 1941.

SB: What did you personally hear or see. What do you

remember.

BA: The night preceding this, the advance of the

German troops on their motorcycles and probably armored

cars, but the night before there, there was a lot of

artillery noise, that seemed to be coming from the

airport in Kovno, just a very ominous sound. I think

most people, Jews and Gentiles alike, Jews and Lithua-

nians alike were worried that the German army was going

to march in that week.

SB: What about before the Germans came, the pogroms

that took place, did you see any of them.

BA: No, I didn't see any pogroms but I don't even

recall hearing about them before the German occupation.

I think all that happened after the German occupation.

SB: Tell me about it, tell me what you know about it.

BA: Mostly rumors. Well I do remember that the house

we were living in and we only had a small room that we

were renting at the time, in the a part of Kovno that

was called Jalya kolnis, meaning the Green Mountain.

And it was an apartment house. There were two young

students living in the basement and even though I

didn't know them well I had just a very casual passing

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 3

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

in the corridor acquaintance with them. And they told

me the day before the occupation that they had planned

on escaping with the Russians who were in retreat. And

so there was, actually it was a very, very, it was a

panic stricken Jewish population trying to decide

whether it was better to run or to stay. And during

this mad rush to get out, with the Russians, I think at

that point already the Lithuanian partisans went into

actions and fell upon some innocent victims who were

trying to escape. But I think the real partisan mass

murders came after the Russians had finally retreated.

And life resumed some normalcy for those who had stayed

behind. But not for long.

SB: What do you mean by not for long.

BA: Well at that point rumors, before the, before

there even was talk of the ghetto we heard about people

in the city who had been abducted from their homes, by

willing Lithuanian so called partisans who also ran-

sacked the homes. Who would round up mostly men and

either taunt and torture them or, or shoot them. I

didn't see any of this though with my own eyes because

I have no idea whether the suburb that we lived in was

more protected than the rest of the city. But no, I

have no knowledge of seeing with my own eyes the, the

brutal acts of the Lithuanian partisans.

SB: But you heard about it at the time.

BA: Yes.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 4

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: And so how did you hear about it and what action

did you take.

BA: No action. In our case there, we were a family of

three. I am an only child. And my mother was suffering

the consequences of a recent stroke. And was, was quite

incapacitated. I can't say that she was totally inca-

pacitated but she had to be cared for. So even if we

had wanted to escape, it would not have been

feasible at the, would not have been practical. So we

stayed in this little room and consulted with all the

other neighbors and everybody was panic stricken. But

not really knowing what to do.

SB: Tell me about the formation of the ghetto.

BA: Well as soon as the German I guess military admin-

istration was formed all the racial laws against the

Jews were put into effect. The racial laws that, the

Nuremberg laws that had already been implemented in

Germany and other occupied countries. And I can be more

specific. And, and mention that none of the Jewish

academicians or professionals were allowed to go about

their work. The doctors were not allowed to practice

medicine unless they were seeing Jewish patients.

Lawyers were, were dismissed from their firms and

professors were dismissed from the, from their academic

positions. And the curfew was instituted. I think at

6:00 everybody had all the Jews had to be in their

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 5

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

homes. The yellow star, the wearing of the yellow star

was made mandatory. That was a piece of yellow cloth

shaped like a star. And the star had to be worn on the

outer clothing, on the left hand side of the chest as

well as on the back. It had to be firmly sewn on versus

being pinned on which could always indicate the inten-

tion to escape or blend with the general population.

Also Jews were made to walk int eh street or in the

gutter. They were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk

and all the men had to take off their hats or caps when

crossing the path of a, a German soldier or officer.

SB: We have to stop for a minute.

(BS--Go to sound roll number 7, camera roll 13, at the

head, continuation of interview with Brigitte Altman)

(head marker 2)

SB: Let's back up to what happened to the men taking

off their hats.

BA: Well I don't think I have I can add anything to

that. Those were the first blows to our civil liber-

ties.

SB: Tell me about the formation of the ghetto. And do

you remember moving in.

BA: Yes, I do. A decree went out that all Jews in the

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 6

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

city of Kovno were ordered to relocate to a ghetto

which was the poorest part of the city with mostly

dilapidated huts. Even though there were some more

substantial farm houses to be found also, as well as

some newly constructed apartment, referred to as

blocks, which had been constructed for the industrial

workers, Lithuanian workers. The date that was set as

the um well the date was the 15th of August. Now the

reason I remember that is because it fell on my birth-

day. And I forgot whether it was 1940 or 1941. I think

it was 1941. We had about 2 months to relocate. The

way this relocation was handled was that first one had

to secure a place to stay in the ghetto. And the

inhabitants, I mean the Jews of Kovno, some of whom had

been quite well to do had owned either their homes,

apartments, or houses. So they were in a position to

trade their well established comfortable homes for a

peasant's home in the newly formed ghetto. Naturally it

was not an equitable trade but at least they had a

place to stay. The three of us were at a disadvantage

because we had nothing to trade. So we depended on the

kindness of strangers to give us a space. And after a

long search, my father was able to find a pharmacist,

an elderly pharmacist, friend of my mother's who had

owned a pharmacy in my mother's village, where she had

grown up. So Mr. Mesahovich and his wife told my father

that they had a small attic space that they could

spare, that everything else had already been spoken

for. And that the three of us could have this attic

space. So that's what we did. We, we had very few

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 7

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

belongings. I think we may have owned a bedroom suit.

Um we had a sewing machine for some reasons which I til

this day don't understand or remember how or why we

kept the sewing machine from our original household.

But it came in very handy later. So there was a bed

that was moved, a sewing machine and maybe a chair or

two. And the clothes that we had been able to save from

our original home. Then my dad hired a, um well he

found a peasant with a horse and wagon and he paid him

for this, for the transportation of our worldly goods.

To the ghetto.

SB: What was the attic like, how big was it.

BA: Very small. I am very bad at dimensions but it was

a long narrow space that, that held my parents' bed, on

the one long wall and my cot and the sewing machine

opposite my cot. And there was a window next to my cot.

I could look out. And I saw many brutal and memorable

unforgettable scenes from that window. And just a very

primitive door that led from one attic space to our

smaller attic space because on the other side of the

wall, another family um was living. And that family

consisted of four people--a mother, father, adult

daughter who was a medical student and her young broth-

er who was maybe 12 years old at the time. These people

became our very good and trusted friends and I would

like to mention that the older son Ted Pace is going to

be interviewed tomorrow and I hope to have a chance to

meet up with him after 50 years.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 8

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: You said you witnessed some brutal things outside

that window. Was one of them the intelligentsia.

BA: that was the first one that I saw from my window.

SB: Tell me about it.

BA: A call had to go out for I think 500 young men.

With a good academic background and language skills.

Possibly fluent in German and Russian. To report for

work on a certain day at a certain time. It was early

on. I don't remember the date, it may have been August

or maybe early September. And because the work condi-

tions seemed so wonderful by ghetto standards because

already food was scarce and men had been taken away for

forced labor. I'm not even sure what it was, it sound-

ed like a wonderful opportunity to be situated in a

safe office environment, perhaps even get a meal or two

during the day. And then return at night. Because I

wasn't working at the time yet.

(Excuse me)

BA: I had the luxury of staying in, in our attic and

looking out of the window. And here I saw them coming

to this um open space. It was near the what we called

the big blocks, at least that's how I remember it. And

I looked at their faces and I, and I recognized a few

of them. One had been my former math tutor because my

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 9

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

math skills were always very weak. And I recognized a

few other young men. Um, I think I saw some, some

Germans surrounding them. It's a little hazy in my mind

and some pushing and a rough handling. And then they

were led off. So I didn't actually see shootings going

on but just very rough treatment.

SB: How did you figure out what happened.

BA: I didn't have a clue except that these men didn't

come back at night, they didn't come back the next day

and they didn't come back on the third day. And then

panic ensued.

SB: Ok, we have to stop and reload.

(BS--Go to camera roll #14)

BA: I think I saw some Germans dragging.

SB: Let's just do this when we...

(Ok, speeding, 3 marker)

(technical adjustments)

(4 marker)

SB: So you saw, you remembered something about the

Germans.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 10

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

BA: Yes, at the very last I think they couldn't find,

they couldn't get their final count of 500, they must

have barged into homes and dragged some able bodied

young Jewish men out of their homes and added them to

the, the rest of the group.

SB: And so you had a bad feeling when they left and

then how did you figure out what happened.BA: Um, I

was still optimistic when they left. And when tho truth

finally came out it was just total disbelief. Such

deception. Yeah, when the, when I found out that they

had been killed. I think they were killed at the, at

one of the fortresses, I forget which one.

SB: How did you find that out. Did it just come in

the..

BA: Well the news just spread like wildfire through-

out the ghetto. Neighbors huddled together and counted

the losses. Many of our family friends were in that

group. The best the best minds were taken out of the

ghetto. The best minds who might have been able to

provide leadership. They were, there were no longer

there.

SB: And then not long after that, near the end of

October was the big action. Can you tell me how that

happened.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 11

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

BA: Yes. Um. It was the last Tuesday in the month of

October 1941. Again posters must have been nailed to

public buildings and verbal commands had gone out that

on the morning of Tuesday, I forgot the date, October

maybe it was 28th, I'm was it. Every person in the,

every Jewish person in the ghetto had to report at, it

may have been 6:00 in the morning, very, very early.

At the public square which was called democracy square.

Um, everybody was able to walk, regardless of age. The

houses had to be left, the doors had to be left open.

Everybody who was found in the home would be executed,

executed on the spot. And ostensibly this was done for

the taking of a census. It didn't look good. I'm not

in our case, my mother could barely walk. But I do

remember that the house where we were living was very

close to the square. So it we had a very short dis-

tance to walk. We may have had a five or ten minute

walk at the most. And we had planned to leave our

house around 5:30. Well around 4:00 on that morning, I

could hear footsteps, never ending footsteps. It was

still, there was still total darkness. It was a cold

uh damp foggy uh kind of late fall early winter day.

There may have been some snow on the ground, there may

have been some wet snow falling. And the three of us

my mother, father and i started getting ready for our

trip down the steps and out the door. But before we did

that I dabbed some lipstick on my mother's cheeks to

make her look a little more healthy. We dressed warmly

and just started out toward the square. My father was

supporting my mother on one side, I was supporting her

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 12

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

on the other side and we slowly walked, joined the rest

of the gray mass that was walking in front of us. And

made it to the square. At the square there was, there

was total chaos. Um, family units didn't know where to

stand. Everybody of course at that point already had a

work pass and was affiliated with a work group. And my

father was, as head of, as head of the family we joined

his work outfit. And he was working at the military

airport doing just manual labor, construction work,

digging, hauling rocks, that sort of, of thing. So we

looked for the larger contingent of air, air field

workers and we stood with them. And stood and waited.

As we were waiting um and at that point I think there

were about 28,000 Jews in the ghetto, so all of them or

most of them were assembled on the square. And um so

we noticed that several German officers, I don't know

what unit they belonged to, whether they were SS or

some other unit. I suspect they were members of the SS

and one of them was greatly feared. His name was

Rauca, R-A-U-C-A. And he was, I had never seen him

before but he was pointed out to me and I think he was

standing behind some sort of table and there may have

been a chair. There were some papers on that table and

he was not alone, there were other Germans with him. I

don't know whether there were dogs or not. I don't

remember that. But they all had their pistols in their

holster and possibly whips. Well as soon as a family

unit had found their work groups, there was a little

more order in the square. And I remember that we were

still standing around noon. Nothing had, nobody had

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 13

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

moved from our group, nobody had passed in review

before Rauca, but we could see what he was doing. He

was assigning family units to the left and to the

right. And already it was very obvious that the people

who had been assigned to the right were the healthy ad

the able bodied. And the younger looking ones. And

certainly no children among that group. And the fami-

lies with children, perhaps their elderly parents of

older people or sick people had been motioned to the

left. And the three of us were standing there, cold,

stunned. More or less petrified waiting.

SB: We have to put another roll.

BA: Ok.

(Sandy, you want to let Tom know)

(end first side of cassette)

(second side of cassette)

(BS--Wentworth Films, Kovno Ghetto, interview continued

with Brigitte Altman, sound roll 8, camera roll 15 at

the head, 5-5-97)

(speed)

(mark, 15 marker)

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 14

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: So you and your parents were standing there wait-

ing petrified. That's where we're picking up.

BA: Perhaps I should not say that the able bodied were

assigned to the right side because there are times when

I'm not sure as to which the good side was. But what

was happening before our eyes was the human tragedy

that was unfolding, families that were torn apart, were

perhaps elderly parents were separated from their

younger adult children. Or sometimes the even mothers

with children were separated from their husbands. And

the crying and despair was, it was just devastating. Of

course our worry was how to get by, get past the in-

spection table, how would we get my mother through. I

don't know if it was the hand of God but we passed uh

the table and Rauca must have perhaps was looking the

other way. I know at one time he was eating his

sandwich for lunch. And calmly eating his sandwich

holding it in one hand and with the other hand direct-

ing people to, to life or to death. And it may have

been that during one of those moments while he was not

looking the three of us were able to slip past the

reviewing stand. And once we were on the other side, we

were so relieved. We knew it wasn't over yet but at

least we had reached a safety point, a safe haven. For

whatever period would be allotted to us.

SB: And how did you find out what happened to the

people going to the bad side.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 15

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

BA: Probably the next day. They were all taken. Let

me also add that 10,000 people were taken away on that

day. They were led away and pardon me for backtracking

but we, we came home we had to take a count who was

still in the house and who had been taken away. So in

our house, everybody except the old pharmacist and his

wife returned. We went back to the square the next

morning and found Mr. Mesahovich slumped over in a, on

a camp stool which his, which his wife had brought

along for him to rest because she knew it was going to

be a long day for him. He must have suffered a heart

attack and he was just left behind slumped over. His

wife must have been led away. Shall I confess at this

point that the two of them had tried to remain close to

us and form a family unit with us and that I, certainly

was trying to get away from them because I knew that

our chances um, our chances were slim to begin with.

And I was afraid that if there was an elderly couple

with us our chances would be even slimmer. So they did

not return. Instead we found an old woman who, whom,

whom nobody knew. She was sitting in a chair in the

kitchen when we came back, exhausted of course, com-

pletely drained of all emotion. And we asked her and

the Jewish word for old woman is alte, or we called

altenkind, little old woman what are you doing here,

here. Where did you come from. And she said she just

got too tired walking to the square. She was all by

herself, so she walked into the first open door and,

and waited.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 16

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: Ok, and within a few days everyone in the ghetto

knew what had happened.

BA: Yes. I am sure we heard the shooting coming from

the 9th fort. And um, oh at first there were all sorts

of rumors that the people who had been separated from

the rest would be assigned new work places outside of

the ghetto. But uh at that point nobody believed these

rumors. And then we could hear the shooting. And we had

the proof that they were gone.

SB: And then gradually life became...

BA: Yes. Life returned to ghetto normalcy. Let me

see what happened to us after that. Uh. I was assigned

a work place so I had a work card. And I can tell you

about that.

SB: Tell me about your work.

BA: Because I was very fortunate in, in getting this

assignment. It was in a greenhouse. I worked in a

greenhouse along with perhaps a small group of 20

people. And there were several pluses to this work

site. First it was inside the ghetto. I didn't have

far to walk, I didn't have to walk one or two hours

every day to the airfield as most other people did. Who

were doing the really back breaking labor there. I

just had this short walk to the nursery where we grew

out of season vegetables for the SS hierarchy. And the

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 17

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

best part of all we had a Jewish supervisor, horticul-

turist, by the name of Mr. Kopete. He was the

brother of a former math professor. Very decent man.

We still had to do our work but it certainly was not

back breaking. We planted seedlings and trans, I mean

we planted seeds, transplanted the seedlings and grew

them to the point where we could harvest all sorts of

vegetables, cucumbers, radishes, carrots, asparagus,

green onions. We were not allowed to take anything

home. Um. It was a great treat to be allowed to take

a few tips of green onion home and have it with our

microscopic ration of bread, it was a great treat. And

like I said the Jewish supervisor was certainly the

exact opposite of a German guard who would, could have

hovered over us with a gun or threats or taunts.

SB: Who was the food for.

BA: It was grown exclusively for the use of German

officers. Is that what you asked me.

SB: Did you smuggle.

BA: I personally never got involved in smuggle and but

as far as the produce was concerned, no, nothing was

taken out. It would have been too dangerous to endanger

the other people in the group, as well as our good work

place.

SB: We have to put another roll.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 18

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

(BS--Camera roll 16, 16 is up)

(6 marker)

SB: If I've never been in the ghetto and I haven't

even heard of the ghetto, can you just sort of describe

to me in general what a ghetto is like or what that

ghetto was like. Were there schools, was there culture.

BA: In the beginning there were some make shift

schools for the children. In the beginning there were

books, in the beginning there was a hospital that had

been established on ghetto grounds. But as time went on

children were taking, taken away, there were no more

schools necessary. The hospital was burned to the

ground with patients and doctors burned alive. The

books were burned. Um. And it was just a very, very

gray existence of hardship. It was so cold there was

no, and the winters where temperatures dropped to 30

and 40 degrees below zero and people have no firewood

to heat the premises. I remember, I remember that when

we went to bed we covered ourselves with every feather

quilt, every coat that we still owned before, before we

had to turn in our fur coats to the Germans. But the

existence was, it was almost on a subhuman level. Our

microscopic rations, I don't know what the official

rations were, I think some working people had some food

supplements. Um there was a curfew at night, maybe

6:00, unless the some workers returned from their night

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 19

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

shift and then they were exempt from the curfew. It was

just a bare existence with a lot of hunger pangs, cold,

and exhaustion, plus hopelessness. Actually, I never

felt hopeless. Of course I, I had the luxury of not

feeling hopeless because I was only in mid teens. But

um, yes, um the young people still were able to see,

had the energy or interest in seeing their school

friends on the only day they didn't have to work. I

think Sunday there was a day to regroup, wash up and so

it really was a very, it was a very harsh existence.

Not only that and then either Ukrainian guards or the

Lithuanian partisans would, whoever was assigned to

guard, the guard duty would barge in and the German

soldiers or SS would barge in for no reason at all and

just terrorize the people they found at, in the home.

Mostly hunger prevailed. The people froze to death

too. All of a sudden they disappeared, they weren't

seen, they weren't heard from. They may have died from

hunger and nobody knew. Because we certainly didn't

have telephones. We weren't allowed to bring in a

newspaper. We weren't allowed to have cameras or radi-

os. All electrical appliances had to be turned in early

on. I don't remember whether we had electricity or not.

I know some homes did but I forgot whether we had to

use candles or not. Certainly there was no sanitation.

There was an out house in our case, in our first, the

place, in our attic space. That was our first resi-

dence. There was an outhouse, that the men took turns

cleaning. And the water was brought in from the well.

In the winter the well froze. And one had to chop real

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 20

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

hard to get to the water. All of us had access to the

shared kitchen where occasionally I would take a bath

in a tin tub. And the way to insure privacy was to put

up a sheet and tell everybody not to walk through the

kitchen. So that was a very minor inconvenience com-

pared to the other dangers.

SB: What about the ghetto administration, the ghetto

police.

BA: Our ghetto administration was composed of very

honorable men. We were very fortunate in that respect.

Our ghetto elder was a highly respected surgeon whose

wife we knew from way back. And he, he delegated

authority and made decision with the rest of his coun-

cil to the best of his ability, not easy, not easy

decision. Police I just know that we had, had ghetto

police, police. I may have known some of, some of them

personally and often they had to perform very hard

assignments like rounding up, like making up lists or

rounding up people for relocation from lists that were

provided to them. And that must have been very diffi-

cult. I know nothing really good or bad about the

ghetto police.

SB: But you weren't afraid of them.

BA: No. Oh, I also know they had a very decent a

chief of police who was one of the most decent men in

the ghetto. I forgot his name.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 21

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: The day of the kinderaction which was much later

in 1944, tell me what you saw.

BA: I happened to be home on that day. I didn't report

to work because I was suffering from what I thought was

a bad cold. I was running a fever and because I had a

Jewish supervisor I thought I would stay home and just

get better and make up all the work that I missed the

next day. I knew that no reprisals would be taken

against me. Well I was not prepared for that day. When

was it. I don't know, I think it was in March, in March

of 1944. And it may have been the last week in March

also. Everybody, we had already been, my mother had

died several years before. She had died a natural

death. But she died as a result of starvation and the

consequences of pneumonia. She just didn't have the

resistance to fight it. But by God's grace, she died a

natural death. She was not taken away from us.

SB: Did you have a ceremony.

BA: We had a ceremony at the cemetery. And it was a

very sad funeral procession. An emaciated horse was,

was pulling some sort of a makeshift wagon. My moth-

er's body was wrapped in a shroud in the orthodox

manner of burying the dead and a righteous man had kept

vigil after her death, during the night. Before she

was put to rest and a very small group of friends

followed this wagon and somebody said a few words at

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 22

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

the gravesite, grave site. And she was buried there. I

think that the cemetery from what I've heard has been

um well it certainly was destroyed because it was on

ghetto property where everything was burned down at the

very end. But going I guess.

SB: Another roll.

(BS--Sound roll 9, camera roll 17)

(marker)

SB: You were telling me about the kinder...

BA: Yes. I stayed home because of the bad cold and

had I worked anyplace else I would certainly have

reported to work because it was unforgivable to miss

work. It could have had harsh consequences. The young

couple who shared the room with my father and me be-

cause we had already been relocated to another place,

as the ghetto had been made smaller a year or so pre-

dating this date. So they only people in this one room

that I was sharing with like I said the other people,

other families, was also occupied by an elderly couple

who didn't work outside the ghetto, who were the guard-

ians of a young granddaughter, who may have been 3, 4,

5 years old. A very good child. I never saw her during

the day but I didn't, nobody even knew there was a

child in the room. She was so quiet. The people left

that morning were the elderly couple, the little girl

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 23

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

and I. Three adults were all dressed, the little girl

I don't remember. Whatever time it was, but it was

eraly in the morning, maybe 8:00. I look out the

window and I see buses, lining up down the streets,

trucks, buses. And Germans jumping out with dogs and

one of those trucks uh, I don't remember whether it had

a cover on the back or not. Anyway, one of those

trucks stops before our house. Out jump the Germans in

their shiny boots, grim faces and momentarily they

barge into the kitchen, a very small kitchen. They

barge in there and barge into the bedroom. And they

survey the room and say tell the three of us because

the child was already hidden, the three adults to stand

and explain why we are not at work. The elderly couple

to the best of my recollection did not have a steady

work place. I think they earned their bread, their

meager bread by doing um they were sawing wood for

other people who needed, who brought home logs maybe

had smuggled out some logs from the work place. And

the, the elderly man had a good saw which he sharpened

all the time and they went around doing this intermit-

tent work and always took the little girl along. Well

they must have realized that these trucks bode no good,

I mean especially for the little girl. Because at that

time there were very few children left in the ghetto.

Frantically the grandmother had put the little girl

into the bed that was shared by all three. And they had

heaped all the blankets and quilts. Well actually she

had made it so it would look that it was just a made up

bed. So first of all this one of the soldiers or

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 24

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

officers confronts me and wants to know why I'm not at

my work place. Fortunately I was dressed. I showed

him my work permit but what I said to him I do not re,

I don't know. I was stunned, petrified and my heart

was racing. I am sure it could be seen through,

through what I was wearing. I think at one time it

actually stopped beating. He left me alone. He gave

the grandparents a stern look. Perhaps he admonished

me not to stay home any more, that, that this could

carry grave consequences. But I really don't remember

but he spoke to me sternly, then shoved me away or out

of the way. Grandparents, he left, said something in a

harsh language to them, left them alone. And started

tearing up the room. I think all three did that, they

tore up the room and didn't take them any time to tear

apart the bed clothes. To come upon the little girl.

And dragged her out. When they made sure there was

nobody else hiding knit nothing else was to be found,

they dragged her out, towards this truck. And the

grandmother, the grandmother ran, ran after them. Fell

down, fell down, fell on her knees, begged, pleaded,

cried, wailed, followed, followed them out to the truck

to the curb and one of the soldiers either used his gun

or a club and hit her and she fell to the ground, she

fell down in the street. The truck took off and she was

left behind. They took the little girl, there were

other children ont eh truck. I could see that from the

window. After I had seen that, I didn't want to see any

more. Uh, I know the grandmother came back in and it

was probably the greatest human tragedy that I have

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 25

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

seen before my eyes.

SB: And so three weeks later you...

BA: Three weeks later um shortly thereafter the kind-

eraction my father just decided that there was no hope

for anybody to stay alive in the ghetto and it would

be, it was time for me to make arrangements to escape.

Do you want to hear about that. That was easier said

than done. It was very hard to find a family, a Lithua-

nian family who would provide shelter, for good reason.

They would put their own lives into grave danger.

Harboring a Jew was almost a, what is it, well a death

sentence. And so that was one hurdle to

find a place, to find a person willing to provide

shelter. The other hurdle was to get out of the ghetto.

All gates were guarded. It was difficult to slip

through the fence, there were guard towers, that were

manned at all times. And there were ways to slip out

where the work group or work brigade as they were

called that worked outside, outside of the ghetto and

with the knowledge, it was usually best that with the

knowledge of the group leader, one could slip away

either to do some trading, bartering, get food. Either

to make an escape or to return.

(BS--Camera roll 18 is up)

(8 mark)

SB: So you could get out with a work brigade.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 26

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

BA: Yes, so the preliminary plans that had to be made

were to establish contact with a former bookkeeper from

who had worked for my dad in our, in my home town.

Perhaps it's somewhat reminiscent of the Frank family's

bookkeeper. This was a very devoted former emp, em-

ployee who had known me since, practically since I was

born and had always allowed me to have the run of the

office and type on every, and play on every

typewriter that I could find. She had married a Lithua-

nian, she was herself a, a German. Of Russian German

descent, who had married a Lithuanian, had moved to

Kovno after her marriage, after Memel had been retaken

by the Germans in 1939 and my dad had found out that

her husband occasionally came to the ghetto on some

business. Not quite sure what it was but there was

some work. What is it. I can think of the German word,

werkstatt like.

SB: Workshops.

BA: Yes, workshops, exactly. Where uniforms, German

uniforms were repaired and perhaps other repair work

was done. And the bookkeeper's husband, Maita's hus-

band, occasionally came to the ghetto. My father could

not contact him personally because my father did not

work inside the ghetto. He worked at the air field. But

I believe that he passed on written messages to be

delivered to Maita's husband, asking him if there was a

way, if they knew of anybody who would take me in. And

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 27

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

the reply came back a short while later that if i could

find a way out, a safe way out of the ghetto that I

could stay with Maita and her husband in Kovno in their

very own apartment, at least for a while. Maybe later

they would find a, a safer place for me, in the country

perhaps. But that happened April or May, I think it

was in April. So um very hasty arrangements were made,

none by me, all done by my father to whom I really owe

my life. That he found a work brigade that worked

outside the ghetto. The group leader was willing to let

me join his group a certain day. He, his group was

guarded by several German guards, some of whom had

shown a shred of humanity in the past and had let

people not connected with the group either leave the

group before they got to their work place and so um I

left with, I went to the place of assembly. It was a

small group. Unfortunately I don't remember the lead,

the group leader's name. But I do know that they had to

cross a small river from the ghetto to get to their

work place. So all of us, it must have been the river

Naris. The group 10 or 15 people at the most all sat

down and in a rowboat and the boat crossed the river.

I don't know if tho guard had been bribed or not. I

don't know that. Some guards would take a bribe and

would look the other way. Some would take a bribe and

would not look the other way. Also had to have some-

body help me to take off the yellow star. Both of them

front and back had been pinned on. I could certainly

handle the one in front, needed somebody to

help me with the star in back and I didn't know that a

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 28

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

dear friend was in that work group. And she sat behind

me so I asked her would she remove the, the pins from

the star. She did. She wished me good luck, embraced

me. We, she survived. She was in Israel. I don't know

if she's still alive. Her name was Shayna Lusuvalsky.

She has been one of my mother's nurses. Well we reached

the other side of the river. Yes. Everybody got out

and regrouped. And I stayed behind and hid beside, hid

behind some bushes. Waited until everybody had left

and the, our meeting place had been previously dis-

cussed and designated. It was on the major highway just

a few feet from the small river, where Maita would be

waiting in a carriage. And as soon as we saw each

other we had to just get on with our journey. There was

a, I guess a coachman who that was the only transporta-

tion available. Very few civilian cars were, were

available in the city. So she was sitting there waiting

for me. I jumped in. We didn't say a word. Both of us

must have been very, very tense and very, very scared.

And she signaled that we were ready to get to our

destination and not one word was exchanged during the

whole trip until we got to her place. And incidentally

she had a very, very nice place. And once we got there

we, we regrouped. And she gave me some

coffee and revived my spirits. I think both of us were

trembling when we made it up the stairs. And many

things happened in that apartment also. Ostensibly I

was going to be the maid there. I had my own room.

And I certainly was not treated like a maid but for

anybody who visited, I had to play the role of a maid.

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BRIGITTE ALTMAN page 29

Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

And for the most part I did that well. I found out

late. Yes, she told me that because the apartment was

so large, it really was a luxury apartment on the main

street in Kovno they had to give up one room to, to an

SS woman who worked in the civilian administration.

And of course she told me to be very careful and not to

let on that I understood a syllable of German, that I

was there as the newly hired Lithuanian maid. I think

she gave me a kerchief. Kerchief to tie around me head

and apron. And some coarse clothes. Because I certain-

ly didn't bring any clothes. I didn't have any clothes.

So yes, I had to be very careful around this, very arro-

gant. I think SS woman. And I helped in the kitchen.

It was very pleasant. I stayed out of, out of sight

when somebody visited. Went to my room. Until one day

Maita had a visitor. A trusted friend, a German woman,

actually a very nice German woman. And Maita was get

ting ready for a party. Her husband also had dealings

with perhaps German hierarchy or civilian

admin, administration, I never found out. But they did

some entertaining and were getting ready for a party

and I was helping in the kitchen, stirring some mayon-

naise. I had the bowl the eggs had been cracked. I was

stirring when this lady rang the doorbell. And she

since she was a trusted friend that I mean to a certain

degree, she was a trusted friend. Nobody knew about my,

my origin. She joined us in the kitchen and started

chat, chatting with Maita and... (end of cassette &

note that last few minutes not recorded)(end interview)

Video Tape No.\_\_\_\_ Camera Roll No. \_\_\_\_ Sound Roll No. \_\_\_\_