-TITLE- BOROFF, EUGENIA

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-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND\_QUALITY- POOR

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-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-

-PERSONAL\_NAME-

-CORPORATE\_NAME-

-KEY\_WORDS-

-NOTES-

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Born : 11/30/1922

1. Can you tell us something about your family before the war?

A. Yes. There was my parents, an older brother, and a cousin

living with us. She had the same last name and nobody who wasn't

family knew she wasn't my sister.

2. Did you grow up in an urban setting?

A. Yes. I grew up in Warsaw. My whole family was from Warsaw.

3. What did your father do?

A. My father was a traveling salesman. Later, he worked for a firm

that was making fountain pens in Poland and my father was president

of the firm.

4. Did you mother work at all?

A. My mother worked two, maybe three years before the war. She and

my sister had a small candy store on a main street in Warsaw. It

was an elegant little store.

5. (tape # 314) What was your family's social status?

A. We were middle class people. I don't think children know how

rich their parents were. But we never lacked for anything. We went

to private schools..

6. Jewish schools?

A. Yes, they were Jewish schools. But they were not strictly

Jewish schools. The were just like public schools except the public

schools didn't accept Jewish kids. There were only maybe two Jewish

children to a classroom. That's why the non-Jewish parents who

could afford it sent their children there and the Jewish children

didn't have to feel the atmosphere of anti-Semitism.

7. (# 415) Did you get a religious education?

A. Very little. We had a class called "History of Judaism" but I

learned very little Hebrew, etc. Mostly what we learned was learned

at home. My brother, of course was prepared for the Bar Mitzvah, so

he could read Hebrew. I cannot read Hebrew, even today.

8. Did you speak Yiddish at home?

A. No, I could not speak or understand Jewish until the war. In

the ghetto, there were so many Jews around I learned to understand.

I learned to speak Jewish from My Husband.

9. Was your family religious?

A. We were not orthodox. But we were religious enough that all

holidays were observed.

10. (5:39) How was your relationship with non-Jews?

A. We didn't have any. I didn't know any non-Jews. The only non

Jews were the ones that lived above us. When I was little they

invited me to see their Christmas tree. I broke one of the balls

and I got so scared I ran away.

11. (6:40) Does that mean that you didn't really experience any

anti-Semitism?

A. We did experience it. But only from street violence. Every year

when the school year started, the students would come out into the

streets...let me start form the beginning. All the bookstores were

in Jewish hands..

12. (7:30) What year are you now?

A. I'm talking about my teenage years. The experience I had was

when I was fourteen. All the book shops were owned by Jews. When

school started, the Polish students used to come out and beat up

people going inside. And from our house we had to go to a big park

to get to the book shop. That park was the most famous for Jews

getting beaten up. You couldn't see a policeman there if you were

dying. At that time all the police hid while the students rampaged.

One time I was with my brother going to buy books and the students

started after us. We were running and...I must tell you that I

didn't look Jewish...they were right behind us. They had sticks

with knives on them. I turned to see how far they were behind us.

One of them said, "Oh! They're ours!" And they walked away. That

was my closest call with anti-Semitism.

13. Did the Jewish community react in any way?

A. Come on! That was Poland! You sat quiet and tried to avoid

whatever you could.

14. When war became imminent, what options were open to you and

your family?

A. War came suddenly. It was the summer of 1939. I was in a suburb

recuperating from an illness. Suddenly my parents came and got me--

two days later war broke out. I could see my mother had stocked a

little food. We spent a month in the cellar living on chocolate.

The bombing was so bad you couldn't go up to the apartment.

15. How old were you when war broke out?

A. Sixteen.

16. How did the first news of the war reach you?

A. The first German planes came at five A.M. My brother, me, and my

cousin went up to see the fighting in the sky.

17. (1087) How did your family react?

A. It was terror, sheer terror. There was burning all around us.

There was a government building next to us that got bombed--the

flames hit our windows. But nothing happened to our building. When

the bombing stopped there was terror of the Germans.

18. What decisions did you make?

A. A few days before Warsaw gave up, we started hearing on the

radio that all men were to leave Warsaw. It was the Germans trying

to create panic. My father and brother left for the East heading

towards Russia. We thought it was on Polish government orders. The

German planes strafed the refugees on the roads. The big question

was to go or not. My brother thought it was a big adventure and

wanted to go, so my father went with him.

19. What were your first memories of war after the bombing?

A. Terror of the Germans. I had a friend in the Polish underground

who was shot next door.

20. What were some of the first changes your experiences due to

the war?

A. The Germans took everything including my father's firm and

mother's shop. Banks were closed and Polish money was no good.

Forty-eight hours after the Germans came the announcements about

Jews started. Jews were to be shot if outside after seven P.M. Jews

will be shot if they don't obey everything. For a young girl it was

like being in a cage. Then they started taking Jews for heavy work.

Then the Poles...you see the Germans didn't know who was a Jew and

who wasn't. It was the Poles who pointed out Jews. Men were afraid

to go outdoors because they might not come back. They would grab

young girls and make them wash floors with their underwear, then

wear it-- they raped them. Hunger started right away. People from

the outlying communities of Warsaw were brought in and housed in

Jewish homes. We were allocated one room of our apartment, in the

other was another family. Then my father came home. My brother was

in Livov, but when the Russians and Germans went to war, he came

home.

21. Your father and brother had no trouble getting home?

A. Not really. Maybe they smuggled themselves in. Then the Germans

made my brother work as an electrician in a factory. Then they took

me in. You had to have an occupation--doing work--because the

Germans were watching you. I was working for the 55.

22. (1588) How did that feel?

A. We thought that with a job we'd save our lives. That the Germans

would leave alone the Jews who worked for them. We had a doctor in

our home who'd say, "They'll kill us all." My mother would get very

upset at this. He knew what he was talking about.

23. What about the ghetto administration?

A. It was run by the Judenrat and Jewish police. It was bad--people

dying in the streets. Everybody had ration cards and when a person

died, the family would hide the body to save the ration card.

Pushcarts filled with dead went through the streets all day. The

children looked worse than the kids from Biafra.

24. Was everybody working for the SS?

A. No. The Germans had different places to work. The SS handled

carpentry and electricity. They used to have their Jews go to the

homes of deportees and completely strip the place and send the

items home to Germany. My parents were living--you had to live

where you worked--in a tailor shop where they repaired uniforms

25. Was there medical care?

A. No

26. Any schools?

A. No.

27. Underground schools? A. Yes, but very limited.

28.(1959) Did people celebrate the holidays?

A. With what? There was no food. It was so bad we were heating our

apartment with coal sand from the cellar.

29. Did your parents change?

A. My mother was always a heavy woman, she got to where she could

wear my clothes. I was 110 lbs. My father went deaf from a shell

burst. He was used to taking care of his family an he was useless.

His life was broken, my mother seemed to take it better. She was

selling linens to the Polish police for food. Other families gave

her things to sell for them.

30. Any smuggling?

A. Yes, it was mostly the kids.

31. Was there any resistance?

A. The resistance started when the Jews leaned that all would die.

It started with the news from the escapees from Treblinka. I never

knew about it until the last minute. The ghetto was burning and we

were escaping across rooftops. All of a sudden we saw Germans. In

fact they were resistance in disguise. They took us into a safe

cellar. I was with my mother. I lost my father on the roofs. My

brother died in the uprising in Treblinka II. My mother died on the

train to Majdanek.

32. (2353) Were you with her?

A. MMMMM...[affirmative nod]

33. You were in seven different concentration camps? A. Seven? No,

six.

34. Could you tell how your reached to camps and the first camp?

A. The first one was when the Germans found us in the cellar. They

shot all the men and put the women in the trains--120 people to a

car--half the people died. I was unconscious most of the trip. When

the train stopped, the doors opened and the guards yelled "Juden

raus!" I looked for my mother, it was night and I crawled over

corpses looking for her. A guard yelled and knocked me out of the

car with a rifle butt. They kept us in Lublin the night. Then they

formed us into fives and marched us to the camp [Mydonyck]. We ran

and those who couldn't keep up were finished off with dogs.

We had to take showers and I didn't care if I lived or died. They

gave us camp clothes--we looked like clowns--and then sent us into

barracks and then ~to work. We had to move heavy stones from one

end of camp to the other and return them on the next day. People

were whipped to make them walk faster. After seve weeks we were

sent to Schareschko Kameyena [spelling] after a selection of all

the young girls.

They gave us new dresses. I went to a factory--it seemed like

heaven because we had regular meals--I worked twelve hour days.

Winter came and I was in a summer dress and barefoot. My feet

became infected due to the frost. My job was to load a machine with

empty bullets. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I went to

the Lagerfurher and said, "Look I want to work for you. I'm a good

worker and strong but I'm cold. Could I get something to wear?" He

took me to a warehouse and gave me a heavy coat and boots.

(28:00)

Then the Germans sent us to Chelsterhau [spelling] which was much

nicer because in the other camp typhus was rampant. Here it was

warm with good food. I was packing bullets. If they found a bullet

on you, you were shot. I had a good friend from Warsaw. We were

smuggling ribbon from packing boxes to the Poles for one Szloti per

ribbon. I would pull the ribbon out of the box, rip up the box,

wrap the ribbon around my legs to hide it, and sell the ribbon for

bread. We managed to sell enough to get bread and survive. The

Russians approached and we were marched in December to trains. We

were on the trains for 3 weeks without food or water. When we

finally got to Ravensbruck, we couldn't walk. It was worse than

Mydonyck, People killed each other like animals. Then they sent us

to Bulgau [spelling] for four weeks.

(3191)

Then we went to Turkheim. At Turkheim we hear of approaching

Americans and moved to Allach [spelling]. On the way we were

strafed at a crossroads. We managed to escape into the forest. We

had to come up with a way to disguise our numbers so we pretended

to be Polish forced labor and went to beg food from the Germans.

That night it rained. You know, in all my time in the camps,

neither I nor anybody else had a cold. We saw a house with some

Swedes in its. They said the Americans were coming. We stayed the

night in a barn and in the morning heard tanks outside. We thought

it was the Germans but when we saw the American star we sobbed in

relief.

When the Americans saw us I thought they'd cry. They made the

Germans civilians take care of us. A few days later I caught

typhus. I went to a Red Cross hospital near Turkheim and recovered

after three weeks.

(3455) I met my future husband there. We went into the mountains to

a resort to recuperate. I started working for a doctor in a refugee

camp and I got married.

35. What was your relationship with the Germans?

A. The Germans had no idea of concentration camps.

TAPE TWO

36. They treated you well?

A. Yes but they were false inside. They treated us with silk

gloves. They were terrified of Jews for what they've done. I don't

know anybody that did the smallest thing to the Germans. It's too

bad because the best of them should hang.

37. How many years were you in the camps?

A. Over two years

38. (349) Did you have any experience with kapos?

A. No, I was twice beaten up in camp by SS women guards. I never

got a real beating though. They used to beat people half-dead.

I saw courageous girls. In Mydonyck there was a girl who ran away

and was caught. They were about to hang her in front of the whole

camp. The commandant asked, "If I were to let you go, forgive you.

What would you do?" She said, "I would run away again." and spat in

his face. He hung her then and left her hanging for three days. I

heard of one girl who grabbed a German's gun and shot him.

39. What gave you hope?

A. I don't know, my youth. I wanted to live and not die like an

animal

40. Did you have any relations with non-Jews in the camps?

A. No the non-Jews weren't in the Jewish barracks. They were free

to do what they wanted to do to Jews and the Germans wouldn't stop

them--they could steal your shoes.

41. Were you always with women?

A. Always, we didn't see any men.

42.(7:24) Did you know about the gas chambers?

A. Yes.

Q. When?

A. In Warsaw--escapees from Treblinka, but nobody believed them.

When you tell American kids the stories they say, "How could you go

like a lamb to death?" They can't understand that you're helpless

with empty hands surrounded by guns. When you walk you think you'll

survive by not being noticed. People say, "I wouldn't go like a

lamb to death!" I hope not.

I hope nobody is in that situation again.

43. Was there any other resistance? A. In the ghetto or the camps?

Q. Either.

A. In the camps the Germans had complete control. People could talk

but they were powerless. People talked only of food and hunger.

44. Were there Jews responsible for overseeing other Jewish

inmates?

A. Yes.

45. Can you talk about it?

A. There was no justification for what they were doing. They were

told that if they did what the Germans wanted, they would live. The

Jewish Police in Warsaw were terrible. They had quotas--when there

were no more people in the street to grab--they sent their elderly

mothers to the trains. But they came to the same end, dead. There

are Jews today who are afraid to go to Israel because of what they

did.

46. (12:04) You talked about selection? A. Yes, I was always chosen

to work because I looked athletic and strong.

47. Did you ever use false papers?

A. I had them but I didn't want to go alone out as a false

Christian from the ghetto.

48. You could have left?

A. Yes but I am at peace with my self because I didn't. There are

no questions about what might have been in spite of what I

suffered.

49. What was the difference between what you knew of the camps in

the ghetto and reality?

A. In the beginning people were fooled with promises of benefits in

the camps. When nobody came back people got suspicious. When people

escaped from the crematoria, nobody wanted to go. That's when they

started grabbing people off the streets. I had a cousin who was

shot hiding.

50. What were your thoughts on hearing these things while in

Warsaw? A. I remember being so afraid.

51. Did you meet people you knew in the camps?

A. Not many. Few people from Warsaw lived. I only have a third

cousin now in Israel. I was working in Boston at a Yeshiva and all

of a sudden a couple of exchange students from Israel came in.

I asked their names and they said "Messinger". I said that was my

mother's maiden name. It turned out that the man was my cousin

Benjamin's son.

52. (20:24) Did you search for family? A. Yes, I put out word in

Germany that I was alive.

53. Where did you go at the end of the war?

A. My husband was president of the Bad-Listov Jewish community. We

lived in rooms requested by the Americans for Jews.

54. How did you decide to stay?

A. Where were we to go? We wanted to go to America but we had to

wait.

55. What was your life like in Germany?

A. Not much. There was nothing to do. The last year there my

husband opened a small fur shop.

56. You could make a living?

A. We were supported by the Americans.

57. Where did you come to in the U.S.? A. We came to Atlanta. Six

weeks later we came to Boston.

58. How do you feel your experience changed your values?

A. I know what's important. I with I could have family and no

terrible memories and nightmares and not to lose so many friends.

Material goods aren't important but in a normal society, you want

the. I told my kids that education was important because that was

something that could never be taken from you. My kids joke that my

cupboards are overstuffed. They call it "Holocaust leftovers"

[laughs].

59. What kept you going?

A. The will to live. When I was freed, I felt like I'd won the war.

I wanted to see them loose. I wanted to see them suffer and paid

back. At least there was the sense of "You couldn't kill me!"

60. (04:45) Have you always shared your experiences?

A. When survivors get together it's all they talk about. I don't

think I specifically told my kids I was a survivor. But they say

they always knew.

61. How religious were you after the war?

A. I'm a national Jew, not a religious Jew. Both my kids went to

a Yeshiva for a while, I wanted them to know they were Jewish.

62. Can you share you experiences with non-survivors?

A. Not really. They either can't understand or they pity you.

There's something in all survivors that we feel best in our own

company.

63. Did you apply for reparations? A. I'm getting a pension from

Germany.

64. What feelings do you have for your homeland? A. Poland is not

my home. I'm split between Israel and the U.S.

65. Do you think another holocaust is possible?

A. I don't know. I think the U.S. is too lenient on Neo-Nazis and

the KKK. That's how the holocaust started.

66. Is there anything else you would like to say?

A. [softly] That was very bad memories. [direct quote]

.END.