

LONIA GOLDMAN FISHMAN

March 29, 1992

Malden, Massachusetts

[After Mr. Fishman interjected, the remainder of the interview was conducted with him.]

We're speaking with Mrs. Lonia Fishman and the date is March 29, 1992. We're in Malden, Massachusetts. Mrs. Fishman can you tell us about yourself, what was your name before you were married?

My name before I married was Lonia Goldman.

Where were you born?

Wegrow Pooluski

in Poland

Poland

And your date of birth?

My date of birth is May 3, 1920.

What can you tell us about your childhood? What was your family like? Did you have brothers and sisters? What did your parents do?

Yes, we were four sisters and one brother. We had a factory from cotton. My mother was a housewife. This was very nice. We went to school.

Where did you go to school?

In Poland, in *[13]

In a public school?

Public school.

Did you have a Jewish education, too?

Yes. We do not have over there private schools. We have just one

private school. In separate we went to a Hebrew school *Bais Yakov [ph15] they called it, as a child. When the child doesn't want to go to the Beis Yaakov we have a man, a rabbi, coming into the house and teach us Jewish.

The Beis Yaakov was just for the girls?

Right.

And the boys went to a Cheder?

That's right. This was nice. We lived a very nice life, quiet, nice. We loved each other, all the four children.

Did you have anything that you liked to do in particular, any hobbies, any interests?

Hobbies, yes. Everybody had a different hobby. The hobby most was like you make shawls from the yarn. That's what we liked to do, knitting a lot.

How did you learn how to do it?

We learned from people, from school. And it was a very, very happy house. It was not like here. You get married, one lives here and one lives there. Everybody lives close to each other. That makes a very, very nice family, a close family. Here in this country it's different. When they get married one goes to California, the other, goes to Florida, you don't see each other. You see just one thing, on wedding or by death. It's the truth. We were very happy, happy and healthy kids. By us my mother never worked. My father just worked. My mother was a housewife, cooking very nice, cleaning the house was the girls. And this was every day. We were very happy.

Did you go to high school or gymnasium?

No. Over there is just high schools, seven years high school. Over there it was very hard for the Jewish people to attend college, like gymnasium. Here they call a college, by us it's gymnasium. Some maybe they went - very, very, very little. When we grow up, finish the high school, everybody was learning a trade. The man was shoemakers, the other was a ?[42] and the third one was how to sew dresses. Everybody when they liked it they made, they had a

trade.

What about the girls?

They had a trade.

What did you study?

We made quilts, because we had the cotton. Me and my sister, the older sister, we made quilts.

And you sold them?

Yes, a lot. And we went to Warsaw. The last couple of years we moved to Warsaw.

The whole family?

Yes, the whole family. And I was making over there, too, the quilts.

(Voice of her husband asking to interrupt) Her mother in the ghetto when she was cooking, she cooked up a meal and she put in six potatoes in a big pot of water and we had to share. She shared out the meal and she remembered Shloime the shoemaker didn't have a wife and doesn't have nothing to eat, she took him a plate and brought it in to *Schleuma.

That was in Europe, not in this country. Everybody knows about this. In this country a lot of people came from Europe, too, not now today, maybe 50 years ago, they remember a lot of good things too. But the new generation today is different. Like I spoke with my granddaughter, God bless her, she's eighteen. Ah, she says, bubby, here it's different when you were in Europe, everything the world changes. I told her the world doesn't change, the people is changing. And it's the truth, it's the people.

How old were you when you got married?

Eighteen. My mother was alive, my father was alive. His family was alive.

But the ghetto already existed.

Yes, existed, in Warsaw. We married in Warsaw.

But it was permitted? I know at a certain point it wasn't permitted.

It was permitted.

(Mr. Fishman speaks) It was in the forty. It was only a few months till the Germans come in. You were staying in the line when the Germans came in for a loaf of bread and a Polish guy saw you and said a Jew. The Germans took you out and wouldn't let you get a loaf of bread. I happened to say, I don't know what it was in me, I was not afraid for anything. I was staying in line. If they give bread, it wasn't written down here I'm a Jew. I took off my arm band, I took off the star and just put it in the pocket. In my city I couldn't do this. Everybody knew me. But when I was staying where nobody knew me and when they shared out bread to the Poles I was right in the line.

So you moved out of your family's home when you got married, is that right?

That's right. We lived together in an apartment. They say they gonna make an *upshtong[ph82] how do they say this in English, an uprising. We went to the small city, to Wegrow, to our city, and we lived with our parents.

Did you speak Yiddish at home?

Yes. We speak Yiddish. We don't use Polish. We use Polish when we went to school, with our pupil, with the kids, and the boys you know what I mean. Polish school, Polish talking. But Jewish we speak in the house. We wrote Jewish letters. And I can write Polish letters. Like here, you can write English. When we went to the fourth grade, to the fifth grade they told us we can pick a foreign language. Who wants German or who wants French? But for us, the Jewish people, we took German because it was easier.

Close to Yiddish.

That's why. That's all. It was very nice.

We heard a lot from your husband about what was going through his mind, his determination and whatever. What was going through your

mind at the time?

At the time where?

During the war, at the time when these things were going on.

I'll tell you the truth. To my mind was like this - yes, yes, no, no. You gonna be alive, its okay, no, is I going to be in between the six million. It was miracles.

(Husband) What she told me, your heart tells you to go, you go, you leave me here.

Because I was afraid. I was thinking soon I go out from this house, I give you an example, the Germans were after me and they're going to shoot me. It's not better than they going to come in here and let them shoot me here.

(Husband) No, when I have to go, you have to come with me as a company.

It was very hard. From the Polish man when he told you we went out from him he told us we were hiding over there but he came from the little city when he said would be better when you poison yourself
....

(Husband) He was a friend. He tried how to say look it's easier how to say to get the poison and get it over with. My mind is a different mind.

And we were thinking it's better for us just to leave them.

(Husband) It is the truth. When you fight and you get killed, it's all right. But to go the way I saw the people went, how to say, it's a shame to repeat like going like cows to the slaughterhouses. It was not in my vocabulary. It was not in my dictionary. You kill me or I'll kill you. No, it's not in my philosophy, maybe in my father's philosophy. Maybe he understood if he hits you on one side you'll put up the other side, not me. You lift an arm and I'll break it.

But the first thing nobody believed, you know what I mean, that it's going to be something like this. They believed just one thing. The war is a war. It's going to be maybe a week, two weeks, three

weeks and then it's going to get over. Who believed that's it going to be like a slaughterhouse. You see what I mean?

(Husband) The first thing my father didn't believe for this weapon. He remembered the World War I and he said the German is a cultured nation. Would never do anything like this. Everything is propaganda. But when the major was in our house and he said to my mother. He stood in the light. He felt sorry because it's such a nice family. He knew that they're going to be eliminated. But it was too late. You couldn't go no place. We have now a different generation in Israel and I'm proud of it. When it was the war, the six day war, I have a passport. I still have a passport. I flew down over there to Israel and I was with my friends in the jeeps. I took my daughter, too, with me, Eva, the oldest. I was over there in the jeeps when they took *El Arish[ph134] and where King Hussein had his palace, Ramala. I was there. I was there when they hung out the sheets in the window, they're giving up, they're blowing them apart. Oh no, not me.

What about your wife?

(Husband) She is different. In me is still the ache what they did to our people. No nation in the world tried to stop this murderers. Our blood was swimming up in rivers. The world tried to forget. Not me. How old I am, I wouldn't mind to go. Now we have a country. We have something to stand in our own land. No more. I taught this to my kids.

Not a lot of people thinks like he thinks.

Did you want to add anything to the story. We know what happened to you during the war period but is there anything from your perspective that you would like to tell me?

About what?

About your experiences. Even though you were together the whole time, you're a still different individual. Obviously you have a different idea.

No the same, we lived through exactly the same....

(Husband) Listen you can tell when I went into the ghetto and I got shot through the collar.

(wife) I'll tell you just one thing. How much you say, they're going to put in just one third.

(Husband) No, it's in the tape. Tell them the way I went in the night and when we decided to go into the cellar and take out the *?leather[ph 170] and when we're going to share out in the morning....

(wife) You said it, you said it. Finish up.

(Husband) When we was in the colony, when I give you the address *Lofa[ph174]. We were the whole family, six or seven people. They were producing *?leather. One time the father came over to me and said to me *Vascha[177] would you like to go with my sons, hide it, bury it, some leather? See the agreement was between us they will stay *?all secure-----the city from-----[179]. He'll give me two sons for this, *Libel and?[181]. If I'll take out three sacks of *?leather, one sack will be mine and two, this is his stuff. So the two brothers was outside the city. I went in the city but when it's no people in the city, when you go in with the shoes, it makes an echo. What I did, I took off the shoes and I took off the shoelaces, make a knot and put it around my neck and I went in the stockings. I brought it out. Before I brought it out, the *leather, the reflector, it was going around, cut me. A series of bullets went in my direction. One bullet went through the collar. The collar of cotton, the cotton was sticking out from the other side. The bullets went through. I didn't get hurt because I dropped on the ground. But I went into the cellar. I took it out three sacks of *leather because I didn't have nothing. I couldn't trade with a promise. I didn't have nothing. I had to have a half a loaf of bread. The farmer is not going to give you anything if you don't give him something in exchange. So when I brought out the *leather from the cellar and we come back to the village, I was very tired. I went to sleep. We climbed into the hay. When we got up, it was noontime my sack was a half. They took it off, a half a sack. It was over there the tops of the *leather. When I have this I could trade with the farmers, give them a piece of *leather they could give me a loaf of bread, a pot of water, some milk. The father, like I told you there were six or seven people, I think there were four brothers...I went over to the father and I told him look I went down to the ghetto. I took out the *leather. Now you stole from me half a sack. Let me tell you something. I'm not afraid for you all of them. The only thing

what I have to do is grab your hat. He was wearing a hat. In his hat he had a lot of gold, he had dollars, he had a lot of things. I come from the Warsaw ghetto. I didn't have nothing. I said the only thing I have to do when you sit down shitting - in the morning everybody used go down and gather around the barn, let down the pants and make your duty. I said when you do your duty the only thing what I have to do, grab your hat and run away. I don't need anything. I come around better than you and I'm not afraid of your family. Finally he decided to put it back in and he put it back in, everything. I didn't have to fight with him. I just said look, the only thing that I have to do is just grab your hat and that's it. They're alive, the whole family. Only I think the mother passed away after the war. But they're all alive. I think two sons. They're in New York. One brother had a son. He's a rabbi like I told you in Rhode Island, in Providence. One brother is here in Boston. He was working in a factory where they're making sausages. He comes from a family of butchers. So he was working over there until he retired. He got married with a German girl, in Germany, not Jewish. He paid for it. He came over here. He saved up some money. She took the bank book, took out the money, left him, and she went back to Germany. He paid for it. So I don't feel sorry for him. A lot of Jews did it this way. I'm a nationalist. You can call me a fascist. You can call me anything you want. The Jewish people are my people. We paid for it. We paid for it very dear with our blood. I can't help it. I am what I am, like me or hate me.

You have all these pictures of your family members. Maybe to preserve their memory just a little bit we could talk about individuals, at least your parents. Could we do that?

(Husband) I told you my parents were wonderful people. They're charitable people.

Can we do is specifically, like your father. Tell me your father's name.

(Husband) His name was Lazar.

Do you know the year he was born?

(Husband) I know when I was twenty years old, he was forty-three. He was a young man.

And you were born in..?

(Husband) 1918. You will be able to figure it out for yourself.

Where was he born?

(Husband) Poland

Do you know the name of the city?

(Husband) He must have been born in Poland, in Katuszyn.

Do you know anything about his family?

(Husband) I remember my zaida, his father. I remember the way he had brothers. He had sisters. My zaida took me to his father, the elter zaida. He was a hundred and twelve years old. He was white. The kids were taking care of him, I'll never forget. I remember the kids the way they were taking care of him, washing his stockings. He was like a prince in bed. When the Germans came in it's unfortunate how they took a man like this and they shot him. A hundred and twelve years old and blind. I remember when my zaida took me, he shall bless me. They used to tell me stories. I used to be the oldest from the whole *eineklas[ph274] from all the grandchildren and naturally I was the oldest and I tried to be, I run the group. I was how to say the leader, the bully. So my grandfather took me to his father. We used to sit around his bed. After his blessing he used to tell me Shaye you're the oldest of my grandchildren, great grandchildren. I know you're the strongest, you can beat them all up. And you're doing it, pretty good. I says look, I want to give you a test. Look how are you going to do it. He had a box of matches, wooden matches in Europe. Let me see the way you break them. You take them between the fingers like this and break them. So he took a match and I took it and I broke it. Oh he says to me, you're strong. So he gives me two matches. I broke them. And he said to me, I'll give you three matches. What is the three matches? You're taking them and you're breaking them. He says to me you know you're very strong. He says how many grandchildren do we have here right now? He counted them up. He says, what? twelve. He says I want to see how strong you are. He took the twelve matches and put them together and he took a little thread and he wind them around. And he says, now you break them. I couldn't. The knowledge what he taught me he says you see if these twelve children will unite they weld them together no strong

man will break them. But when they're single, divided, even a weak man can break them. Did you learn something from it? So from now on don't you pick on the children, because if they'll be united, they'll break you. I'll never forget this. It's a very good example. He showed it to me, are you strong, you break one, you break two, you break three, you're breaking them, single.

What did your grandfather do? What was his occupation, do you know?

(Husband) He was in business. He had a stand like a market, like a booth. He was selling fish and he was selling cherries, corn, vegetables. This was my grandfather. Then when he retired he gave it up he used to go lay down in the field and he used to give me a Jewish newspaper and used to say, keep away the flies, I can sleep. It was not a bad life.

Do you know about your grandmother?

(Husband) It was in Europe usually the Jewish women were housewives. My mother used to be a businesswoman because we had a business. We had to do it. You know Friday you come in the house, if you had four plates, all four plates was cooking. Everything was for Saturday. You never know how many people you have to bring home for supper. You know always was enough. When it was not enough she gave away a plate because she can have later on another plate. Doesn't mean anything.

Do you know about your father's education? Did he go to high school?

(Husband) Cheder. Everybody goes to Cheder. In Europe they used to say do you know where the days going away. The Yeshiva Bugherim, every Jewish boy what went to the Yeshiva used to go to a merchant's house to eat over. To us there used to come Jewish boys two days a week. Every merchant what he was well off, you take them for two days, the other take them for two days and that's the way they were sitting and learning. Till they got married and he had the smicha the paper what he can be a rabbi. In Europe we had three million Jews and we had all kinds of Jews. We had ...

There were more than three million, there were many million.

No in Poland there were three million. And we had people what they were driving horse and wagon. We had people who were carrying on their back, what do you call this *traigas[ph347] you know what they're carrying - they had special when it comes to a transport - goods - their job was to take off in the tray and bring this to the stores. They had like a little union. It was not a luxury life, but everybody was making a living, an honest living. We had Jews we used to say were *Jokers[ph355] You know what *Jokers[ph356] is? I give you an example. The farmer brought into the city once a week chicken to sell. You take a Jewish man he wanted to see if the chicken is fat. He used to put it in his finger in the side, from the chicken is always fat. He used to talk to the farmer and he says look you wanted so much money take a look the chicken doesn't weigh enough. The meat you let the chicken run away and the farmer used to chase the chicken. There was a couple and the man couldn't make a living. He was not a craftsman, he was not a businessman and the wife used to say to the man, look why don't you go out and grab anything to bring home a loaf of bread, anything. So he went out to the city and saw that a farmer was carrying a big tree. They had to put a pole to put on the electric lights and the horse was pulling the tree. The horse had to pull the wagon with the tree. So the farmer said hey Jew get off. Oh he said no my wife told me I had to grab anything so he took the whip and whipped him up and then he come home. He was whipped up and his wife says to him how come you're whipped up. He said to the wife you told me to grab anything so I grabbed myself the tree and the farmer beat me up.

Will you tell me a little bit more about your father now? When your family went into Warsaw ghetto in 1940 do you know what happened to them?

(Husband): Yeah, still in the ghetto Jews used to trade. They used to have some cigarettes. They used to go out and sell it. They used to have thread, they used to have things when the ghetto was still open, the Polish people used to come in and buy it or trade. They used to take it out to the other side and sell it. Till they closed the ghetto. Once they closed the ghetto you couldn't go in, you couldn't go out. Jews used to trade between themselves.

So what did your family do?

We had to stock up things. We used to go to market and trade, same

as the others. Used to be people like me they used to smuggle out. They used to go outside, they need things to bring it in. Like I want to bring in a horse and wagon with some food I had to trade outside with some farmer. I used to give him boots, I didn't have boots I went down to market I used to trade with him. In the late thing they used to make Jewish money. You couldn't do nothing outside with it. Just the Jews used to do between themselves.

Was your family deported or did they die in the ghetto?

I don't know. I think from the Warsaw ghetto they went to Treblinka.

You don't know how long your family stayed?

When I went out from the family I supplied them with food as much as I could. Then my father said take your wife and try to leave. See if you can survive. I said to the family, how about you? In our family they believe we don't want to live anyway without each other. It was a very tight family. Or we live together or we die together. Instead of saying to the kids run, try to survive, split. No, or we live together or we die together. Nobody wants to live without each other anyway. Because I was married my father pushed me out and said take your wife and try to survive. And I managed. I don't know how, I survived. I can tell the story about it.

Do you want to talk a little bit about your mother?

My mother was from Kaluszyn. You know over there the Jews they knew each other and they married to the grade. Rich are married to the rich, the poor are married to the poor. Sometimes you fall in love, a poor could marry to a rich. You know love is a very strong weapon. It breaks all the weapons in the world. The king of England gave up his throne for the woman he loved so I think the strongest power in the world is love. I'm surprised about the Jewish people. Even today Israel, I thought Israel would be the mirror for the world, what we went through, how we can show an example to the world, how we can live like a family. When I was in Israel, I was riding in a taxi I had an argument with my own. Not a born Israeli, she was emigrated to Israel. Why I emigrated to America is because my wife she had her father's sister was here in Massachusetts they had shoe factories. He was from Europe a shoe maker and he managed to be a rich man even he couldn't sign his name - he made three crosses - but he had 1200 people working for

him. *Rattenubriport[ph472] he was under the name the Root Shoe Company. He sent me papers to Berlin, Germany. I come to America through his papers. Even in Germany from 1946 through 1948 I was a translator for General Clay. I had a motorcycle and I was bringing (because I was speaking several languages). I was from *Schloktenzei[ph484] to the airport over there I had to bring the papers from one camp to the other and I had papers, not the MP, not the CNC, when they stopped me, when I produce the papers they salute me and I was going with my ...*[495] They were driving a *Zindup[ph496] the English motorcycle, I was driving a BMW. The difference is a BMW a shaft, their motorcycle had a chain. They couldn't catch me when I was driving.

Before this tape runs out I want to talk a little bit more about your parents. Do you know how old your mother was?

She must have been two years younger.

Than your father?

That's right.

Could you tell me about their personalities a little bit?

They have the personalities from my wife, very, very nice. Not me. I'm tough. Even today in my business, the customers when they look in and I'm alone they're not going to come in. I deal with the people difference and my wife deals difference. She's more business. When I have a customer and he gives me a time I ask him what do you want? You don't want to pay don't come here no more. Find yourself another victim.

Your parents wouldn't have been tough?

I don't know. When I was in the Warsaw ghetto and we had Jewish police and we had a *Chernoska[529]. The *Chernoska[ph529] was the more intelligent type of police. The one time I was working with my father in the street and they grabbed my father by the arm. They had to deliver 5000 people to the Germans and they come out to the street and they grabbed everybody. They grabbed my father and I said to this guy leave him be, let him go. He said to me no he'll go with me. He didn't go with him. He was laying on the sidewalk. With one bang he was gone. I said to myself so long as I'm alive nobody will put a hand to my father. I was difference.

Even in the store I'm difference. I'm not going out and say move back against nobody, he'll have to kill me. That's right, my wife is difference. Maybe she is bright, she is better. My father taught me one thing. A tree what waves with the wind will never get ripped out with the roots. A tree what is stubborn in a hurricane this is the first tree what will fall. He taught me right. Every person has his own personality. Every person is difference. I cannot change, that's the way I am.

Well, you've been through a lot and your experiences certainly influenced...

Yes, but as I said it's better to be like my wife. I don't know by miracles I'm still alive, I don't know why because I'm not going to move back for nobody. I hope I'm going to die in a peaceful way because you never can tell in these days some nut could come into the store and he's not going to ask you. He'll give it to you.

(Wife does the speaking again at this point unless otherwise indicated) My sister came before me here in this country.

What is her name?

Edith.

Edith Goldman?

Goldman.

(Husband) Bielawski, she's married to a Bielawski.

[Husband starts to spell, wife says I can spell that.]

(Wife) He calls himself not Biloski, I'm sorry Bell.

But I'll use the Polish name. Was she married in Poland?

Yes.

To Bielawski?

Is she older than you?

Yes, older.

You said five years older.

She has three children, two boys and one daughter. They are all married.

Actually I'd rather talk about her when you were children.

Oh, children, yes, it was in the house very good.

Did she like to do knitting like you?

Knitting, yes, even maybe the quilts like I told you. I can't explain it. The children lived very happy in the house. We fight, I don't even know if we fight there.

Do you remember anything special about any time you spent with her?

I spent all the time.

She went to Beis Yaakov?

All the children with us went to Beis Yaakov[22].

(Husband) Every child has a different nature. She happened to be not to my liking.

(Wife) Why he don't like her is a reason. When the Germans come in and she was married....

Do you remember what year she got married?

(Husband) I told you '40, I think she got married in '41.

(Wife) After us. I don't want to go to this, what it was, why he's mad, it was a wall.

(Husband) [says something in Yiddish] She was always apologizing.

(Wife) To me she was a very good sister, very smart, smart in Hebrew, smart in Polish, smart in English. She came here to this country she worked very very hard. Now she was sick, she got cancer. Now one thing I don't like here in America is different

(Husband) She passed away.

What happened to her, was she in the Warsaw ghetto?

Yes, she was the same hiding. Like he told you.

Was she in your town?

(Husband) the same, Wegrow.

So they never got to the Warsaw ghetto.

(Husband) Oh yeah, she was in the Warsaw ghetto too, she was in the family.

So when was she in the Warsaw ghetto?

(Wife) the same as me.

(Husband) In 1940, 1940, then back to Wegrow.

And then she went into hiding with her husband?

(Husband) Yeah when the ghetto was liquidated.

She didn't have any kids or anything?

No.

So she and her husband survived hidden by a Polish family?

(Wife) The whole family survived, my mother survived, two brothers survived and a sister survived. His.....

(Husband) She was the only one from his family that survived. She was an outcast in his family.

Did you have any contact with her during the war period?

No. (Husband) She didn't know from us and we didn't know from her. She knew one thing, that we got killed. Remember there was a rumor how the tailor got killed. She was in another colony about seven kilometers.

So she spent like eighteen months also in..?

Yes.

Did you ever talk to her afterwards about that time like what happened to them during that time?

(Wife) Oh yes, you know she told me she was hiding, the same what we was.

(Husband) And they were sharing the food, but her husband was a good man.

When you were in the grave did you talk to each other?

(Wife) No, to my sister?

You couldn't talk.

(Wife) No, with my sister?

No to each other.

Oh yeah, we were both together laying.

If you didn't want anyone to hear you or anything.

Nobody would..

(Husband) Like I told you 24 hours a day. When I was asleep she was up, when I was up she was asleep.

(Wife) Anyone could walk in. When it comes a Sunday all the Polish people come in.....

(Husband) They used to come in to the guy. A good Polish guy would say like this, I'm not going to kill a Jew. If I'm not going to feed him, if I'm not going to give him water he'll drop dead by himself. But he wouldn't kill him. This was the good one what he believed in Jesus or something. The bad one was going around and kill them.

So your sister and her husband that was the way they survived, the same?

Exactly the same.

So about her personality you think she was very nice.

(Wife) To me she was a very very good sister. I like her, she was my sister.

Was she close with the other children in the family?

Yes, but the other children was dead. Everybody was close. In Europe children, everybody was one. Here in this country is different, not in Europe.

You'll promise that you'll send me her picture and I'll make a copy of it and we'll include her in our project.

(Wife) My pleasure.

I'm going to turn off the tape unless you have anything else to add.

(Wife) Thank you very much for coming.

Well, thank you.