

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Volunteer Collection Interview

**Carolina Taitz**  
RG-50.106\*0179

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Interviewer - Gail Schwartz

**Track #1** - Carolina Taitz was born Lena Knoch in Russia on February 24, 1929. Her mother delivered her on a train in Russia and they embarked in Riga, Latvia. Her father Mordechai, who was born in Livani, Latvia was a tree doctor. Her mother Frieda was from Subata, Latvia. Her sister Berte (Bayla) was nine years older and her brother Gedaliah was one year younger. They were religiously observant and spoke Latvian, German and Yiddish. They lived in Viesite, 100 km from Riga in a house with a fruit garden. Carolina went to Latvian public school for six years where a rabbi came once a week for religious studies. At the time, unlike later, the townspeople were friendly and she didn't feel any anti-Semitism. She and her brother and one other student were the only Jewish children in the school. The other Jewish students in the town went to Jewish schools. When the Russian Communists occupied the town, they took away the house, the cows, her father's business and then arrested and imprisoned him for a time for being a capitalist. Her father, who had fought in WW I loved the Germans who had treated him well when he served as a medical assistant on a train. When the Germans came to Carolina's town the formerly friendly students turned against her and her family. There was much anti-Semitism and Latvians shot Jews on the street. In 1941 the family went into the Muscovsky-Forshtat ghetto in Riga where she wore a yellow star and had little food, though some Latvians threw bread over the iron fence. Five people lived in one room using an outside bathroom. She only brought blankets and clothes. Everything else was confiscated and books were burned. The men worked for the Germans. She was afraid of being raped but never got attacked as she always ran away from them. There was no school in the ghetto. A Jewish doctor had a clinic. When a German soldier found her with a cooked potato he hit her in the eye. Carolina worked in a shoe polish factory from 5 AM to 5 PM where she and the other laborers always talked about food. Other of her relatives lived in different ghettos. In 1942 there was a sign telling all men, women and children to line up outside the ghetto. 30,000 people started walking guarded by German soldiers. She saw people being shot in a ditch by Latvians and Germans, and still remembers the people screaming and praying, bodies falling, and the noise of the guns in the Rumbula forest. Four German generals on horses came by and asked for seamstresses. She and her mother and sister went with 150-200 women and the Wehrmacht officers and walked through the woods to the Termini prison. The women stayed on the roof and were very cold as it was November 1942. A baby was born and the women gave their shirts to cover the child, whom Carolina named Termina after the prison. Carolina asked the Latvian guard for food and he brought some bread from home. The group stayed for two weeks on the roof and she remembers seeing a louse on herself. Then the women were brought back to the ghetto where there was a second Aktion. Carolina decided to run away. Without telling her mother or her sister, she dressed like a boy to go out to work and got in a group of men. At 4 AM she stood in the middle of the street, then slowly moved to the side and took off her yellow star. She was 14 years old.

**Track #2** - She broke away from the group and hid behind a pile of logs. She then knocked on the door of a house. First a woman came out speaking Russian and then a man, Vladimir (Volodya) Michko, a 60 year old Evangelist priest. Carolina ran to him and asked for help after telling them she had escaped from the ghetto. They gave her milk and bread and took her to the cellar where she stayed for 2 1/2 years. She slept on Volodya's mother's mink coat. Carolina would crochet shawls out of wool from sweaters and he would sell them at the market to make money. He cut out a piece of the floor so she could go in and out of the cellar to have dinner with him and his sister. They put a table with a cloth on top of the opening to the cellar, so the Germans didn't find her when they came looking for Volodya's sister who had been a member of an anti-German organization. They took Volodya with them but he did return. Carolina stayed in the house until the end of the war. People were screaming and dancing, but she had no place to go. People from Israel found an apartment for her and three other girls. She went to school and met her husband Charles Taitz, a painter whom she had known before the war. After the Russians had come in he lived in Alma Atta. She married at 18, in 1947. They had a religious marriage and a civil one. Before

then he was called back to serve in the Russian army, got shot in the lung and came down with tuberculosis. Since he was a veteran the Russians sent him to a sanitarium and gave him an apartment and money. His brother and sister were killed in the Riga ghetto. Later he received a letter and packages from his mother Amalia Taitz. She had gone to America and was living with a rich man. She wanted Carolina and Charles to come to the U.S. She did not want to go as she was acting in commercials after having gone to acting school in Riga and was doing very well. Also Carolina felt that her mother-law did not like her. However they sent in papers, but it took eight to ten years to get permission. Her husband went ten times to Moscow and gave \$100,000 as a bribe and they were let go after getting a visa through Eleanor Roosevelt. Their daughter was a teenager. They came in March 1966 to America. They had only \$5 as the Russians confiscated everything and Amalia did not help them out either. Carolina got a job in the New York City Opera, in charge of costumes, wigs and makeup for the productions and worked there for 19 years. Her husband died from TB in the 1970's. She left her job after coming down with vertigo. She remarried and her second husband died ten years ago. She has had two shoulder and two hip implants. She came to Washington, D.C. two years ago.

She became religious when she was living in the priest's house. She feels that God had guided her and she did not die. Her mother survived Auschwitz and a Russian soldier brought her back to Latvia where she lived a short time. Her sister was in Stutthof. Carolina sees her mother and her little brother in her dreams, as well as Germans whom she runs away from. She prefers to be alone and to read. She does not get reparations because the Germans said she was in hiding more than she was in the ghetto. She feels very Jewish and very Latvian and loves to speak Yiddish. She keeps in touch with friends in Latvia and from the New York City Opera. She has written many stories about her experience - "The Louse," "The Doll" and "The Potato." She has two grandchildren.