

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lisa Nussbaum Derman
November 30, 1994
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Lisa Nussbaum Derman, conducted on November 30, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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LISA NUSSBAUM DERMAN

November 30, 1994

01:00:15

Question: Why don't you tell me your full name and your name when you were born, and when and where you were born and then a little about your childhood?

Answer: My name is Lisa Nussbaum Derman. I was born in Raczki Poland in 1926. I was one of three children. I had an older sister Pola and a baby brother Busiek. My parents Herschel and Gittel Nussbaum and an Aunt Sarah that lived with us. I lived in a very small town. We were approximately five kilometers from the German border in East Russia, Ostpreussen¹. And this is where I grew up until the war broke out. It was a town with not that many Jewish families, 50 Jewish families, surrounded maybe by a 1,000 or 1,500 Christians. I grew up in a loving home, a beautiful Jewish home that instilled in all three of us children wonderful values that really kept me through the years and through this entire traumatic experience. I went to public school as a child, and then I also went to a Hebrew school, and when there were not enough Jewish children for a school, my parents had a private tutor in the house, a Hebrew tutor for myself and my little brother. My father was an exporter. He exported geese and lumber to Germany and he was sort of involved within the German world, so to say. When Hitler came to power, my father's business at Raczki came to a stop. He was not allowed to trade any more, and conditions had changed. We lived very close to the border and we knew really, what went on in Nazi Germany by this time. However, we were not so much yet affected by it. The town I grew up in was antisemitic. We suffered from Antisemitism. Even though, I have to really tell, that my parents were sort of a very special family in this town. My mother especially was giving of herself to absolutely everybody, Christians especially. They would come to her to write letters to America because not that many people were educated and literate in the town. And by the very same token they suffered from Antisemitism. When my father's business came to – abruptly to an end, my mother too had a business. My mother had a fabric store, a large fabric store and there were sermons in church given very often to say not to buy from Jews, and especially even mentioned my mother's name – my mother's name was Gittel but in Polish they call it Gitka (ph) – especially to mention not to buy by Gitka. Shortly after – right after Kristallnacht there was already an influx of German Jewish refugees that came to Poland.

01:04:04

None of them came to my town because we were too small of a Jewish community to accommodate Jews, but however, we heard from them about all the stories. Also, I wanted to be very much aware, even though I lived in this tiny little town, there are people in America call there a shtetl of the kind people think maybe from the *Fiddler on the Roof*. No, it was not. It was not because we were quite really advanced in a way. We had a radio in the house. We had a telephone in the house and my father in his days when he conducted business traveled very far – traveled to Germany and to other places, and we really knew what went on in the world but very little, because my parents have done at the time to change what was coming? The war broke out

¹ East Prussia

in 1939 and Poland was divided between the Soviet Union and the Nazi Germany, and my town, of course, was directly on the German border. And immediately the Germans came and occupied the town. I was not in town when the Germans came to occupy. My mother sent my little brother and myself to my aunt that was only 15 kilometers away. I don't really know what was the reasoning and such, and low and behold, when they bombed the town, my little brother and I had the measles and we were in a shelter hiding from the bombs. And not even – we both had such high fever that we didn't even know what went on. The town was occupied and simultaneously, the Russians came and the two armies sort of met. And by rectifying borders my town remained under the Nazi occupation and the rest, 21 kilometers away from my town Augustów was already the Soviet Union.

01:06:08

My parents had the foresight to leave with the Russians, because the Russians encouraged anyone that wanted to leave with them were able to leave. We left. We took part of our belongings, not everything but part of our belongings and we moved to Augustów, which was a mining town 21 kilometers away. On there we were already refugees. We found accommodations. I started to go to Russian school so that my sister – my sister already at the time was in gymnasium and much higher grades than I was. My sister was 17 years old. And very shortly after – I would not say that I myself as a child suffered much under Russian occupation. My parents provided us with everything that they could. And now we went to school. We made new friends, and youth has a way of adjusting very fast. However, my parents had a much harder time, because my father being a businessman had a handicap under their – the Communist regime. And we had to move away a 100 kilometers from the Russian border. And we moved away from Augustów and we moved away to Slonim, a town which was Poland after 1939, but then in the division of Poland and the Soviet Union – the Nazi Germany and Soviet Union, ended up under the Russians. We lived on the outskirts of town, the whole family. And my aunt that lived with us, Aunt Sarah. We lived on the outskirts of town in Slonim on the river – on the Shchara, and our neighbors were Christians. Predominantly, Slonim really was a Jewish town. It was a magnificent Jewish town because it had so many learning places, so many synagogues, Yeshivot² – the famous Yeshiva of Slonim, the rabbis of Slonim, two Jewish high schools. Really, a place that really did not lack of anything one would want to know or really to enjoy in a cultural way as a Jewish child. I had friends, Jewish friends and Christian friends, too. and shortly the war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and it is there that I really met up with the Nazis.

01:08:57

We lived on the outskirts of town. The town was not bombed much, and we were not at all affected by the war per se from bombs. Very shortly after the war broke out on the 21st of June, very shortly after, there were announcements that Jews were not allowed to live in certain quarters, in certain parts of Slonim and we had to move right away. We moved closer in to the town, and it is there where really the first of 1,500 men were selected and taken on this market place, and 1,200 men were sent to their deaths, very shortly, as soon as the Nazis occupied the town. It was done by Einsatzgruppen. I am sure we did not by that time – the name. We called

² Plural of Yeshiva

them the chapones³ in Yiddish. Chapen⁴ means to grab someone, because they literally came; they grabbed men, regardless. Whoever looked to them – they're of a certain age, young sort of – grabbed them and killed them. My family – my father and my little brother were not affected. They were hiding in a outhouse outside in the house where we really lived. But they did not come even to this part of town. Very shortly there was a law, we had to move again. It was still before the real ghetto was established. We moved again and again, we had to vacate the place because that too was a spot – it was really the center of town, quite prestigious, sort of to say, and we had to move again. And we moved to Podgórna, which was the name of the street. And it is there where we moved that already the ghetto was, even though a little bit larger yet than what it ended up at the end. But it was already surrounded by – loose, loosely what they call – they prided themselves – loosely barbed wires.

01:11:34

And it is there that I witnessed while we lived, still the whole family intact, that I witnessed a massacre. The Germans called it an Aktion⁵, an action. What it means is really slaughter. And I will tell what happened to me on this day. My father did not work as an artisan, as men that had skills. He was a businessman so he only went on slave labor, and he wasn't, quote unquote, "one of these desirable Jews" for a while that did certain, like the shoemakers that sewed their boots or that made their uniforms and such, that for a while yet they need them. On Thursday a sort of strange army came to town, and because the ghetto was so loose yet and you could see the roads on the outside, trucks have been seen and Germans and soldiers – not only the ones that we knew that are Germans, that are the Einsatzgruppen and the chapones, but also auxiliary forces that served the Nazis. There came armies in black uniforms with sort of sleeves and with certain insignias on their sleeves that were Ukrainians. There were Latvians that served Nazis – not all, but in great number Estonians some. And the panic started in the ghetto. What are all these armies invading coming to do in this town? And on the very same day on Thursday, some people returned from work and they received a – it was called, the German called it a schein⁶. It means really, a passport, a tiny little card, an I.D. card that had the person's name and number and the stamp from the Gebietskommissar⁷ which would be the equivalent to the governor. And a panic started. Only very few very, quote unquote, "desirable people" received it. The rest of us didn't have it. My family didn't have it.

01:14:14

And my mother, before we went to the ghetto, first spoke to our Christian neighbor, that if there is trouble in the ghetto she wants to send her girls to her. Would she take her girls if there was trouble? And the woman said, "Yes, send them to me." When Mother had first visualized that there was danger, she really wanted to save her girls. In a haste we were dressed. She took us to the barbed wires and, you know, it was loosely yet. They were not charged with any high

³ snatchers (Yiddish)

⁴ to catch (Yiddish)

⁵ action (German); term used for operations whose objective was the physical removal and destruction of Jews.

⁶ certificate (German); term used for Nazi issued work permits.

⁷ regional commissioner (German)

voltage electricity and any thing of that sort. Mother took us to the barbed wires. It was November 13th of 1941. I was not quite 15 years old. My sister and I took off our yellow stars. Mother lifted the barbed wires. We snuck out. There were always guard around the barbed wires. All of us already had to wear marking. In Slonim the first marking we wore was a round yellow patch, a round patch in the front of the garment and in the back of the garment, and we took it off naturally. Mother lifted the barbed wires. She stood inside in the ghetto of the barbed wires. We stood on the outside. I turned my head back, and that was the last time I saw my mother because my mother was killed on this November 14th. My sister and I – it was already getting dark. I also want to say that other people tried to sneak out of the ghetto. A lot of people tried to do it and many a times people were shot in the process. I guess you needed some luck too, sometimes not to be shot while you tried to sneak out of the ghetto.

01:16:25

It was already quite – getting dusk, almost dark. We walked very confidently. I knew to keep my head up so nobody would pay attention of two girls walking with their heads down – try to identifying them – that maybe they're Jewish and such, because there was a lot of animosity outside. We walked. We came to the woman's house. Nobody saw us walking in the house. In fact, we made it a point not to walk into the house with nobody noticing us. We came. She let us in and she kept us. She told us to go in the basement to stay overnight. We did. Friday morning on November 14th there was a knock on the door and a neighbor came to tell her that they are killing all the Jews in the ghetto, and the woman became frightened and would not keep us as much we begged her. We cried. We just begged her to hide us somewhere – to tell her that she is no danger – that no one saw us come into this house. And also, a Jewish man had a much harder time surviving because only Jewish men were circumcised in Europe, Christians were not. So this was right away identification that this is a Jew – was a male – was circumcised. The woman would not keep us as much as we begged her. I have to tell you that it was already cold. It was winter. There was already some snow on the ground, and she told us to go hide into the woods, which we were really on the outskirts, not far away – not really far away. We had no alternative. Nothing. What could we have done, two young girls? We went to hide in the woods.

01:18:22

We came into the forest and we stayed for a while. And all of a sudden there were bullets flying all over – flying over our heads, and we ran deeper into the forest to hide from the bullets. And as we came in deeper to the forest we came to the scene of the massacre. It is in this forest that on this Friday, 10,000 Jews were killed in open pits. Shot. Of course, we ran from the scene – the blood, the screams. We ran in opposite direction hoping that we will survive this massacre. As we were sitting there, both of us frightened, shaking, a ranger came in the forest. He wanted to know what we were doing in the forest and we told him that we came to collect some wood for the winter. At first he believed us and he let us stay. He came from the road. He had with him – he came with a bicycle from the road – he had a rifle slung on his shoulder and an axe behind his belt. We were in the forest staying and he walked in deeper. He heard all this shooting. He became curious. He walked in deeper and he saw the scene of the massacre. And he came with a rage to us – that that we are Jewish – we told him a lie. “You must be shot like

the rest of the Jews.” Nothing had we done to the man. Nothing. He was in no danger. The viciousness of men. But he didn't take us to the pits. He took us to the road. And as he took us to the road – leading us under the rifle – and told us to meet up with the group of the Jews that were being led to be killed. The women and children were being walked, walked quietly, holding on to their children – some carrying them. They were surrounded tightly with guards. By running out they would be shot immediately. Men were in trucks with machine guns in the back, and as we walked on the little walker's path, the ranger behind us, at one point my sister turned her head and she realized that he is a distance from us.

01:21:14

We ran from the scene to hide in the opposite side of the forest away from the shooting and the screams. And all of a sudden as we were sitting there – both of us frightened, hoping that we will live through the day – all of a sudden a ranger came into the forest. He came from the road. He carried – he came with a bicycle – holding on to a bicycle, a rifle slung over his shoulder and an axe behind his belt. He wanted to know what we were doing in the forest and we told him that we came to collect the wood for the winter. He believed us and he let us stay. He too, came deeper into the forest and he heard all of the shooting. And he saw the scene of the massacre. He came with a tremendous rage – that we are Jewish and away from the pits. We have to be killed like the rest of the Jews. The viciousness of man! Nothing have we done to him. Why not find the kindness to save two young girls. He was in no danger of anything. But he did not take us to the pits where they were killing the people. He took us to the road. He led us under the rifle to the road where the group of women and the children in a great number were being led to be killed. They were surrounded by guards tightly. Women holding on to their children, some carrying them, walking very quietly. And the men on the trucks and the trucks moving very slowly. In the back a machine gun attached to the truck. They couldn't run, they couldn't do anything to change. Nothing at all could they have done. We walked on a little walker's path that was bumpy, a lot of ice, thin ice. As we are putting our feet – walking, it was hard for even to pull for us to get our shoes out. And when my sister turned her head back and she noticed that the ranger is a distance from us, she grabbed my hand and she told me, “Run, run in the field and run in a zigzag!” And the two of us ran wildly in the field in all different directions. Of course, the ranger in his rage threw the axe in the field. Then he began to shoot at us. As he threw the axe in the field it hit the back of my sister's leg. She had a deep cut. We had to stop in the field. We had scarves. We took off our scarves. We tied her leg and we ran in the field all the way back to the community that we started from.

01:24:24

And it is for you to know that no one would let us come into their homes. No one would let us come into their home. Desperately, we were walking, hoping that we can find a place to hide, a place to hide. We were practically on the outskirts of town and there were no more homes left. All of a sudden, we passed by a house and the gate to the house was open, and there was a barn in the back of the house and the door to the barn was open, and we ran to hide in the barn. And to the side of the house all of a sudden the door opened, and there was a little window in the door, and a woman opened the door and, of course, we thought she would tell us – turn us away. And this woman with her hands clasped said to us these words; “You do not have to tell me

where you're coming from. I know. God brought you to the right house. I will save you.” A saintly Christian woman opened up her house, took us in, attended to my sister's wound, gave us food, opened up a sleeping sofa. They took out the inside of the sofa, put us both in, left enough air for us to breathe and kept us there the day of the massacre.

01:26:02

I am convinced I am alive today because someone cared. Someone followed their conscience. Someone had a heart. Someone did what a human being is to do to the next one that is in kind of trouble that my sister and I were. The woman said, ‘God, if it should happen to my girls, please somebody, help them, too.’ And in this house there was a father and two daughters. They were exactly my sister's and my age, and while we were lying in the sofa, people, the neighbors came and sat on the sofa, telling her, telling the woman that they are going to search the Christian homes and they will punish the Christians that hide Jews, which is true, they did. They did. But the woman never vacillated. The woman never told us to leave or anything. In fact, she told her neighbor, “This is Nazi propaganda. Don't fall for it. It is impossible to search the homes. Don't fall for it. It is not true.” And at no time at all did she tell us to leave, no time at all. When evening came – was my sister's decision – they took us out of the sofa. And the neighbors – they closed the doors and made sure nobody comes in. And it was my sister's decision. She was naturally the older of the two, the wiser of the two. She said, “We must leave this house in case they do search. These people were so good to us. Why endanger them?” The father of the house took with him a blanket and a pillow and took us to a bombed out house. We didn't stay in the bombed out house. As soon as it got dark –because we were afraid in case somebody would find us. We were not so sure we would meet up with such good people.

01:28:21

These righteous Christians are almost like beacons in this darkness, pointing the fingers at others that could have done something too. There were so few, not so many. It is our great fortune that we met up with a saintly woman that never knew us, never got paid for it, did it out of the goodness of her heart. Following her conscience and would expect others to do it, too. We came to a farm house. We knocked on the window. They let us in. We told them that we are Jewish, that we want to change our clothes with them. We'll give them our city clothes and we wanted to change into – let us give them our farmer's clothes. They gave us. They consented. We told them that we will not endanger them, that we will stay in the barn overnight and early in the morning we will leave. And they let us stay overnight in the barn. We stayed overnight in the barn. Early in the morning before sun, we started out just walking in the woods. And we knew of a woman, a farm woman that used to come during the Russian occupation to sell butter and chickens and eggs to my mother, and she invited us many times. She said, before the Nazi occupation, “Why don't you girls sometimes come and visit me? We have a beautiful lake and it's nice and we want to really show them hospitality.” Do you know I remembered the woman's village? And we decided that we would go to this woman.

01:20:21

However, it was such a distance in the winter so we stayed in the woods. We lived – we never went to a farm to ask for food because we were afraid. We never knew what kind of people we would meet up with. So we lived on the berry that we could find, the mushroom that we could find and we finally made our journey to this woman's house. She took us in. She kept us there for several days. I think two days if I recall, and she kept us hidden; she was very smart. She kept us hidden and she was a very popular woman, a very popular farm house in town with children. Evidently, they were wealthy so everybody in the farm, all the young people would gather there. So she told the young people when they asked her, “Who are these two girls?” She said, “Oh, I hire two maids to spin and to weave for the winter to make wool.” So, she kept us there, and we begged her if the farmers go to town to Slonim, to see maybe somebody survive. Maybe they didn't kill all the Jews. And she made it in such a way – she was very clever, very clever – she made it in such a way that there was no suspicion that she's hiding two Jewish girls or anything. And she told the farmer, “You know, I used to sell eggs and butter to some Jews. I wonder if somebody still survived.” The man came back and he told her, “Yes, but they killed 10,000 Jews” – he heard – “but there are still Jews.” He saw them returning from a nightshift from work. My sister and I immediately left the farm house and we walked back on foot, back to the ghetto to see if somebody from the family survived.

01:32:22

We never asked for a ride because we were afraid. We would see farmers and such. We wouldn't approach them. We would run into the woods to hide. You must also realize it was winter. We couldn't live in the woods. The elements – nor did we have food, nor did we have enough clothing in sub-zero weather, in cold. We made our way back to Slonim. We came back to Slonim, and on the outskirts we saw a group of Jews returning from work. We joined them. We sort of ran into their midst. We asked them if they knew our family. Nobody knew my family because we were really refugees already in Slonim. These were most of the people were natives. Nobody knew my family. We walked in with them to the ghetto. We were not counted. We just walked in. They kept us in the middle because we didn't have any stars on us and we came into that room where the six of us lived, and as I opened the door my mother was not there to greet me. So I knew. My mother was killed. My aunt was killed. My father and my little brother survived. And talking about courage – I'm a parent now. I'm a grandparent already. Imagine my mother taking two girls, sending them into the unknowns so they would live. Imagine what went through her mind. My father and my little brother were hiding outside of the ghetto. My mother remained. My aunt was sick and my mother would not leave my aunt. She stayed with her. That doesn't mean were she outside of the ghetto my mother would have survived, but at least her chances would be better. Both of their chances would be better.

01:34:35

They shrank the ghetto. They made it smaller and we moved in on the street Operowa. We moved in. We had one room. There were two rooms, a very rundown place, but – however it was a little brick house and it was close to the gate where the ghetto was. In one room the four of us lived, a tiny little room. We had a bed, one bed where the three of us, the children slept and Daddy slept on a little bed cot, sort of. Next door, the other room was a family, a young family, newly married and a brother that lived with them and they were wonderful to us. Wonderful.

They did not have children of their own. They shared absolutely everything with us. The little bit of extra food, the extra hot water to wash. They sort of thought that maybe, maybe one of us will survive or something. I don't know. It wasn't told to us but I somehow had the feeling. And my father went to a slave labor. I did not work in the ghetto. I was too young. In fact, my little brother would run out of the ghetto. He was blond and really, his Polish was so very good, and he did many, many times run out on the Christian side, come back, would bring some food. And it is in this ghetto where we first moved in. In December of 1941 a young man came into the house.

01:36:51

Next to our house was a wooden house, larger, with more rooms and naturally more people lived there – crowded, one on top of the other. And there was a young man that I knew that I really knew yet from the Russian occupation because he went to the same school that I did, but he was older. He was in a higher grade – came in one evening and he brought with him a fellow that was, I thought, so much older than I was, and he introduced me and he was a young man. He said his name Aron Dereczynski. They called him Arkie and he kept on coming, and there was a friendship that developed. He worked in the Verpflegungsamt⁸. Did he have a chance really to have food? Do I really need to explain and to tell the value of food in the ghetto when there was such hunger? When a slice of bread meant – when everyone aspired to have enough. And my sister liked him right away. My father sort of – since my mother was killed, my aunt was killed, my sister really sort of took the motherly part, even though she wasn't that all – she was so wonderful to us, so caring. She was a student before the war and I never expected her to come in and to this role, but how beautifully she did it. How kind and nice she was to us. She wasn't really that much older than we were. And as a friendship developed, Aron would come. You know, there was curfew. Nowhere could you have gone or do anything. And meanwhile, terrible things were happening in the ghetto.

01:39:07

People were being killed. Not in mass but they would hang somebody for bringing in food. They would kill somebody. They found a bottle of milk in his possession, and the ghetto was tense at the killings. And then – I guess it's a human quality – people would sort of like relax and it was almost like normalcy. I really don't know why they thought it was normalcy, but the tragedy was a community tragedy. Everybody was in the same shoes. There was no family that wasn't touched. Everybody lost someone and maybe it was at this particular time easier to share the grief because everybody cried. Everybody was in the same position losing their loved ones. And I developed a friendship with Aron. It was more than a friendship, really – more than a friendship. It was “boy and girl,” even in this abnormal circumstances. As time went on in the ghetto and it was quasi-quiet. The Judenrat⁹ had problems all the time with the slave labor. The Judenrat had problems with the terrible demands always being made on delivery. Deliver them that much gold and that much silver and the valuables. Slave labor in great numbers also the Judenrat also was faced. People did not want to go to work. They really – I'm talking about

⁸ Food distribution bureau (German)

⁹ Jewish council (German); term used for Jewish administrative boards appointed by the Nazis to oversee Jewish communities and ghettos.

Slonim – they try to cope with it as best as they could. And I – when I think back and I reflect and a lot of really thinking, intellectualizing and such, we always must put the blame on the enemy. They were forced to do it. When they did not do it, they were killed for it. How many of us have the fiber really to say to a stand, to take death instead of doing what you are told to do. There was no suicides in the ghetto. People did not have the means. They did not have the poison to do it with, no guns, but yet there was a tremendous urge to live, to live, that tremendous self-defense to live. People did everything that they could at the time, in their power. Whatever they could was possible for them to do to survive and it was so hard to survive. It was almost impossible to survive – almost impossible.

01:42:19

This is why so few people survived. And again, when a government, an organized government – they have to have power, an army, the money, an unfriendly population that does not want to help for most part except for the righteous, and there were not so many numbers. They can do it to any people, not only to Jews. Time went on. Time went on and meanwhile, there was – people began to think of survival. The young, some of the young were involved in joining together in the underground. I was only not part of it. I was too young. We were refugees. I guess an underground you really have to develop strong roots to be able to trust the group as a unit together. I was too young and we were refugees and my sister was not part of the underground. Neither did she know anyone that was because also it was so terribly secretive. How would one know unless you were approached and asked and really become part of this unit? People in the ghetto began to build hiding places. They called them malines¹⁰. It was probably a Jewish word for a hiding place. In every ghetto that we lived everybody called it a maline, a hiding place. Where were these hiding places? People imagined every possible place that they could build a place where they could hide, where they could hide. Is it in the yard, in a hovel dug out? Is it under the floor? Is it in an attic? Is it some place in a shack, or is it even in the room concealed with a big credenza or something? People didn't have already, this. The furniture was taken away because periodically there were the men from the Gestapo for furniture. So everything that had any value of any was taken out of the ghetto. But people have these old armoires yet, broken up yet. So some people built hiding places beneath, concealed it with an armoire or with something of that sort – anything imaginable that people could think. They did everything humanly possible to find a place to hide, because it sort of taught to the people – the first massacre – were people to hide even under the bed. When we came in back from the massacre, my sister and I, how much I cried and screamed. “Why didn't mother hide? Why didn't mother hide?” Little did I know that maybe it was impossible for her to hide.

01:45:55

But I was a child. I needed my mother. And time went out. Everybody in the ghetto had a place to hide. Everybody in the ghetto had a place to hide. In fact, between the two homes where we lived, we had a hiding place for 30 people – for everybody there to hide. It wasn't anything so very intricate. It was under the floor. And all of a sudden on a Sunday there were already signs that something is going to happen. In between when Aron used to come to the house – all the time, you know, he was such a wonderful spirit. He was so confident and he would tell me

¹⁰ hideout (Yiddish)

things. That he belonged to Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir¹¹. I, in my town, did not belong to a Zionist organization. There were not enough really children for a group – for a Zionist group – but I knew about it. I read about it and I knew very well, because in the town in Suwalki where my sister went to gymnasium there were Zionists' organizations. And my cousins belonged to the Zionists' groups, so this was not strange to me. But he always – and he told me that just before the war he was supposed to go to agricultural school in Palestine and it didn't work out for him. But one day, one day, maybe he still will get there.

01:47:48

And I would listen to him and it would give me confidence. I sort of looked so much forward to his visits – to his visits. And he always also knew a little bit of news, because in the Verpflegungsamt, out by the Germans where he worked – this was the Wehrmacht¹², the army, the German army that he worked for in this huge, huge depository of food. They would sometimes listen to the radio to German radio, so they approximately knew where the Front was. And then they even had, he said, they even have a clandestine radio, which was to me like something like a fairy tale thing. And our friendship grew. Our friendship grew and we really became a boy and a girlfriend. By this time June rolled around, and all of a sudden, all of a sudden on a Sunday, a strange army rolled around the ghetto. The ghetto by that time was sealed – was closed with barbed wires. There was not loose at all – the gate and the people counted. Always guards around the perimeter of the ghetto, much smaller after the first massacre. They shrank the ghetto, made it much smaller and the congestion was much more. And a terrible panic in the ghetto. What could these people have done? Very, very little. Only to hide – keep them there. There weren't as many Christians that would accept Jews to hide, keep them there. With an exception, I say again, of the righteous. The idea was to hide and to try and see maybe we will survive by hiding. By Sunday night the panic grew and Monday morning, early in the morning, we heard shots. We lived very close to the gate. We lived on the Operowa and the gate was on a Operowa and I learned later that it was the head of the Judenrat, Gershon Kwint that came in when this Einsatzgruppen group, and this army of killers came in to the gate to march into the ghetto.

01:50:49

He asked them, "What are you doing with my people?" He was shot and this is the shots that we heard because we were close to the gate. We were already by this time in hiding and the rest of the ghetto was hidden. The ghetto was hidden and we separated with my sister. The place for us, all of our neighbor, the two neighboring homes to hide was in the middle – was under the sidewalk. And my father walked in to see at this place and he said there were children and also he said the children might start to cry, and he felt that he couldn't breathe. He said, "I don't have enough air there to breathe. I will not go there. I'll choke to death. We will not go." My sister ran across the street to find out the house, which was by the name of the Jachwidowicz house across the street from us. Well, she was never able to return because the massacre – because the Aktion started. My father, my little brother and I remained in the house and my father, the three of us, tried to hide in the house. Where were we hidden? The kitchen had an old-fashioned oven

¹¹ youth guard (Hebrew), Zionist youth organization.

¹² Armed forces (German)

where before – for baking bread. To the side it was a deep oven. To the side was a little opening for three people just to squeeze in where wood was kept in normal times. In normal times wood was kept. Of course, we didn't have any wood in the ghetto. The kitchen was wallpapered and it was really shreds sort of hanging. When they used to come to take people on slave labor, my father used to hide in this spot. How did he hide there? He had a piece of cardboard that he held almost, held from the inside that matched the rest of the wallpaper in the kitchen, torn the same way as the rest to conceal this entrance into this little place next to the oven. And my father said the three of us run and hide there. Monday morning when we heard the shooting already in the house, we ran in to hide behind this oven in this little space that was open. They came in. The killers came in to the house. They searched the house. They knocked on the walls. They never came to this spot. “Raus, raus, raus!”¹³ And then we heard cries and we heard shooting and we realized that the people next door were discovered. We remained in this place, frozen. There was no place to move. For one of us to make a turn – all three of us had to move to be able for one of us to make a turn. My little brother was a child. It was so hard on him. It was very hard on all three of us. We stayed there the day. We survived the day.

01:54:26

At night my father said that we cannot stay there. It's not safe. We'll be found there. We must hide somewhere else. We did not hide any more in this place. It was open because we couldn't cover it. It was all open. The part that covered this entrance was broken. So we went in the yard. There were shacks on the side and as we went out of the house in the shacks, we realized that the ghetto is burning while we stayed in the house. We didn't know, hidden in the house. We didn't smell anything. We didn't know. All of a sudden we went in, in the yard and we saw that the ghetto is burning. But we had no alternative, so we went to the last shack. There were a row of shacks. The last shack we walked in and we saw that there was a ladder and there was a trapdoor, and we crawled up the ladder and we opened up the trapdoor. There was a loft that hardly you could squeeze in and we found two old Jewish men, the old Mr. Margolis(ph) and Mr. Fink(ph). And we asked them, “What, what – where are all the rest of the people?” They said they did not hide in with the rest of the people, because they knew they couldn't breathe there. They were coughing and they didn't want to endanger the other people, so they did not hide with the rest of the family. They were hidden in this shack and we came to this shack. We walked up and threw the ladder away so it wouldn't be a sign that some people are hiding in the shack there on top in the loft and we stayed there. We stayed there. We didn't have any food at all. Daddy went at night and he brought water. He found he could not find any bread in the house. Nothing was in the house. He brought water so we still had water, and we stayed there Monday night, Tuesday and Wednesday and we watched the fire, the ghetto burning.

01:56:58

I do not know how it was possible that this shack did not catch on fire. I do not know but it didn't. And we survived in this shack. And while we were lying in the shack, my father said, “What even if we survive? All the Jews are killed. What are we going to do even if we survive? What am I going to do with my two children? Where are we going to go?” But we didn't. We stayed. We stayed in the shack hoping for a miracle. On Thursday afternoon we heard noise in

¹³ out (German)

the front and we – all of a sudden we heard steps in the back and somebody calling in Yiddish. “Lisa, Lisa,” and, “Jews, if anybody's hiding, answer, answer.” I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it, that this was possible, and I wiggle my father. “That sounds like Aron, that sounds like his voice.” My little brother opened the trap and I answered, I answered. Aron came into the shack. My little brother opened the trap and he leaned over and he said, “Yes, the three of us are here. We survived the fire and we're still here.” So Aron said that the massacre – they are still purging people but it is already much quieter and it looks like they will leave some people. They will let some people live, survive. So all of a sudden a ray of hope sort of came in and then Aron tells me, “Go down. Climb down from the loft, from the shack.” I jumped down. He took me—

01:59:35

End of Tape Number One.

Tape Number Two

Q: Why don't we start with hearing the voices calling in Yiddish.

A: As we were sitting there, it was in the afternoon. In fact, I'm sure it was in the afternoon. All of a sudden we heard footsteps. Of course, we froze. We thought that it's Germans again coming to find us. All of a sudden there were voices in Yiddish – in Jewish and I heard, “Lisa, Lisa.” At first I couldn't believe it and then I also heard in Yiddish saying “Jews, Yidden, Jews! If anybody is hiding, please answer, please answer.” And I nudged my little brother and I said, “Daddy,” I said, “it sounds like Aron. Could it be?” And I answered and as I answered, Aron walked into the shack. My little brother opened up the latch and, of course, can you imagine the kind of feeling that went through me? My wildest dream would I ever imagine that I am ever going to see Aron again? And here he came really to the rescue like. He looked at me. By this time we were sitting there already three or four days without food, only with water, being so cramped in that there was no room to turn. And it was a very hard on my little brother. He was so restless and every time he had to move all of us had to turn. I jumped down. Aron took me to the house, to the empty house. Of course, all the houses were empty. The people were gone already by this time.

02:03:22

He took me upstairs to an attic and he looked around for a while. He looked for some clothes and he came in and he brought with him a boy's jacket and a pair of pants. Women in Europe at the time, this particular time, never wore pants, and he found a scissor and he stood there. And I was in shock, in complete shock and he said to me that he's going to dress me like a boy because women are not allowed to live. He found the scissor and he cut my hair completely. He left a little stubs on my head and I did everything that he told me to do. He put on a cap on me and as I walked down, there was a mirror and I took a look. I took off the cap and I took a look at myself. I was frightened to see what I look like without – shaven, not shaven but practically shaven – without hair. But I followed him and I walked out. We came to the street and four Jewish men were waiting there. They were the men that Aron worked with and already he had enough time to tell me that he has kept Miller, the head of the Verpflegungsamt that he works for, asked him to come into the ghetto and to find some valuables – I don't know – riches, riches to enrich himself on this tragedy. And he said – Aron said, “It was my idea because I wanted to come to the ghetto to see if I can still find someone alive. And maybe he has had an opportunity to take you out with me.” He told me that his mother and his three sisters are alive, that he left them in the hiding place because he says he could not take four people out. And he says, “I could not even decide; who would I take out of the four?” They put in – they were carrying, – all the men had on them it looked like chandeliers, really nothing fancy to speak about. Maybe it was old something with some wires. They took off – one man gave me a chandelier sort of – I don't know, you call it a chandelier – something that resembles a chandelier, and he put it over my shoulder and he put some wires around my neck, and we walked out. All of us walked out. We came to the gate and the guard was at the gate and Aron very confidently – all of us carried something. Some of the men carried something in pillowcases. I didn't even know what they carried there. I learned later that all of it was for Miller, and all of us walked out.

02:06:44

Aron waved confidently his slip of paper that Miller gave him to come into the ghetto. They came in into the ghetto with Fritz which was one of the Wehrmacht, regular soldiers that worked in the Verpflegungsamt and he waited for them. Across the way from the ghetto directly across was the house where the men that the German Wehrmacht that ran this Verpflegungsamt lived there. It was Captain Miller, the head of the Verpflegungsamt and Bauer also a captain and one more, a German, and two regular German men. So I was absolutely numb. I didn't really know except to follow and to do what I was told to do. Aron took me into the German's house. I could not believe why he would do it, but he didn't take me to the upstairs. He took me to the basement. He left me in the basement within a pile of old furniture that was lying there and I hid behind the furniture. All of a sudden a young Jewish boy came down and he searched for me. And he said to me, "Don't be frightened, don't worry. I will help you. I will do everything that needs to be done for you," he said. And the first thing what he did is he brought me food. He brought me food. And when I looked at him, he was a child. He looked to me like he was not older than 12 or 13 years old. And he said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of you." And he did. He did everything what he could. He said to me, "There are maids working here, but I will not let them go in the basement. Everything that they need, I will run and get it so that they won't come down in the basement to find you." And he did. But all of a sudden as I was sitting there hidden, Bauer walked in. I didn't know anything about Bauer. Can you imagine how frightened I was? Here was a German came in and he found me. I was sure he was going to shoot me right there on the spot, but behind him was Aron. And Bauer tells me, "Stand up." And I stood up. I stood up and he said, "Do you have girl's clothes?" And I said "Yes, underneath I have girl's clothes." Because I still had the clothes that I went into hiding. And he said – then the little boy ran down, the Jewish boy, and he brought me a babushka. He said, "Take off your Boise's clothes. Put on this babushka and come with me. I'll take you to the Verpflegungsamt." And he walked – we walked out. I learned later that Aron asked Miller – he said, "I'm hiding – I brought here my sister. Please do something for her to save her." And Miller pounded on the table saying, "My place is no place to hide Jews. Take her out of here immediately." So then Aron approached Bauer, evidently while the ghetto was burning, and when Bauer passed by and saw the shooting and the killing...he was a decent human being and that he was terribly upset. And he said, "How could I believe it that my people can do something like this?" And so Aron approached Bauer.

02:10:31

He had no alternative. He had to take me out of this German house. He approached Bauer and Bauer walked with me. Do you know the house where they lived was across the street from the school, the high school that I went to before the invasion? It was recess and the children were walking out of school during recess and I thought to myself, "Why am I so cursed? My parents were such good people. I am equal to all of these children. Why is it done to me? What have I done? Then this befell me. What have I done? They are free and here I am being taken to the unknown, maybe to death for nothing that I have done." I always thought the Jews were good people. All the people that I knew were Jewish were good. I am sure there some maybe that were not so good, but maybe I didn't know them as a child. I walked with Bauer. He told me to walk on the sidewalk. I did not have my yellow stars. I walked with him. We came to the Verpflegungsamt and there already the man that worked the Verpflegungsamt waited for me to

come and to hide me somewhere. They made a hiding place for me. The hiding place was; they took out two sacks or three sacks and they covered it. They found a piece of plywood, put a piece of plywood – put a sack to cover the plywood or two sacks to cover the plywood and marked it because it was a huge warehouse, with hundreds and hundreds of sacks of flour, of corn, of oats, of everything. It really supplied the entire area around Slonim – that there rations were given out to the Germans, to the Pole, to everybody from this warehouse. They marked it in such a way so that they would know where I was hidden. They made just enough space in this little tiny place where they took out the several sacks for me to crawl in and to lie there, and they left enough space of air to come in so I could breathe and I stayed there. I stayed there.

02:13:06

When night came everybody left, and I remained all by myself in this warehouse, hidden. And as I said, I remained in the warehouse. All of a sudden I was being scratched by rats, lying there. And I was afraid that I was going to be devoured by them, that they will scratch me, eat me practically. And with all my might that I possessed, I pushed the sacks back and I crawled out of this space. And all night long I was sitting on top and running away from the rats. Then when morning came and I knew that they were going to open up the warehouse, I was afraid for them to find me. Maybe the Germans would come before the Jews would come into this warehouse. I crawled in again and I was able, not very well, but to cover myself again, pulling that sack to cover as I entered. It wasn't very well concealed but enough not to notice. And anyway, if the Germans didn't know that I was hidden some place where they would go and check thousands of sacks of flour to find me. The next day they already allowed for people to live. They allowed for people to live. The people that still remained hidden were told to go out from the hiding place. They took them all to the jail, the people, and they started there the selection left and right, who to live and who to die. To the left and to the right and to the left and to the right. I was not there but I learned about it from my father and my little brother, because my father and my little brother still remained hidden. And then they heard that there was a reprieve and you can really go out. They came out and were told that they were going to be given a Schein, this certificate to live – this I.D. card to live. But they were taken to the jail first and there they would be given the certificate. And there they started the selection and somehow, somehow my father was given the card, was sent to the right side to live and my little brother remained on the other side, and he ran and he tried to beg this Nazi, to beg him that he wants to be with his father. He wants his father and I guess in his, with all of his viciousness and with all of his thoughts of inhumanity, he found really a trace of caring. He threw my little brother. He grabbed him and he threw him to my father, and he survived. He was let out of the jail with my father.

02:16:40

And I knew about it because one of the men came to the Verpflegungsamt and told me, "I saw your father and I saw your little brother and they were alive, and they survived the selection in the jail and they are alive." And here they said that women already can live, too. Women already can live, too. I did not stay in the Verpflegungsamt. They put us up in the Beutelager¹⁴. It was a really a huge army barracks that were built for the Polish Army way before the war, and there they collected all the surplus of broken up, damaged arms from the war, Russian arms that they

¹⁴ warehouse of confiscated goods and valuables (German)

collected. And this is really where the young Jews that were involved in the underground work were able to steal the arms and to smuggle them in piece by piece into the ghetto. Or in some way, Germans that were – some of them that were bartering with Jews even brought it in under boxes of soap, hidden under soap that was brought in into the ghetto. Approximately, not more maybe between 800, 900 maybe 1,000 people remained from the entire ghetto, from 20,000 people. And they left a little small little ghetto, besides the people that lived in the Beutelager. The Beutelager where were all the young people that still worked in the Beutelager or the Verpflegungsamt, and every day, every morning there was an appell¹⁵, we had to go out to be counted. They would come in the middle of the night with lights, have us all come out and to be counted. The people that lived on the last ghetto, the several homes around the river on the street that's called Mostawa were given an identification, a little tiny piece made out of clay with a number that you had to wear around your neck all the time – all the time besides your round badge. I stayed at the time in the Beutelager, and my father and my little brother stayed on Mostawa. I used to go – I too had this badge that I wore and you were allowed to go from the Beutelager to Mostawa. Already my father was thinking that we must leave this ghetto, we must run away from here. And my father evidently went out of the ghetto and found a farmer, a woman, a farm woman that he still had some means to pay her with. I really do not know what he gave this farm woman. I don't remember what daddy still had but he still had some valuables. I know because he still had it in Wilno – the ghetto that he managed to hide. And this woman, we traveled by horse and buggy. We went out of the ghetto. We were not caught of course, otherwise I wouldn't be here to tell you the story. And we were hidden under a big wagon with hay. We were under the hay until we came out of the outskirts of Slonim. Then she told us that we can be in the open. Neither of us looked Jewish. My little brother was blond with blue eyes. He was almost a towhead. I was blond with blue eyes and my father did not look Jewish either. No, he didn't. So, she really relaxed and told us we can even be on the open and we came in. We came into a village to a farm house and we were hidden. We were hidden, and while we were hidden Partisans came into the village and my little brother begged, "Daddy, let's go with the Partisans." But my father said to him, "My child, I am too old. They won't take me. They won't take you either. You are a child and your sister is a girl. You entertaining an idea that is just a dream. They won't take us. We must continue to another ghetto." We came to Volkovysk. We came to the Judenrat.

02:22:08

We told them that we want to go to Grodno. The whole idea of Grodno –because Grodno was still annexed to the Third Reich, and the killings in 1942 in the summer of '42 they were unheard of in the Third Reich. And we somehow heard by way of people coming – I don't know really – Daddy heard that they are not killing people in – the Third Reich. The Jews are still going to work in the Third Reich and maybe they are not going to kill the people in – the Jews in the Third Reich. In the beginning Daddy thought so. Then we finally came to Volkovysk and we got passage and we came to Grodno. We came to Grodno to a world that already for us did not exist – already since occupation. Everybody was killed in pits. And here the ghetto was quasi – sort of free –the first ghetto, the second ghetto – the working ghetto – the ghetto that people did not work. You were able to walk from one ghetto to another. In fact, my mother had a cousin that lived in Grodno. She was in the second ghetto with a husband and wife and two children

¹⁵ roll call (German).

that my brother and I adored. And as soon as we came we ran. We found out that they lived in the second ghetto. We ran to them to see the family, to tell them about our misfortune, that my mother was killed. My sister was killed. I didn't mention really that my sister was killed in the second Aktion. In June of 1942 they found the place where she was hiding. They took all the people out and my sister knew what to expect, and she ran to the barbed wires to run out on the Christian side and she was shot on the barbed wires. I lost my wonderful sister, the one I loved so much. We shared with them our misfortune, telling them what happened. And we lived. We came back to the first ghetto. We came back to the first ghetto. I had – my mother had another cousin in this ghetto but they did not have enough food for us. They lived in – they had one bed for three people; husband, wife and a child. We were assigned a room. We came to the Judenrat. We told them that we are survivors of Slonim, that everybody was killed. They sort of took it, almost, they didn't believe it. And when my father used to retell it and we retold, they say, "Enough already. Enough already." And you know we were sort of convinced that this would happen here too. We were convinced and we tried to – Daddy especially, tried to do something.

02:25:39

To do what he can do with the children to survive but what could he have done? He was considered an old man. My father was in his early 50's, not quite 50, I think. And we were assigned a room in the ghetto with a family. There were two rooms. Three families in two rooms. In one room there lived a family – Lipszyc. Herschel Lipszyc with his father that was very orthodox, and a cousin of his, that her family was already killed in a small town. They drove in all the Jews from a small town in a barn and they set the barn on fire. She was visiting grandparents in another place and she escaped. So she lived with them. In the next room lived a family with two children and they assigned us to live in this room. We had a bed. That was the extent of the living that we had in this house in Grodno in the ghetto. And shortly after we came to the ghetto, all of a sudden, one day Aron showed up. Aron showed up. I parted with him thinking I will never see him again. I left with my father and my little brother and he – all of a sudden Aron showed up and he told me – we discussed. In fact, when we left I told him that my father knows of a farm woman that would take us. He said that he knows somebody, a neighbor of theirs that he was very, very good friends with told him of a woman that is going to take them and then he'll give me the names so he can come too – run away with his mother and three sisters. And then he told me in tears that he parted with them in Volkovysk, because he said, "By staying together we only perish together." He said, "If I want to have any hopes of survival it is only in the underground – the woods, and if I will stay with my mother and my sisters, all of us will perish. So I decided to run away to come to Grodno." And in Grodno we lived with the Lipszyces, and Herschel Lipszyc was wonderful. He would sing. He would bring a little bit of respite and life. It was not terrible hunger at the time yet. No, it wasn't.

02:28:35

I couldn't believe it, that something like this still existed under Nazi occupation. And Aron went to slave labor with Herschel. My father did not go to slave labor outside of the ghetto. He worked in the ghetto, but my little brother would run out all the time, back and forth. He really had a tremendous courage and sense of adventure, running out all the time. And it is in this

ghetto while Herschel Lipszyc took Aron on slave labor to remodel a house for the Gestapo that Aron befriended a Pole. His name was Tadek, they called him, but his real name really was Tadeusz Soroka. Tadeusz Soroka came very often to barter with them. He would bring them food and they in turn would take out – they would wear an extra pair of pants and extra jacket on them and trade for food. He was a good friend of Herschel Lipszyc. Herschel knew him much longer than Aron. And all of a sudden, all of a sudden November first rolled around and they sealed the ghetto. They sealed the ghetto and transports started to resettle it, to resettle people in the East supposedly. And rumor started in the ghetto where are they resettling the people. No one at the time thought of gassing people. No one at the time thought of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek – merely fear of resettlement. You were told to take a certain amount of clothes, to take your toothbrush, to take all your necessary things that you would need to go and to be resettled. And you will even get better rations and better food. People tended to believe it because they thought maybe they'll be better. By this time already there was more hunger in the ghetto and anyway, the Jewish – the Judenrat was forced to make a list of so many people for resettling.

02:31:17

And it was a sign of resettling much more so only the ghetto because they start to bring all the Jews from the small towns from around Grodno. And Grodno had really hundreds of small little towns and villages where Jews lived, surrounded with small towns and little villages where Jews lived. They took them all in and brought them into a detention camp in Kelbasin and from there the people from Kelbasin were sent first to Auschwitz and to Treblinka and Majdanek, bekknown to them where they were going, bekknown to them, lists were being made and transports. They finished with Kelbasin and they started with the ghetto. Naturally, we were outsiders. We were not natives and we were always the first people on the lists. But to our advantage was our past. By being in Slonim and being in the ghetto and surviving two kinds of massacre and surviving practically – sole survivors in a ghetto of thousands, of close to 20,000 people. Out of 20,000 people, eight – 900 people survived. We really realized that we have to do everything that we already learned and the first thing is hiding. And we started to make places to hide and decided that we would just hide. We would not come with a suitcase to be taken to go to Auschwitz. Aron helps people find – build hiding places. They knew that he came from Slonim and he knows, and the word traveled. It spread by word of mouth. So here he knew of a lot of places that he helped to build. So when we knew that we were on the lists, we began to hide. And we would come to one place and try to hide and all of a sudden, “No, this is not safe. No, no, no, we must leave the place right away. It's not safe.” We went to another place and we didn't stay – to a third place – I remember one night we changed five places. It was – we were going crazy from fear not to be caught while running out from one place to the other, four people, the three of us and Aron. We survived this transport.

02:34:06

After we survived this transport again it was sort of quite for a while. Respite came to the ghetto. And Herschel Lipszyc with a very dear friend – oh, my God, I forgot his name – Lutek. Lutek were approached by Tadek and he told them that, “You know, you don't look Jewish. I know of a Polish family or a Lithuanian family in Wilno that will keep you as Christians. I will

take you to Wilno.” And Herschel consented to go with Tadek and Lutek to Wilno. What were the alternatives? Another transport? If you have a chance you do it and it is for really to know that people tried to do it. They took every possible chance. The chances were so few, so few. You needed the looks. You had to look Aryan to be able to survive on the Christian side. You had to meet the right people what would keep you. You have to think about years, it's not days. This is why the righteous that saved, that kept Jews, some of them for years, are really people that are an exception in this society. They're giants. They are giants. They are to emulate – a whole world must learn to emulate. They were the people with morals with consciousness and they wanted to help and to do – do not kill. Do not kill. Be your brother's keeper. Aron – Herschel parted with his father and his niece and his cousin. Aron went with him to the barbed wires. By this time already Aron knew Tadek, and the idea was when Herschel and Lutek will arrive to Wilno that they will send back a note with Tadek to tell everyone that they had arrived safely. Well, they arrived safely but they did not send the note, and Aron didn't know about it. So he was reluctant to believe Tadek. Tadek gave him the kind of story that either you want to believe it or not. He said he took them to the Polish family. They were afraid to keep them because even though Lutek, his Polish was perfect, but he had Semitic looks, which is true by the way. It was true. And the family was afraid to keep them. So he said, “I took them to the ghetto, to the perimeter of the ghetto.” He says, “I show them where the ghetto is and they walked into the ghetto. They told me that they would come and give me a note to give back to Aron.” Says, “It poured, it rained. I waited and waited for the note and they never showed up. Here I come to tell you that they are in the ghetto but I don't have a note.” Well, Aron already had hesitations, “Should I believe him or should I believe him?” But he left it. Tadek kept on coming and kept on coming and bartering and the ghetto was not quiet any more. There were talks about transport and people already expected this transport, and already they begin to loom that these people are not going to be resettled. That there is some thought, “They're sending them some place, to concentration camps. And do you know what they do to most of them? That they gas them. Gas them in 20th century? It must be. How could it be? How could it be? Yes, yes, yes, yes, it can be, it can be.” And it already begin to work on people and people already begin to believe. But so little could they have done to avoid the transport. So little could they have done to avoid the transport. One day Tadek came and tells Aron at work, “Aron, the ghetto is sealed. They are taking out the ghetto – the Jews.” We escaped the first transport of 5,000. “They are taking the Jews to resettlement and I doubt if you will have a chance to survive. Come with me to Wilno. I'll take you. I'll take you today. Come with me. Don't go back to the ghetto.” Well, Aron listen to Tadek and he said, “What should I do? I have nobody in the world left. I left a mother and three sisters in Bialystok – on the way to Bialystok. The only person,” he says, “that I really have ties to is Lisa. Should I leave her too and go to Wilno, to go to the unknown?” By this time already he almost has said he resigned. He said, “What is life altogether? What if I survive? I have no one. All the one – all my dear ones are gone. They are killed. What is – I still – I think I'll go back to the ghetto.” And by this time already the people that he worked with sort of were suspicious that he might go away with this Christian, and they worried because they were counted. And this too – was a tragedy that we are responsible one for another. If 10 people walked out of the ghetto, 10 had to return. If nine returned, they took hostages and they killed people. And you had this tremendous responsibility of the whole community, and it's not only said that they would take hostage. They did take hostages and they killed people. They killed people. They came to a house and they didn't find a person. They found this woman outside of the ghetto in Grodno. They dragged her into the

ghetto and they took out the people, the person in the room that she lived with. And both of them were hanging on the gallows for days for the Jews to see what's being done when they catch Jews outside of the ghetto and if they're not reported that they are missing. So there was a communal responsibility. You were responsible not only for yourself but for others.

02:41:09

That too kept a lot of people from maybe running away or doing something. Families clung together and they perished together. Tadek came and told Aron that he – the ghetto is surrounded. He better go with him, as I said. But Aron decided to go into the ghetto. He came into the ghetto. He was immediately arrested, taken into the Synagogue, and he looked for me. He didn't find me, because when this came – that the transport that are coming to grab people again, my father, my little brother and I went to hide again. We really did not have a very good place to hide. So in our yard where we were living was a courtyard. Again, there were shacks where before the war people kept wood. And again, my father and my little brother and I crawled up in a little shack, in a wooden shack and we stayed there. Police came and knocked, “Your number is up. Come out. Come out. Anybody hiding come out.” Of course, we froze. We didn't answer. The Germans came in and knocked and searched around. They did not come with sniffing dogs. Were they come to sniffing dogs though, they would probably would find us. And we remained there. Aron searched for me in the Synagogue, in the Synagogue. He didn't find me in the Synagogue so he didn't know – either I was killed or hiding or whatever had happened to me. The massacre – the transport went on for quite a few days and finally, it came to a stop. A handful, about 800 maybe, people survived, maybe close to a 1,000 people, and as we were sitting – you see the shack where we were sitting faced the Synagogue and we saw all the thousands of people being led to the trains, being led, this march, this endless march of people being taken to the trains, to Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek. We – all of a sudden we saw Jews running and carrying a little bundle and we realized – and they were talking loud and we could hear. We realized that it's over and, you know, the talk was – evidently – people that wanted for other people that were hiding, to know that it's safe to come out. So in Yiddish they would say, “Come out. Come out. It's safe, it's safe. Git aroys, Yidden.¹⁶ Git aroys, git aroys.¹⁷ Come out, come out.” When we heard this, my father said, “It's safe to come out.” And we came out. We were practically numb for lying like this all curled up. We came down and we came and we realized that the house where we lived in – it was a two story, it was a building really. There were two buildings together – that people were running to these buildings. So we realized evidently that these are the buildings they left for the Jews. Yes, it was. There were three buildings that were left and one of the buildings was our building, where we lived before. So we went upstairs and as I came in upstairs, I found Aron there. I could not believe that it could be true. I could not believe. For sure I thought that he is already taken in a transport and I never, ever see him again.

02:45:20

He came with another man, that he told me the story how he was saved when this man let him build a hiding place under the coal. And that now we have to do something very fast, to run

¹⁶ “Get/come out, Jews.” (Yiddish)

¹⁷ Get/come out (Yiddish)

away from here and our only salvation is Tadek, that we must get in touch with Tadek and run out of here. Well, my little brother went out and made – Aron had the address. He was always ahead in his thinking so he knew where Tadek lived and the address. And my little brother went out to meet Tadek, and Tadek told him that he would take him and my father to Wilno. He would take them on freight cars that are traveling between Grodno and Wilno and he would let them – if they arrived safely, hoping that they would arrive safely, he would bring them into the gates of the ghetto. Let them walk into the ghetto. And it was a designated day that my little brother and my father left the ghetto to go and to meet Tadek. They came to Tadek and Tadek said that on that day he could not take them. That he would take them the next day, that there was no transport going. So they went to hide. They were hiding in the second ghetto that was completely empty overnight.

02:47:00

And the next day they met Tadek as he told my little brother where he would be and they would travel to Wilno. Tadek again told them to stay in a ditch – to stay in a ditch that was right next to the yard to the railroad yard, and then when the train begins to move a little bit to jump on and to try to crawl on to the roof. Well, my father listened and when it was time to run out, he did. He did as he was told, but he would not step on to the two couplers and try to go up to the top of the roof, and he said, “Even if I have to be caught and killed, I cannot go to the top of the roof. I cannot do it.” So they were hidden on a flat car that had a tank that was traveling to the front – German tanks that were going to the Russian front and covered with tarps, so they were hidden under the tarps and they somehow made it. They somehow made it. They were searched. They searched – there were stations where the trains – the flat cars were being searched to see if there was anybody. By this time already there were Partisans. There was already danger of Partisans. But they didn't find them. They arrived to Wilno. They got in into the ghetto. They found Herschel and Lutek in the ghetto and my daddy send a note with Tadek to Aron to tell that he found Lutek in the ghetto and Herschel and that Tadek is for real and to come to Wilno. And then it was our turn to go to Wilno. I went out of the ghetto. By this time the ghetto was very small and guarded, and I went out of the ghetto to establish a contact with Tadek. I came – I found him and he told us to come on a designated day, on a Sunday and then he would take us. I came back to the ghetto and I told Aron that I met Tadek. He consented to take us and we'll go out to meet Tadek. But not only Aron and I, but we were eight or nine people. One of the people that we met was Elkie Jezerski, that knew – he said that he knows of a janitor that used to be a janitor in their building where he lived, and maybe we can hide there and wait until Tadek can take us.

02:50:11

Eight people went out, not with the idea of all of us to go but maybe Tadek would take them one-by-one. Meanwhile, they would establish a contact and they know Tadek and they will stay with this janitor. Elkie had a feeling that the janitor is fine and he would keep us. All of us came to the janitor's house, and at midnight the janitor decided that he does not want to keep that many Jews. It is dangerous. We must leave his house. He said, “But I'll keep the girl.” He wanted us to leave right away and it was curfew so we begged him. We begged him to let us stay until it gets a little in the morning before sunrise, while it is still dark. And he kept – he let us stay and

all of us went out of this house. He took us – the janitor took us to a bombed-out house. I went with them with the idea that I can stay in the janitor's house. I stayed in the janitor's house. I met Tadek at church. Tadek told me that he would take us on a Tuesday. Here it was Sunday. I came back to the janitor's house and the janitor sent out his wife and the children, and I was not thinking at all, not knowing. I was a child yet. He wanted to rape me or to kill me because he was sharpening knives. I had the presence when I heard knives being sharpened, that even though I was locked in a room – I was locked in a room when he sent out his wife and two girls, I had the presence to run out. I ran from the house, and in my chase running out of the house, the doors were flimsy even though the door was closed and with a latch, but I went out with all my strength. And I slammed the door in such a way that by the time he opened the door, I was already a distance from him, from the janitor, and my luck was that there were stairs. It's hilly. It was very – it was hilly and there were stairs and there were homes on the sides of the stairs. He ran to chase me. I was faster than he and when he came about the middle like, of the stairs and where there were homes, he was afraid because they shouldn't tell that he's chasing a girl or maybe it's a Jewish girl or something, so he left.

02:53:21

I ran to the house where the rest of the Jews – Aron and the others were hidden – to tell them what happened. That we cannot leave tonight. That Tadek will take us Tuesday and that the janitor, either he wanted to kill me – I did not realize that he wanted to rape me – that he wanted to kill me. And I ran away, and what are we going to do? We decided that we have to return to the ghetto. We cannot stay there until Tuesday, until Tadek would meet us. We had to return to the ghetto because there was an empty yard and children were playing ball. It was a bombed out house and the windows were open and we were about to fall in into this basement, into this hovel where we were all of us hiding. The children would run home and say, “The Jews are hiding there, so many of them.” We were afraid that they would give us out. We had to wait until night came and we went back to the ghetto. We could not remain one day of the danger that loomed outside. We came in back to the ghetto and Tuesday as Tadek told us to meet him – told me – to meet him in the public washroom at seven o'clock at night in the evening, and he would take us – when he said would take us, he only meant Aron and myself but five people went out – not, not two. One of them was Ruby Loren, the man that Aron was saved in the synagogue, his cousin, and another young man. And the reason the five went out, because we wanted the other people to have this contact to be able to go with Tadek another time – to know him and where he lives and so forth – to establish a contact. Five of us came. It was dark. We came to the public washroom. Dark, seven o'clock. Tadek was there.

02:55:43

He told me that he would be dressed in a uniform like a railroad worker. He would have a flashlight. He would light the flashlight so I would know that that was the man. Exactly there, seven o'clock, the men were in a public washroom in the middle of Grodno on the Christian side, naturally. I waited for Tadek. Tadek came and I tell Tadek that we are five people. When they were hidden in the public washroom, they looked out of a little window and when Aron saw that Tadek is there, he went out to talk to Tadek and he begged Tadek to take another person. He tell them that, “I was saved with this man. I really don't want to part with him. He was good to me.

I want to be good to him. I want to take him with me.” But Ruby didn't want to go because he tells Aron, “The only person in the world is left is my cousin. I don't want to leave my cousin. I want to be with him. I have no one left in the world. Everybody in my family is gone already.” Aron tells him, “Look, Ruby . They will come Thursday. Tadek promised to take them Thursday. You have an opportunity. Come. They will come. You'll be in the ghetto already. Come.” And Ruby was standing there sort of halfway with his cousin, halfway, when Aron grabbed his hand and took him with and he went with us. The others returned to the ghetto. They never were able to make the trip because for them, death came. Resettlement came before they were able to go out of the ghetto and to meet Tadek again.

02:57:21

I walked with Tadek. Aron and Ruby followed. They were both very Semitic looking. They wore Polish looking hats called *maciejówka*¹⁸, a kind of hats that Poles wear. We were not stopped. We came to the railroad station. Tadek pointed out to us the train, the freight train that was going to Wilno – from Grodno to Wilno. Within the freight train, also there were passenger cars that the Wehrmacht – that the Germans traveled. But we were to travel – Tadek told us that when the train began to move already at a little speed to jump out, to try and grab, to run up between two boxcars and the couplers and find a little ladder and try to crawl up to the top of the roof. I listened and I had it all in my mind to do it the way Tadek said. Aron went out first and he was able to do it and went up to the top of the roof, I learned later, and Ruby, I guess, did the same. I remained in the ditch, or lying in the road, I remained in the ditch. I turned my head and I saw so few cars left. “Oh, I will remain. It's the end. It's the end. I survived until now but I won't survive anymore more.” I ran out and I have not been able to find the two box cars with the couplers, but I saw a boxcar with a door and, you know, it had a handle, a little ledge, and I grabbed on and I stood on the ledge. I held on to the handle. I have not been able to go on to the top of the roof, and there I was standing with my feet, wearing mittens in sub-zero weather, holding on. The train began to accelerate, add speed. I was already frozen. The wind tore off my babushka and I couldn't hold on much longer. I couldn't and I couldn't do anything. By this time already I wish to be killed so it would be over with. And all of a sudden I heard a noise on top. I heard a noise and it sounded like somebody is sort of on top. And then it got quiet and I still was holding on. I learned later that Tadek came to find his passengers on top. He found Ruby and he found Aron lying on one roof on the same boxcar. He didn't find me. He asked, “Where is the girl?” They said they don't know. They still left her in the ditch and they don't know what happened to the girl. Tadek did not give up. As the train was moving and moving very fast already, he jumped from one boxcar to another until he came almost to the end of the train, the almost of the end, and he saw me standing there holding on yet. He ran for the car where Aron and Ruby were on. The three of them jumped boxcar after boxcar. Youth was with them. They were young. They were able to do it. My father could not do it and a lot, a lot, a lot, of people could not do. Children and woman could not do it either. You had to be young to be able to do it and to know that there was a Tadeusz Soroka. This were not that many Tadeusz Soroka. They came to the boxcar that I was still standing and Tadek leaned over, gave me a hand and told me to hold on to his hand, that they will pull me up. I had a vision that he will grab my mitten and not my hand. And I said “I must do everything that I possess not to lose his hand.” And I managed. The three of them pulled me up to the top of the train on the roof and I

¹⁸ visored cap (Polish)

traveled with them, the three of us on this boxcar for 180 kilometers in sub-zero weather. I was at the time 16 years old.

Q: We're going to stop.

03:02:24

End of Tape Number Two.

Tape Number Three

Q: Now, you're just about to arrive in Wilno. So tell me what happens then and how you end up in the Resistance?

A: We arrived in Wilno and we were able to go in into the ghetto without any problem. Tadek walked with us. He told us to cover our faces with soot so we would look like railroad workers coming from work or something, and he said, "As soon as you see a group of Jews returning from the nightshift, from work, try to jump in, in their midst and walk into the ghetto." And we walked with Tadek for awhile and all of a sudden we see a group of Jews. Of course, worker Jews because they walked in the street, not on the sidewalk and they all had yellow stars. We went into their midst and we walked in into the ghetto. This was the last time on this voyage that we saw Tadek. We came in into the ghetto and Jewish police immediately took us over. And as the Jewish police took us over they took us into Dessler¹⁹ and to Gens²⁰ in order for us to receive rations, a piece of bread that everybody needed and a bowl of soup and also, a place where to put your head down. I'm not talking about a room, but a place, a piece of floor to put your head down. You had to be registered within the Judenrat. Dessler cautioned us not to tell anyone. Of course, we told him the story, that we are – about the transports and we still had a story to tell him about Slonim and then Grodno about the transports. Also, he said, "You have to be very quiet, not to tell people, not to put the ghetto in a panic. Not to put the ghetto in a panic. Here it's different. Here it's different, and don't jeopardize your ration cards and do as we tell you to do." Needless to tell you, neither of us listened to what he had to say. We spoke our mind and told people exactly what happened in Slonim, what happened in Grodno, and by this time already people in Wilno knew too, because it was already after Ponar and a lot of killings in Wilno but the situation there was still different. The ghetto was still vital. There was still quite a large ghetto. I came in. I was immediately – I was told where my father and my little brother are and I immediately ran there to be with them. Can you imagine the joy of my father to have me come to Wilno?

03:07:01

Now, Aron immediately found a group of people that came from Grodno. They were together with me. There were nine men and a girl. I was the only girl. So they all lived together and they were called in the ghetto "The Grodno Group." They all sort of were dressed the same and they were called "the Grodno Group" and they all lived in a room. They had one room with another married – with a couple and the couple's sister. So you can imagine how many people in one, in one room lived. The ghetto – people went out to work and there was a lot of cultural activity in the ghetto that came to me as a total surprise. There was a library where you could go and take out books or sit and study. There were children playing ball. There were competition and there was a theater in the ghetto. I couldn't believe it, that this was possible. There was a restaurant in the ghetto. This was such an unknown experience to me that I felt like it was a different world. My father worked outside of the ghetto. So did my little brother – used to go out and I too, for the first time went out to work outside of the ghetto. I worked in hothouses where they raised vegetables for the Germans. For – I guess for the German elite, whoever, the Gestapo, or

¹⁹ Saulk Dessler, head of the Vilnius ghetto's Jewish police.

²⁰ Jacob Gens, head of the Vilnius ghetto's Judenrat.

whoever. The leader there was a – the foreman there was a Lithuanian man and he knew some of the Jews that worked there, so he wasn't very harsh on us. And the Germans didn't watch us. We somehow could always, always finagle a little bit, where we could steal a radish or a carrot and eat it real fast and try to get rid of the green part of it. And it is there where I worked.

03:09:26

The man that was our foreman, the Jewish foreman, always used to go away and leave us. I was very, at times, angry. I say, “Why does he do it? Why does he do it?” Little did I know. Much later in the underground where I met him that he was part of the Jewish resistance. But I didn't know when I worked with him. The man never told us or anything. He evidently was trying to do something for the resistance on the outside of the ghetto. So I worked – Aron worked inside of the ghetto and very much our hope was only the resistance and the underground. We knew that we can not survive in the ghetto. And because it was still a large ghetto in numbers and there was still quite a young people in the ghetto, we tried to look every possible way to get in touch with the resistance. Do you know, before the war was known for this – it was called “the Wilno Jerusalem of Lithuanian.” There was such a strong nucleus, culture in Jewish and in every, every aspect of Jewish life in Wilno that we were convinced that there must be an underground there. And when Aron worked with one of the men in the shop in the ghetto he realized that he's – that they do something there. That it's always producing a part, a part, a part and the minute the foreman, the German foreman, would walk in they would immediately hide. He learned later that they were making some parts for armaments in this shop, that they were really working for the Germans. And besides Aron there was another man that had contacts in Wilno and from both sides, somehow, they contacted the Jewish resistance and the resistance took us in because they were all young men, unattached with no families, and we became part of the resistance.

03:11:43

It was very, very secretive. I could not tell my father, neither I could tell my little brother. And then the story of Wittenberg²¹ developed in the ghetto where a Communist, a Polish Communist was caught on the outside of the ghetto and within his torture he gave out Wittenberg as the leader of the Jewish resistance in the ghetto. Now, the Judenrat played both ends of the picture. They were with the resistors and they were with the Gestapo. Gens had a notion because in 1943 when we came to Wilno in March, then April, May, June, the Germans had big defeats on the Russian Front already and Gens had a thought that if the resistors do not bring in the destruction of the ghetto, the people might survive. Maybe liberation will come and everybody will be liberated, not only the couple of hundred young people, resistors. So he wanted to convince the resistance to “don't rock the boat.” And even though he knew there was resistance, so he played both ends. But he convinced the population of the ghetto that, “the resistors will bring down your end.” And the population of the ghetto was with Gens, unfortunately, not with the resistors. And then this tremendous play with Wittenberg developed and as we know from history now from the Wilno ghetto that Wittenberg was turned over to the Gestapo. He committed suicide and Abba Kovner²² took over the leadership, but at a time when the leadership decided not to

²¹ Yitzhak Wittenberg (1907-1943), leader of Jewish underground in Vilnius.

²² Abba Kovner (1918-1988), Jewish-Lithuanian resistance fighter and Israeli poet.

give out Wittenberg. They called us to come in the barricades and to fight, to raise a fight with the Germans. Of course it was futile. We all would have been killed. And when we came to this designated place I realized the strength that the resistors had because they were so big in numbers. They really did not have much to fight with in arms. Of course not. It's a David and Goliath fight. I mean there was an army with tanks, with all the supplies in the world, and we only had our bodies, a few grenades and something that we wanted to give our lives – to show the Jews fought back, that we fought back, that we achieved at least something.

03:14:36

And as history tells, Wittenberg and I tell, Wittenberg was given – there was a big discussion among the leadership. We learned all of it later after it was over. We were not in the leadership position. I was a 16-year-old girl doing what I was told to do and really being so grateful that I was part of the resistance and did absolutely everything that I was told to do, and I knew very little except what I was told to do.

03:15:14

Q: This time when you all came together, tell me more about when and where that was.

A: That was in Wilno in the ghetto that faced the outside of the ghetto, and it was at midnight like, late at night. From all sides group start to converge to this place, and as we came it was dark. Maybe there weren't as many numbers, but I conceived it as a tremendous number, two – 300 young people that came there and some of them were walking. Some of them had a grenade and somebody had a pistol. And we already, our group, too already possessed couple of pistols that we really bought on the outside of the ghettos, smuggled it in and paid with hunger by not eating, by not having that slice of bread to be able to obtain the pistol. It was an exhilarating experience to be there, even though that we knew that we would all die, because we were no match, we were no match. All of a sudden we were sent home, to go back home. We didn't know the drama at the time until the next day when it developed that Wittenberg decided that – they came to him with the thought and told him what it entails. And Gens told the leadership, the resistance leadership, that if he doesn't give himself up, they are going to come and destroy the ghetto. And there was a lot of people, Jews, running in the ghetto screaming “Wittenberg, Wittenberg,” for him to give up. “He's bringing the end to us. He's bringing the end to us.” Little did they know that the end was coming anyway. But when I was in the ghetto, my thoughts were altogether different. I was the enemy of these people that said for Wittenberg to give up and to – not to rage and to fight, not to fight back because the ghetto will be destroyed. I thought they would be destroyed anyway. The end will come anyway.

03:17:42

But for the ones in the ghetto that still had children, every day meant something and Gens kept on saying, “If we live through this period, maybe we can still live through the liberation.” I began to appreciate it many years later when I had a family and children. And I know that you were to be responsible, not only for yourself but you're responsible for your family too. You cannot run out. You can only do it when you are a youngster, leave your parents. You cannot do

it when you are a parent. There is much more responsibility expected of a parent. And then the decision was, after the Wittenberg affair, of course, Wittenberg was taken into the Gestapo and he was given poison and he committed suicide. So they really got nothing out of Wittenberg as far as questioning him and for him to give out secrets or anything. And then the thought was that we cannot wage a war – warfare – in the ghetto. The population is not with us, is not with us, and the only solution would be to send the resistors into the underground in the woods in the forest to fight from the forest. And little by little, groups began to leave. How did they go? It was a 180 kilometers. The closest the Naroch woods where we went to. Groups of 25, 28 or so were sent with guides. Who were the guides? The guides were Jewish Partisans already that were in the underground and were already, so to say, “free people.” They took upon themselves the risk of being killed to go into the ghetto and to lead groups of Jews out of the ghetto. What courage! What heroism to do the kind of, really, thing that you risk with your life to do it. They were giants, giants of men. Giants, lions, young dedicated, fearless, that came to the ghetto. Some of them were even arrested in the ghetto and then let out. And they took groups. Some of the groups that went out before us met up with an ambush and were killed.

03:20:30

Q: Why don't we actually start with, let's start with the resistance to take taking you with them because you were a girl.

A: After we contacted the resistance, I really was not one of the people that contacted the resistance, but it came from two different sides. Aron knew somebody and our friend – another friend of ours that was from Grodno, that knew the resistance, knew somebody in the resistance already, and finally we were able to join the resistance. When it came the time to really go to the forest, there was a discussion that among the Grodno group there was a girl and they were not so keen of taking the girl, to leave the girl behind. Little did they know that I could do everything that these men were doing, even more, and I was really at no time at all any liability to anyone in the underground – just the opposite. But Herschel Lipszyc, our dear friend Herschel Lipszyc, stood up and he say – they call me Liska(ph) – “If Liska doesn't go, none of us are going. All of us are going and Liska is going too, and this is the way it is going to be.” And because he was so very positive and naturally, Aron very much wanted me to go, no question. I mean, I joined in group because Aron was part of it. On my own, I don't think I could have reached the underground. So finally they consented that they'll take me too. We would be going to the underground to Naroch and we would go with a group of 28 people. So on a designated day there came a call that it's time for us to leave for the underground. All the Grodno people, the 10 of them lived together, so the call came to them. And early in the morning, about three or four o'clock in the morning, there was a knock on the little window. In Wilno we lived in a room with three more families. There were practically corpses all over the floor, to walk out. It was time for me to go to the underground.

03:23:15

I have not been able to walk out because I would wake up all the people that want to know, “Where are you going in the middle of the night at four o'clock in the morning? You can't go to work that early.” I slept in the bunk with my brother, and Aron knocked on the window and he

said, "It's time to go." I have not been able to go through the door, so I had to slip out in the tiny piece of the window, the little window that opened up for air. Luckily, I was so thin and so small that I was able to get out. I have not been able to tell my father. Neither did I tell my brother. I only told him, "When I am gone, tell daddy that I have left – that I left." And he says daddy will know where I went. So that my little brother was intelligent enough to know. Can you imagine? I left without telling them because it was so secretive. I wasn't able to tell them. Were I to remain, who knows if I would have survived and I wanted to go so much. The leaders were the two men. It was Shlemke Hilczyk and Motke de Geller – Motke the Red. Really, I can only speak about them in superlatives. Only super giants, men that were ready to give their lives to help other Jews in need. They were already free people when they were in the underground. Of course, they could have been killed but they were not in the ghetto. Their dream was already accomplished. They were there. They were fighters. They came to take out groups of Jews from the ghetto to lead them in into the underground. It took us seven nights to walk to the underground. Twenty-eight people left. Among them were women too. I wasn't the only woman. I was the youngest, that much I'll say. I was the youngest in the group.

03:25:26

The first night when we came out we went out of the ghetto as a group going to work. We came to the outskirts of town. We were hidden in a little wooded area, hardly wooded enough not to be seen. There were shepherds with the flock. We took them with us. We kept them the whole day. We did not harm them. We blindfolded them and we kept them there, and when night came, when we left this little forest, we let them go home. And we told them under no circumstances are they to tell that they were in the woods with some Jews, because they will be punished severely. We showed them that we had weapons, and we left. We walked with this man that took us – that supposedly knew the road and they got lost. They had no compasses, only by the sight. We tried to go with side roads, so we would not be seen and identified. But as we were going on the side roads we only got lost. We got lost and we had to cross a railroad track on the other side of the railroad tracks. So he decided to go on the main road where Germans were traveling, and every time, he told us, we see approaching cars with lights to drop in the ditches and to hide. And one by one we crossed the railroad tracks while German guards were standing. Every time the guard would turn to the back towards us, one of us would slip out. Twenty-eight people had to cross. Imagine the danger. And all of us crossed safely. Part of the way when it began to get light we were running, not walking, but running to hide. The day we hid in a little forest we started out walking again and we had problems again. The road wasn't so clear to them. They came back from the forest. Somehow they knew their way but they had to – maybe – had to change the way. They took another road and two nights in a row we were lost. They never lost their cool. They always kept us convinced that they know what they're doing and they will bring us in a safe place. And we had the total confidence, total confidence, in these two young men. Finally, they decided after the second or the third day they decided to take farmers to lead us, to be our leaders. And the farmers knew the way and we told them to bring us to the next stop. They told them to bring us to the next stop, and the farmers listened. The farmers listened and brought us to the next stop. They were cautioned not to give out the Jews, that this is a pack of Jews. The farmers knew very well and somehow we made it.

03:28:37

We had to cross two rivers, and one river a farmer took us and we were all walking all the way up to our waists. Some of them didn't know how to swim. They were worried that they would drown. And we made it. The farmers said, "The river is not very deep. You will make it." And he was right, we made it. We came to cross the big river, the Viliya, and the Germans were standing guard on the bridges, and when they heard the splashing of the water from so many people walking. They began shooting at us. Fortunately, their aims were poor. Nobody was killed and we crossed, and finally the two leaders start taking wagons with farmers, wagons, and they put us up on the wagons. And we traveled on wagons already, until we came to what is called "Partisan Territory" where there was a tremendous number, already, of Partisans and it was safe. This was Partisan Territory so it was safe. And it is there, while we were on the wagons traveling, all of a sudden we were stopped. We were stopped by a Jewish Partisan riding on a horse with an automatic rifle. Can you imagine our joy? I will never forget this moment. Never, never. Leibke Gordon on a horse with a rifle, with a machine gun, greeting us, falling all over us, kissing us, we kissing them. He was like Messiah. We came to the Promised Land and they brought us into the truck. The guides waiting for permission. They didn't know the password. You had to know the password. They didn't know the password. They were stopped. They told they are going to the ghetto to bring Jews to the Partisans, so they were let in and then we were let into the base. We came to a place that it's – how could I describe this place.

03:30:58

It was like Robin Hood. There's people walking around with rifles. Sides of cows are hanging that were being slaughtered for the food. Huts – we lived in huts that were built. It was hilly so they were built in the hills made out of logs, dug out, you know, made out of logs. And there were bunks. A long bunk that was not for twelve – how could I describe to you the scene as we came down the hill. I seen a Robin Hood. People walking around with rifles, sides of beef hanging, huts, people coming out of the huts milling great number of people. I never could have believed that this is the way the underground, the resistors, worked. I thought they lived hidden in some kind of a small little place away where nobody could ever find them or such. This seemed to be so open. It seemed so open and we were welcomed right away. The leader – we came to a Jewish unit that was called "Revenge" – "Nekamah" in Hebrew – and the leader was Joseph Glazman²³. He accepted us with warm arms and right away everybody wanted to know who we saw, the last people that we saw in the ghetto. And we learned that it wasn't that simple for Jews to be in the underground, in the Jewish unit. That the Russians would not give them any arms, enough in the unit, and the thought was they met up – they told us they already met up with Antisemitism and the Russian unit is separately, and they look down upon these Jews that came from the ghetto. After all they are ghetto Jews. Little did they know that these ghetto Jews knew how to fight and were better fighters at times than the others were too.

03:33:46

And very shortly, very shortly – the spirit was wonderful. It was sort of free. You felt free even though you knew there were dangers, that there were Germans all the way around. But you felt free and I kept on thinking, "If people in the ghettos would only know that something like this

²³ Joseph Glazman, Jewish partisan and leading member of the F.P.O.

existed, they would all run, they would all come.” But I knew very well that they couldn't run and they couldn't come. It's only the select youth that were able to do it. I knew it but you thought both ways. Very shortly, very shortly this Jewish unit was disbanded, was disbanded under the pretext they are training the Soviet Union, all the nationalities mixed together. There isn't such a thing as a Jewish unit – it must be integrated unit. And, of course, they sent away most of the group to be in a family camp. Actually, it wasn't so much a family camp because there were hardly – we did not have any children in this group. But also the artisans are people that knew how to sew. They made them because this was the Jewish elite that came from Wilno, the Jewish elite. They send them in to bake bread, for the woman to peel potatoes and to sew, to make boots for the Partisans. I don't know – sew their uniforms. I really don't know and there was a tremendous anger among the group. Tremendous. People felt so rejected. They felt it was so unjust to do it. Here people came to fight and they were sent to be in a group. They gave some of them weapons so they can defend themselves in case they are attacked and also to go out to the farmers and get food – to get food. After a while there was no alternative. People got adjusted, but they felt it was a tremendous injustice. All of us felt it was a tremendous injustice. We remained in the unit and we were the first among the Russian units, in a lot of Russian units. But our group, that were in this Jewish otriad²⁴, remained with the Russian unit and it was called the Kalininski Otriad and, of course, we met up with Antisemitism. With Antisemitism women had a very special strike against them. Nobody thought, the leadership and even the soldiers, the resisters, did not think that women know how to fight, know how to do – when you need to go on a mission or something of this sort. And they told them, you know, to do kitchen work, to do this and all sorts of menial jobs.

03:37:16

And some – then Glazman took a group of really the most outstanding young men and women and they left. They were so really hurt that this could happen to a group that was so dedicated, that was so knowledgeable, that had all the potential to do everything that was asked of resisters to do, that they left. They left to go to the other groups that left Wilno and went to Rudniki to the forests, to the “Pushcha²⁵ Rudniski” it was called. In English they call it Rudniki. And on the way they ended up, they met up with an ambush and they were all killed. One young woman escaped and she came back and told us what happened. How they were killed and things and exactly what happened to them. Very shortly after, we were dispersed within the groups. I was always within the Russian unit with the Jews that were remained in the Kalininski Otriad and whatever it was asked of us to do, we did. We did it very well. What do the Partisans do? They really made it impossible for the German Army to move. We cut down trees and blockaded the roads. We mined the entrances to where the resisters lived and this was called an otriad, the units where they lived. They cut down telephone wires and they made ambushes at times; dynamiting the roads, dynamiting also trains that went to the front. In the very same token, we helped Jews that were hiding in the woods because there were Jewish, young children and also elderly people, women that escaped, wanting a family that ran out of a ghetto that either burning or everybody was being killed, and quite a few children. I mean not in large numbers, no. And we saw – they lived at first almost like wild – running from place to place and hiding and never having enough food. Some of them even died. But when we came into the forest, we made sure

²⁴ military detachment (Russian)

²⁵ virgin forest (Russian)

that the farmers keep them and they watch over them for their safety because we threatened the farmers. If something will happen to their safety, you will be punished and punished severely. And you'd be surprised, they listened. Because they knew that we had power. There were sieges every so often.

03:40:32

There was one tremendous siege in the fall, a little bit later in the fall in 1943, where the Germans that were going to the front had to come through the woods, and we lost a lot. A lot, a lot of Partisans were killed. A lot of them were killed. They systematically walked through. We were hiding on an island that was covered. We thought was safe. It wasn't at all. After we came out of there we realized that we could even be seen from the road. But somehow we survived, but 20 – we survived but at least between 20 and 30 percent of the Partisans we lost in the siege that were killed, that were lost. We returned back to the base. The base was not touched. They never came to the base and nobody was on the base. Now, the leadership, the leadership took it first a group of Jewish young men and I was left to guard, to stand guard for the leadership. And after the danger really came that they realized that they cannot travel in a group with more than two or three of them. They ran away hiding some place with farmers. They changed their clothes. They were after all, they were Russians. They were Christians so they didn't have this danger of being Jews and hiding among farmers. They left. They left, disbanded all of us, and told us each and everyone to go and look out for ourselves and it will be over to come back to the base. We came back to the base and we found, for a while, no one. After a while the leadership came and they start dropping now leaders from behind the enemy lines to be our leaders, and we begin to grow in numbers and everybody was armed because the arms were being dropped from behind the enemy lines. We made an airport and air drone like where we cleared out part of a forest. And at night on four corners of this meadow, we would light fires for the planes to identify where to drop the shipment of arms. So Jews and no Jews, everybody got armed.

03:43:18

The others always were armed. It's just Jews, always the Jews. And time went on and at big battles they would organize two or three or four units to come out together. At times we just walked and walked for days not knowing what they were doing and what was going to be done. But somehow we always came back to the base, and later we would learn that this was sort of an exercise of a sort. Nobody questioned. Nobody questioned. We did what we were told to do. Time went on and I have to tell you that one day as I was on the base, somebody came running to me to tell me that my father came into the woods. I left my father and my little brother in Wilno. When one of the groups went – guides went to Wilno I begged one of them, begged to tell my father that I am alive and that I am in the Naroch woods. He told my father; he went to my father. I told him the floor. I told him the house where we were, and my little brother was caught in the street in Wilno while they were grabbing the people and was sent to a labor camp in Estonia, and then added up in Stutthof concentration camp. My father was home and he remained all alone, and when he learned that I was in the underground in Naroch, he walked all by himself, dressed as a Pole. Luckily, he came to the underground. He lived in a hut that we provided him. He and three, four more people that lived there. We provided food for them and safety. They knew that they were safe as long as we are in the woods around them. And my

father lived there until liberation and he was liberated together with me. Liberation came. There were battles. I did not participate in the battles because it was really the big units that it was done, combing through the woods. We remained on the base and the last time before liberation some of our closest friends were killed, while they were combing the woods, to put up, to catch some of the Germans that were escaping from the front or something. And we lost quite a number of men, and the men that we lost were our close friends. There were battles that the Russian Army waged and summer of 1944 we were liberated.

03:47:04

We were liberated and we immediately – most of the men were drafted into the army, to the Russian Army. We – my father and I and Aron asked for permission just to go to Slonim to see somebody survived maybe from his family. He was granted the permission. In the Soviet Union you couldn't travel as you wished. You needed a permit and you had to show the permit everywhere you went. We were given the permit and we came to Slonim. I knew that I would not find anybody in Slonim but we still had hoped. Daddy told me that my little brother was caught on the street, that maybe he survived. Maybe he's alive somewhere. Maybe he wrote to the house that we lived in Slonim. So we came to the house and the man of the house that we lived in was killed by the Nazis because he was a Communist. The wife and the two children survived. We left a lot of our belongings – when we went to the ghetto – was left there. We were absolutely, penniless, without anything to change – anything to wear, only what we had on our backs. And we asked to try and give us something that was left in the house that belonged to us. The landlady, the woman of the house said, “Nothing at all is left and everything was taken away.” The only thing she gave me is a slip, an embroidered slip of my mother's that I treasure ‘til this day. It was the only thing that I remained with, the hand-embroidered slip. We left Slonim immediately. There were no Jews in Slonim. However, I found a note from a cousin of mine that was saved deep in Russia, in Kazakstan, looking for us, if anybody survived from the family. So I immediately was able to get in touch with my cousin Harold Brenner that lived, that was still survived in deep in the Soviet Union. We left Slonim. We stayed in Baranovichi for a short while. We were taken in by Jews that survived and all the survivors became like a family.

03:49:42

Everybody took in everybody. Everybody shared with a piece of bread. You were so happy that somebody survived, because whoever survived thought that he was the only person that survived – that everybody's killed. The joy that you found something. I came to Baranovichi and my Hebrew teacher survived and he met us on the street. The joy of having Meyer Chalasnowicz survive. He took us into his room. He shared his food with us. And as Poland was liberated, we left the Soviet Union as Polish citizens. We were allowed to do it. Aron left first on New Year's Day of 1945. My father and I followed right after, right after, and we came to Bialystok and in Bialystok there was danger again of being killed, again, after the war by pogroms. They talked about pogroms. They talked about killing. It didn't materialize in Bialystok but it was in other places that we knew. And it is in Bialystok that we start searching a way how to get out. There must be a way to get out and to get to the West. And Aron especially, we met in Bialystok. We came right after and Aron had a room, a house, a room in a house and he took us in and we

stayed there and Herschel Lipszyc stayed there, and whoever survived from the Grodno guys stayed with us and we were like family, like family. What I wanted to add that before we came to Bialystok we went to Grodno. We went to Grodno to tell Tadek that we survived. When we came to Grodno, my father, Aron and I – Herschel Lipszyc was already in Grodno – and Herschel Lipszyc said, “Well, we came to Grodno.” We said, “We came really to tell Tadek that we survived.” He said, “Yes, I already talked to him and he knows.” He says “imagine.” So we made a party. A party, really a reunion. Tadek came. We kissed and we hugged and the men drank. There were other people. He brought some vodka and there and the men drank, and there were other people, the Jews that survived, that everybody really shared in our joy.

03:52:37

And everyone made a tremendous to do over Tadek, to tell him how much we appreciate what he did, even though it was only one night in the chain of events. If it weren't for this night, who knows if we would have survived. The same goes for the first woman that kept my sister and myself in the couch. If it weren't for her, I don't know if I would survive. If I would be here to tell you all this. Was only one day, and by Tadek it was only one night. What are the other nights and the other years that it took to survive? Yet, without this chain, were the little link broken, I probably would not maybe be here. You needed somebody to give you a helping hand. The tragedy was there were not many helping hands, and the ones that helped, again, are the giants in society. They had the moral fiber. They had the conscience, the feelings. They were real people. The way I would expect people to do in case of need. And in general, to have morality because were the Germans moral, this would not have happened. And it is in Bialystok that we began to look a way to come out. And again, there were rumors that there is an organization that came, people came from Palestine. They're trying to lead the survivors, get the other survivors and see if they can takes them to Palestine. This was something sort of unbelievable. How could it be possible? But you know, after a while we learn that it is true. People told us by word of mouth and it wasn't that, really, secretive. It wasn't announced in the opening, but neither was it secret because they were very anxious to help. And Aron through Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir, again contacted the B'richa²⁶ and with the help of B'richa we start to getting out, to getting out. We left Poland. My father remained behind for the simple reason that he had still hopes to find my little brother.

03:55:05

He said, he will stay and see what he can humanly possible to see if he can find his little brother. He said already, “I will manage to get to you later.” We came to – from Bialystok we came to Lublin. In Lublin we met a greater number of young men and women that Aron knew that were members of the Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir and that were friends of his and his sister's friends. And we traveled with them. We were given passports as Greek Jews, and we began to travel from Lublin to Kraków, from Kraków we went to Czechoslovakia to Bratislava, from Bratislava we went to Hungary and where ever we went we met by the B'richa. They somehow arranged. There were other trains. The entire European continent, people were traveling in en masse, going home, going home. Everybody had a place to go, but the Jews. They were going home to Italy, to Czechoslovakia, to Rumania. Everywhere people were traveling. The trains were full. You

²⁶ flight (Hebrew), organized underground evacuation of Jews from post-war Eastern Europe.

grabbed on. People were hanging on the outside of the boxcars and in the passenger cars. There were no tickets. People just traveled. The Red Cross announced, too that they had facilities, whatever. We were given really passports by Red Cross as refugees, and we came to Graz. From Hungary we came to Graz and in Graz we had to cross the river, and to cross to get to the western zone of occupied Europe. We did it with the help of the B'richa. They led us. A group before us when to go through to swim through the river. Some of them drowned and they decided to hold off and to send the rest of the groups through the Alps. And we went through the Alps with leaders that led us. And we came to Tarvisio. Tarvisio was already Italy. It is in Tarvisio that we met up with the Jewish Brigade. The Jewish Brigade was part of a Palestinian Jews that volunteered and they had a hard time to be accepted as a unit to the British Army. And they were wearing these insignias here, the English insignias, but here on the sleeve they had a Magen David – a Jewish star. Can you imagine from wearing the star in the ghetto to come to Tarvisio and to see Palestinian Jews wearing it proudly on their sleeve? The transition that it took in us. They were absolutely – they did everything humanly possible to do everything for us. They fed us to the point where all of us were sick, because we were not accustomed to the rich foods that they tried to feed us. And they did everything possible that they could to alleviate our worries. I immediately found somebody that knew my sister that came from the town rejoining me, Slovaki (ph) and he was able to send a telegram to my grandmother in America and my aunt and uncle and my aunts and that I survived and my father survived.

03:58:54

And we did not stay long in Tarvisio because it was like a detention place. Groups were coming and leaving further into the coast, into Italy. We went to Bologna. From Bologna we didn't stay there long at all. We came to Florence, and the first night when we came to Florence we slept in that magnificent Synagogue, but we slept in the Sunday school that was adjoining the Synagogue. They took the benches that the children used for sitting on, people used for sitting. We put the benches and they brought something to lay on top and the first night in Italy we slept in Florence on the benches. Besides Tarvisio was Italy too but really already away from it. And we were immediately helped by UNRRA²⁷ by the United Nations, where they gave us food, and we were registered with UNRRA and the struggle started how to go to Palestine. The shores of Palestine were closed and you couldn't go. Meanwhile, my family in America contacted me and they very, very much wanted me to come to the United States, even if I don't live there merely to come to see them. They wanted to see me. And since we could not go to Palestine, we decided to go to the United States. My uncle and Aron's made affidavits for us to come. They send us passage and everything and we came under the Refugee Act in 1947. We came out to America. We were married in Rome. We lived from 1945 to '47, we lived in Florence and in Rome. And Aron and I lived with an Italian family, a Christian family in Rome that took us in as a family. And we shared our food with them because it was hunger in Italy at this time. And we remained close friends until today. Shortly we were married in Rome in this magnificent Synagogue with 10 witnesses that we brought with us so the Rabbi could marry us, and we came to the United States. We came to a loving family that could not do enough for us. We settled in Chicago. First we came to New York. My father's brother and sister lived in New York. We visited with them and then we came. We stayed for a while in Indianapolis and then we settled in Chicago. The families were absolutely wonderful, loving, caring and giving to help us in any possible

²⁷ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

way. We had a wonderful life and we're so grateful, because we raised three sons that are wonderful human beings – Howard, Gordon and Daniel –that are married. We have three lovely daughter-in-laws; Barbara, Carol and Miriam. And we have eight magnificent grandchildren; Courtney, 17, that is a Merit Scholar on the way to college. Lindsey, charming and beautiful and lovely and giving, that told me they went on Thanksgiving Day to serve the hungry dinner, and the homeless. Ari, Benji and Yalie, the joy, all of them. Evan, bright, wonderful. Rachel, beautiful, gorgeous to look at, and Gabie, our little Gabriel that is going to be two years old in December. We tried to instill in them consciousness, good values, morality. And our sons are physicians, try to prolong human lives, not to take away human lives. Try to help. Aron and I are both very active with the Holocaust Memorial Foundation in Skokie. I am the chairperson of the speakers bureau and I truly do what I think I can do to see as a survivor that this never happens to any people on earth. I feel only by education and only by perpetuating what we experienced and what we know to leave a legacy for future generations to come. And I very much felt that this Museum really, truly will do the job when we will not be here anymore. This is why we came and we want to give this testimony so it remains for generations to come. For that, I thank you.

Q: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview.