United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Fela Warschau
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Fela Warschau, conducted by Randy Goldman on February 9, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

FELA WARSCHAU
February 9, 1995

Q: Start off by telling me your name at the time of war, and where you were born, and when you were born?

A: My name at the time of the war was Fela Yakomovich (ph) in Yiddish, and I lived in a small town called Ozerkoff (ph) in Poland. I was born the tenth month, the fifteenth day of 1926.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the town you were born in?

A: It was a small town. The way I understand -- I didn't know at the time but after the war, people that were older than I am told me that the population was like 15,000 all together, and almost one third of the population were Jews. It was a nice little town. We had natural springs there on the outskirts of the city. There were the birchwoods and little cottages where people came in summer for vacation. Life was, I would say considering all the circumstances in Poland, I felt happy, because I had a good home. My father was by trade a jeweler and watchmaker. Watches he sold and repaired but jewelry which most of the time wasn't costume made, people didn't think much of costume jewelry. If they ordered a piece of jewelry it had to be either silver or gold, and it was ordered and my father made these things to order. Many times I used to stand there fascinated watching him pour the gold. It was just like liquid poured in a form and how he fashioned all this. And also the finish and the engraving. It was something -- he was a good craftsman. We were not rich. We did not have a home of our own. Where we lived was a big building, an apartment building. It was going from one side of the street corner into the marketplace. But it was one building, but the other side, because it was on the other side of the street, naturally it had a different name, this street. We lived on the side where it said Listopadova (ph) and the number on the street was 17. Upstairs we lived the business together. There was a lot of that in Europe -- people had combined things. Downstairs my grandmother had for a long time a grocery store, but in the later years she retired and naturally she came to live with us, with Grandfather. But Grandfather died before the war, and I think he was fortunate enough, the only one to die a natural death from the immediate family. I have a sister, which survived. I had two brothers, a mother, and my grandmother lived with us. I was going to school the year of 1939 -- I was not quite 13 years old, but I was through with public school, all the grades. I had skipped some classes, this is why I finished early. So that was the time of vacation in between. My parents tried to decide what would I go into. We were very Orthodox, very religious. My father was one of the Hasidim -- belonged to one of the Hasidic sects, it was called the Alexander Hasidim (ph). So, he did not want me to continue. Their high school, which was called gymnasium, was also a paid school. You did not get that free. It was a higher school of learning, and naturally we didn't have one in the beginning, and because we were so religious and so sheltered my father wasn't going to let me go in the big city to continue this education. So, what should I be doing, right? First my mother thought maybe I should be a dressmaker. I said not on your life, because you know how the apprenticeship in Europe was for a dressmaker girl? First, you were bound for so many years there, and the first couple

years all you did is to clean her house. She never showed you anything. You had to pass this test, you know, but I had a friend that owned one of those web where -- textile, web, I don't understand how you say this machine that they made material, textile mills –

Q: A loom?

A: A loom, that's right. They did that at home. The textile industry was very prominent in Lodz and that spilled over to our little town because we were about only 14 kilometers from Lodz. Almost like a suburb. I used to go and visit her and watch her, after school she was doing all this and I thought it was fascinating. In the same street there was a factory, textile factory, the owner was Jewish and she said, "Oh he takes apprentice girls if you want to learn this trade." So, I don't know how I persuaded my father to let me do it, because he didn't think something like that I should go work in a factory, after all, but I said, " I am not going to go there." Here if he takes me in, even at the age of 13, there were no labor laws over there, so you could earn money if you wanted to. So, these couple months until the war came out I learned and I worked there for a while. I was happy because I got paid for it and I felt very important. Also, because I didn't continue school, we did sort of at home learn some more. I don't know what kind of education my father had, but he was so wise and he knew so many things that I really don't know where he learned all this. So, we just kept on learning from them. We also had a habit of reading a lot. Then my father was busy working and had no time to read the newspapers, my mother would sit next to him and read him aloud the newspapers and I remember her chuckling about when the world news in this paper about certain things that happened in America. And that's what we would call the United States, and she shook her and used to say, "Only in America things like that can happen." It was something unbelievable whatever it was I can't remember. Anyway, she was marveling at the things that were happening here, even at that time. So, like I said, I was sheltered. I was happy. Until this fatal day when Germany marched into Poland.

Q: Just let me ask you one question. When you were reading in the newspapers were you reading about Germany and Hitler?

A: Yes, we did. My mother used to read and she used to be very stressed about it. Refugees, people from Germany, Jewish people, came through the town, and I remember that she was collecting, going around and collecting clothes for them and other things. We donated a lot of things to them. My mother could not get over it because when she was a girl going to school, quite young, the part where we lived was once Russian and once Austrian or Hungarian. I guess she was in grade school or whatever. Anyway, then she lived downstairs with my grandparents of course. After she came home from school she used to hang around the store and the Germans that came into the store, they were so polite, and she says, "I was a little girl and they came in they greeted me, and kissed my hand, and called me Fräulein Marta." That was her name, and she said, "I can't understand that those should be the same people, and that they would get so insane and follow a man, an evil man like him." It was unbelievable, and what we counted on is for the world to stop him. But it didn't happen, we know that. Just it seems like to her unbelievable that nobody stood up against him and let

him get away with whatever he did.

Q: So, you were starting to tell me how things changed.

A: Well, there was a battle a little whiles away from our city. The city was called Kutno (ph). Soldiers, German soldiers were marching through there. And while they were marching through the city, they used to stop and do some looting and rounding also. Because it was so close and shrapnels were falling in the city, we all took shelter in the courtyard in the back. There was a building which was a theater before the war, a movie house, so all the neighbors gathered and we slept in that building. We made sort of an improvised bedding, the stove was there. We brought our food and we slept there, but when the soldiers were marching through and trying to loot the homes, some of the Polish people pointed out where we were and made us go out there and they just took whatever they wanted. To the end, there was nothing left to take, so the last soldiers that came up in the house and went all over the place and couldn't find anything, you know what they took? My father had all these accessories for fixing watches and people broke the glass on top. He fixed, he put all different kinds of shapes of glass for all different watches. They picked up handfuls and put in their pockets. Just the glass, would you believe that? We just shook our heads and didn't know what are they going to do with this. The battle lasted there for a few days.

Q: This was when?

A: 1939.

Q: September?

A: Yes. They entered our city to stay -- I think what -- I don't remember the day, but according to the paper I got from my home town, it was supposed to have been September 5. I know they came in real early. The first day, 25 Jews were shot right there, on the streets. I don't know how they could know these people were Jewish. I have no idea. I wasn't on the street. I just know that would happen. So, you see, there was panic. Everybody run, hiding in their homes. We just sit there not knowing what would happen. And then again, they came into your homes and then they took household goods. Pillows, pictures if you had anything of value, whatever they thought they wanted, they took. Businesses were taken over, Jewish businesses, of course. On our street, there were quiet a few enterprises, there were stores, you know. On the left side we had a family that run a store where you bought material and made clothes, coats and clothes. Then the lady that took over my grandmother's store, she had a little grocery store. Next to it was a tinsmith, like he was fixing pots and pans and all that. Then was another large family that was selling pots, and pans, and sweaters, all kinds of glassware. Like in New York they have the Pottery Barn, and it was something like that, on a small scale. Farther down you had other stores. Across the street there were shoe stores. There were all kinds of little enterprises and everybody made a living because it was a industrial town. There was a couple textile factories and the rest of the population made a nice living, so that was it. But all of this had stopped. They took over city halls naturally, the

Nazis. And from then on the orders came. Right away, the first days Jews were beaten on the streets, wherever you showed up. Our two synagogues were burned down. The rest of the walls that remained standing the Jewish people were forced to dismantle. That's what happened. There's not a sign left in the city of the synagogues. Nothing to remind you if you didn't know they were there. So, you see life was hard. Then all the rules came out. We could not enter any stores. We still lived where we did originally when the war started, but we could not enter any stores to buy any provisions. We were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks, only on the middle of the road. Later on, the arm bands came with the yellow stars. We had to form, like in every city a Jewish administration. And they had to follow orders. The orders came to them, they had to carry them out. Otherwise they come in and did twice as much damage as originally they wanted, whatever they wanted. So, it was hard. Right away they demanded so many young men, single men, supposedly for labor into Germany. But we knew later on that it wasn't so. These people send us one time a post card that they were well and we should send them food. People did, but you know they never received and these people never survived the first couple days, that was it. I think they did exterminate them right away, these first transports. That's what we were told. I'm not sure. Some of them probably went into camps. Like my husband, when he was grabbed on the streets of Lodz. He said, "I built some of the camps." He said, "I helped them put the walls up," so you see, some of them probably went that way and didn't survive or whatever happened. Anyway life was hard, we did not have enough access to medication, to real food that we needed. So, you see older people, babies, sick people died, lack of medication, lack of facilities too or lack of food. The first victims right away, and quite a few every day, quite a few. It was hard. Then if you walked down the streets, they grabbed you off the street and made you clean the roads or whatever, beating the people, making fun of them. Some of the religious people, the Hasidic people they caught. Like in every city they made them wear the prayer shawls, and run back and forth, and cut their beards off. It was their favorite pasttime in every city.

Q: Did this happen to your father?

A: No, it did not happen to my father. My father, actually had a small beard, very neat trimmed, you know. But we -- my father ended up to be almost the only one in his trade in the city, and so from the beginning on we were forced to work for them. The local people pointed out that he was the craftsman. They came in and brought all their watches to repair and of course the gold they robbed from whoever they found. My father had to fashion other jewelry for them which they sent home. Some of them not even said thank you but some of them surprisingly brought some provisions, some food, which we appreciated very much but you couldn't say anything. You were afraid to say anything. You were grateful for whatever you got, no matter which source it came. It was hard to live and we were growing children and denied everything right away. It just didn't do good for our health and for our morals, because of this and trying to figure out what was going on, it was confusing. We just lived from day to day, not knowing what the next day will bring.

Q: Was there any sense of normalcy? Did you have friends, did you --

A: I had friends as long as we could, we did communicate with one another. But it was more dangerous. You were afraid to go out on the streets. Sometimes they just picked you off the streets and you disappeared not knowing where you went. So, it was dangerous. Most people stayed close to home. They also liquidated the library. There were a lot of Jewish books in the library, so at the time of liquidation whoever was close grabbed a few books and they just made a circle around the people. I remember quite a few of them finding their way into our home. We used to read them in the evenings where we had to cover the windows that the light shouldn't be visible outside. We used to sit -- that was the only thing you could do is talk and read. You could not observe any holidays any more. In your own home if possibly, you could get away with it, you know. My father still prayed every morning and he went into the bedroom and closed the door real early in the morning. We were hoping nobody would come to see that, but he observed as long as he could possibly the circumstances let him do that.

Q: Were you ever subject to any punishment or did you see any beatings or hangings or any sort of that brutal treatment?

A: Well, I was grabbed once from the street and made to scrub school halls and they really were not dirty, it was just mean. A whole day long from morning till night. Somehow, by some miracle they let me go. When I came home, my parents were really upset and they thought they would never see me again. What happened was, yes, I saw hangings. One day we were marched into the marketplace. All of us, we had to be there. Sick people, even a woman that just had a child had to come with the baby there. All lined up, they marched in ten young Jewish men and the girls were errect and they were going to be hanged there. We all had to be witness, we all had to watch this. They claim they committed a crime against Germany by violating the curfew, supposedly stealing something, any kind of excuse to do this. The last minute before hanging they announced that they would let one of these men go free if the Jewish people could collect enough money to ransom him out. Of course we wanted to save this person. People gave money. They let one man go but this is what I always tell everybody how cruel that was because all these 10 people standing there each one of them praying and hoping he would be the one picked and be saved. That's what it was. Can you imagine that? So, life was hard, like I say. People were dying every day. We just tried to survive from one day to the next, but we know that Hitler's goal was to erase the Jewish people from Europe and if possibly he would go farther, it would be more. That was his goal. So, people were not dying fast enough even matter what they starved us and beat us, they thought the process is too slow, and to get a hold of us much faster, they wanted us in one place, so the cities, the small little places, hamlets and little cities were concentrated and each district in one large ghetto. We lived in our Ghetto until 1942 under these circumstances.

Q: Now, did they move you, how did all of this take place?

A: They told us to line up.

Q: When was this?

A: I have to go back because I forgot an important thing. Is that all right? Okay. Before we were sent to the ghetto in our home town, they still wanted to reduce the population in half in our home town before they separated us in the outskirts of the city. We were first of all we were two years in a ghetto in Ozerkoff. So, they wanted less people, so one day we were assembled in the school auditorium, men, women, and children. There were Nazis in front of us and we were told to strip naked and parade in front of them. They looked us over like a bunch of cattle and we were stamped like a bunch of cattle with a letter A or B. We were told to get dressed, go home, and wait for further orders. In a couple weeks or in a week, I can't remember the length of time, then we were told again to assemble in the marketplace. There we were surrounded by trucks, machine guns and all these Nazis and told that the people with the letter A go to one side and the people with the letter B go to the next side. The people with the letter B they herded on those trucks and drove them away. This is where my grandmother went. My eighty-some-year-old grandmother. I was told after the war that those were the first experimental gassings with the exhaust pipe in those trucks. So, this is how she died. If this is really the way it happened, it was a horrible death. After that we were herded.

Q: Before we stopped the tape, you were talking about this selection. They took away half of the population which was marked B, what did that mean? Who was taken away?

A: Sick people, children, older people, mothers of children, those people they got rid of because they thought women with children, their children would be a hindrance. They couldn't work. The younger people they left using them for work. Those are the people that went away.

Q: Now, just tell me when you were standing naked in front of all of these Nazis having to parade around, that must have been a very unusual experience. I'm wondering if it was more difficult for the girls?

A: I think I was shocked because I had never seen a naked male, not even my own brothers. It was shocking. I just looked around myself and saw everybody walking ahead so I figured this is what I have to do, trying to shield yourself, you know parts of your body because it was so embarrassing. But they just -- they were so impersonal, just picking up that stamp going like this, you know, like canceling things out. This is the way it looked to me.

Q: What was the stamp?

A: It was like you stamp a paper, the same kind of ink. They told us to be very careful to see that it doesn't erase. That they would be able if they wanted to check this, if it's the truth which side we are going so they would be able to check this out.

Q: Where did they stamp you?

A: On our bare body, up here, so we sort of walked around and slept on one side trying to see--because ink does erase, this type of an ink, especially on your body. That is what we had to do. Now after these people were taken away, they created in our home town a ghetto in the outskirts of the city. We were surrounded by guards, like three, four families in one room. Of course no sanitary facilities. I remember we had this one long bed in this little room. We all slept this way to have enough room to sleep, sideways you know. This is how we slept, and whatever provisions we got, we cooked together and shared the portions of food. One time they thought they did us a favor and they gave us some horse meat which was contaminated. People got very ill and some of them died. One of them was my sister. She was very, very ill at that time.

Q: She died?

A: No, my sister is alive. But from the ghetto every morning we had to gather in front of the gates. They marched us out into the city to a certain destination where were worked for their industry. Almost all the population worked one place or another making warm shoes or we made little fur jackets from rabbit fur for the Russian front for the soldiers. There were different phases of doing this. One was the cutter, one was the pattern maker, and then the putting it together, the inspection and finally putting it in the boxes and so much had to be put out every day. When the day was over, we were marched back into the ghetto. Naturally, we tried to make something to eat, and rest up, and somehow to communicate with your neighbors and whatever you could, if you still had the strength when it was warm outside just to walk outside and just walk a little bit, feeling a little more free than being so confined in one place. Of course we were not free, we were isolated, but it felt much better and this is the way we sort of communicated or associated in this little ghetto. But that was not -- they used to come into the ghetto and line us up and pick out people out of this line for deportation. Whenever they had a whim they would just come in and get people. I remember one time standing in this line. My youngest brother was behind me in between and he was so small and we found a box. We put him on top of the box and sort of hid this box between our legs. But there, I was again sick. I had a bad infection, I remember, on this side of my face. My whole side of the face was covered up with a scarf, with a white scarf and this black salve put on it. You could see it through and this S.S. man was walking back and forth picking out people, looking this way and that way. The third person from me was a brother of my friend. He had a big birth mark, a red one on his face and he looked at him and he said, "Out." And I can't understand how he walked by that many times in front of me and did not take me out of this line. This is something that I will never understand the rest of my life, but it happened that way. When I tell people, they say, "It wasn't your time to die." That's all I can figure out.

Q: What about the organization of the ghetto? You had a Judenrot or some sort of Jewish organization that administered the ghetto?

A: Not much of it in our home town. There wasn't much.

Q: How did you get your food, how did you --

A: Rations. They used to send it in. There was some kind of administration but they were not very effective, you see. In the beginning before we were in the ghetto, there were representatives and an administration and you went for your food there, even for your heating material. Because when winter came around, we didn't -- like I said I think to you before, we did not get the regular coal. It was some kind of a substitute. It was wet and it came in blocks almost like bricks and it was called torf (ph). It smelled terrible when we were burning it, but we had no choice. This is what we used to get, but in the ghetto I don't remember really how we heated this place in winter. We lived like that in Ozerkoff from the end of 1940 until 1942 and this is when they decided that they want the Jewish people concentrated in one larger place. This way they can get a hold of us much faster. So, they liquidated all the little cities, and hamlets, and every district and deported the people to the larger ghettos. We found ourselves in the second largest ghetto in Poland, in Lodz. There we were taken by street car. There weren't that many left of us. You can imagine that we fit in a row of street cars there and walking in the line to those street cars, you always have to line up. By some miracle that these people who lived a little distance from us, the father, the family was intact and the man was blind. So, he was like in front of me walking but he couldn't see exactly to keep in line, so his movement was like moving out of the line, and the Nazi walking next to us thought he was trying to escape and he shot him dead. And another man and my father carried this dead man into the street car and carry him along into Lodz. So, we arrived in Lodz and the place called Baluter-Mark (ph), Balutzkerinek (ph) in Polish. There we were all lined up and we were told to give up all the gold or whatever we have because if they would search us it would be much worse. So, anyway, everyone gave up everything.

Q: How much did you take with you to Lodz in terms of personal --

A: Just personal belongings that's all you could take, but sometimes people took on themselves, on their person, jewelry. You know no matter how much they searched, some people smuggled it through. They risked their life, but people did that. So, then, we were marched into the ghetto assigned to a place to live, also with several people. The first we lived on a street called Linarskenein (ph), but that was just like a weigh-station because we had no place to go and we sort of slept on the floor there even. There wasn't even a bunk bed or anything. Later on, this other room, these two rooms got vacant and me and another family were assigned to this street. It was called Berkayoselovicha (ph) and we lived on that street. Each one of us has to be assigned to a work place, and there what would you call the work places were called in Lodz, "resorts." This is what they called them. I don't know for what reason.

Q: Who assigned you?

A: I don't know, I think the Jewish Admin -- or wherever. They wanted us to work. This is where they send. Each one of us got a Russian card and the provisions were -- the only time you could get your provisions was after a whole day's work. Then you stood in line, I don't

know how long just to get even your loaf of bread or the other provisions. Sometimes people fainted dead away, in these lines, but we had no choice, you see Ghetto Lodz had thousands of people, not only from Poland, but they had people from all over Europe. It was confusing. At the same time they were shipping us in from all over, they were deporting people from Lodz Ghetto. It was like coming and going, coming and going every single day. It wasn't safe on the street. You never knew if you went to the destination of your work if you'd return because they could grab you on the street and just cart you away.

Q: That was happening?

A: Yes. Of course the leader of the Lodz Ghetto was Haim Rumkosky (ph). He was the king. Everyone knows that. He even had money printed and I think his picture was on it. That much I don't -- but I know it would have to be that way. He taught -- this ghetto would be forever because we did such important work for the German government. Military orders and whatnot all, so for the time being he thought we were safe. What was safe there? I wasn't safe. First of all we were hungry. What they gave us wasn't enough to live on. People were dying, hundreds every day. Some managed to bury the people on their own, but some of them couldn't so they were buried -- they came down and picked up the dead bodies in a bag and buried them in one grave. It was hard walking down the street. There were some children that by miracle survived, and still were in the Ghetto. And you saw them standing on the streets, raggedy, swollen, hungry, asking for food. Who had anything to give them? We were starving ourselves, but it was something hard to take, even when you were hungry because you felt I can't do anything. You felt helpless. And we lived there for two years, but in between there, like I said, there were called deportations, different phases. It was called lists, so they send lists, they send the order to the administration. They wanted that many young people, let's say single people, the oldest from the family, supposedly for labor. So the administration had to make a list who should be going to these deportations. That was called the "Time of the Lists." Then there was the time of the shpera (ph). They sealed off the streets and they came in with the trucks and just grabbed people out from the homes and took them away. They also, I think, came several times to the hospitals and took people out. But despite of all this, there was -- people were determined to normalize this life. I know for a fact that there were several organizations, several culture places. Of course I never went because my parents were too protective. After I came home from work, they were so afraid that something would happen to us if we go out, that they just did not permit us to join any of these things. But I know that there were cultural events held and people even went like to schools. It was forbidden of course. It was like in hiding, but it was done.

Q: Who was organizing all these activities?

A: I think there were teachers there and other people that were capable to do that.

Q: Was there an actual underground or resistance organization?

A: Lodz -- I don't know if there was much underground. You see Lodz Ghetto was a little

different than let's say for instance Warsaw Ghetto. It was sealed much tighter and it was hard to get out. We had little communication with the outside world. That's why it was harder to do anything. Even less heroic what Warsaw Ghetto did.

Q: Did people have radios? Did you have any idea what was going on?

A: We knew. We didn't have a radio, but someone must have because news came filtering through to us. We knew what was going on on the fronts. You see, we heard that the Russians were advancing and the Allies were bombing, but because we were in such terrible situation, and because my father always said that this war was going to be a lightning war. He used to say in German, a blitzkrieg, because of all the technology and the air warfare, this war was going to end fast, but it didn't. You see, it dragged on and that's why when all these news kept on infiltrating into the ghetto, we listened to it, hoping but somehow it sounded unbelievable that Hitler is being defeated or he is losing a battle because he is so almighty and look what he was doing to us. We were helpless and we could not defend ourselves, so it was do we believe or do we not believe what we are hearing.

Q: You talk about the deportations. Let's take the first period, that "Time of the Lists." Was there any logic to who was getting deported?

A: Of course, people you mean from Lodz, the original people who lived in Lodz or what do you mean?

Q: Well, what segments of the population?

A: Okay. They took, let's say, my sister had a friend who's parents were taken away at home. She was alone. She was single. There was no family there so they used to take single people first like that. Then young able bodied people because they told them these people are going for labor into Germany. But you see, those people really disappeared. There's not a trace of these people left that went with the lists. They were all exterminated, and we know that for a fact.

Q: What about -- the lists, I assume, were made up by Rumkosky and his --

A: Yes.

Q: What about old people, sick people, children --

A: Oh, these were naturally deported. These were deported. Sick people and old people had not place in Hitler's programs. They were not useful at all. They go first because they can't even work. He worked us to death. That's what he wanted anyway, but in the meanwhile, we were young, and we were healthy and we were useful. So, we survived as long as they felt that they can work us to death. At least they have something out of us. But older people, sick people, were of no use to them, so naturally those people were exterminated right away.

Q: Were there regular selections on the streets that you saw or you were a part of?

A: Not in Lodz, I have not seen that. I just know of -- yes, because my sister's friend went, you know, with those lists, she went.

Q: Did you ever see or hear Rumkosky?

A: He drove by once in this horse and buggy carriage. This was the only transportation, sitting like a king there. He was grey and old at that time already and thinking God knows who he is. You know, it was like a man of life and death almost. Some people say -- after the war we had one time a discussion in Milwaukee after we saw the film about Lodz Ghetto, we had a discussion about Rumkosky and some people said that he was forced to do what he was doing, but I don't see it that way. Me, personally, I don't see it that way. Because if he would have been forced to do it, he would have a different attitude than what he had.

Q: What was his attitude?

A: Like he was the king and he was going to last forever and rule this kingdom here because he's so safe and secure because we are doing such a job for Germany that they can't do without us. That was his main idea, that that's why we are safe, but no Jew was safe in Nazi occupation. We know that.

Q: Tell me about the work.

A: Well, there were different places of work. My father was assigned to a shop called the machine shop, repaired their sewing machines and all other instruments which were shipped to Germany. My brother, my older brother worked in a steel shop. My sister worked in a place called Marishean (ph), and that they were making straw shoes. The method of making is really interesting. They bought all these stacks of straw. They lined them up on the ground next to their feet, put water on it, and they had to stamp on the straw to make it softer. Then they used to braid the straw with their hands and shape them into shoes for the soldiers on the front. And she always used to come home with bleeding hands from this job. My little brother, I exactly don't remember where he worked, would you believe it. I know that he went to work every day and I worked in a place where they were embroidering emblems for the uniforms. My mother had brought-home work. There was such a thing. It was called in Polish halumintzfau (ph). She could bring the work home. She was tearing all kinds of rags apart, making strips, braiding the strips and fashioning rugs. What they needed that for, I have no idea, but that's what she was doing and every day she had to make a certain amount and deliver it the same day. So that was the work we were doing there.

Q: Did you have any sense that women were treated differently than men in terms of --

A: I don't know. I don't think so. We all had to work. I think that maybe the men did some

more hard physical labor than the women, but I can't tell you exactly.

Q: But you didn't feel different.

A: No, no I did not. As far as deportations and treatment like that, we were all treated equal. That's the way I think.

Q: In the factories or the "resorts," were you ever aware of efforts to kind of sabotage the production of hunger strikes or anything like that?

A: No, no, maybe in different places where people were things might have happened, but where I worked I never encountered, and people did not there go on hunger strikes. We were at the point of starvation and I don't think people could last two or three days if you went on a hunger strike. That's the way I felt.

Q: You were at home with your family at night?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember what you talked about?

A: Always trying -- first of all we were trying to put food on the table. Then you tried to keep clean, which was a hard thing to do. Washing clothes was a task within itself, because we had no water. You had to walk like almost a half a mile with a pail to get water. Then you had this board that you rubbed on and you boiled the clothes on top of the stove if you possibly could. That was another chore which required a lot of time. But sometimes before the curfew set in, we had some neighbors that were from our home town that used to come over and just sort of talk things over. My father was always the one very optimistic, thinking that this will end soon and that he hoped to be alive when this happened. But it didn't happen that way. He didn't live to see that. Slowly though, he did repair work at home. Somehow he got some instruments. He was repairing watches in the house. People in the ghetto, believe it not, some of them could afford to do that. Sometimes they paid and money was helpful because every place no matter how much you starve there is always a little market where you could buy for higher prices something to help yourself.

Q: Even in the ghetto?

A: Even in the ghetto. One day one of the Jewish policemen, the ghetto policemen and said to my father he's being summoned to Gestapo headquarters on Bolitzkerenik (ph), and we thought what did my father do? He will never come back alive, you know. But you see, before they took all the -- took us out of Ozerkoff Ghetto, we all had to register that you were a tradesman or whatever, they looked through this list and summoned my father to do some work for them. When he came back it was like a miracle. He came back with work, watches to repair and all that stuff. And they walked him back, the Jewish police, back there

when he was done with his work to return the work. And would you believe that now and then some of them would give him some food for the work, even those Gestapo people? It was amazing.

Q: What kind of food did they give you?

A: Bread. Bread was the staple. Bread was something we craved. Bread was something that I dreamed of. We always said someday -- in the camps where I was, we always used to say we didn't dream about eating cake or meat or whatever. We used to say if ever the time comes all I want is a loaf of bread and eat enough that I feel my stomach is full. This is what we want, just a loaf of bread. So, bread was very important, to the point we were starving so much that sometimes when a person died in a family in the ghetto, they did not report him for a couple days so that they could pick up the bread ration and help themselves for a little bit. So, you can imagine how desperate you were and how hungry you were to go to such measures to get some food.

Q: Was that it? Did you eat anything else?

A: They gave us potatoes. Certain other stuff, whatever was available. Sometimes they gave us canned food, canned meat, but that was called, you had to be at work every day. They made a day when if you were at work that day, they picked at random a day and if you were there, it was called in German the schteichtag (ph). If you happened to be working that day, you could get a portion of that conserved meat, and it was mostly horse meat anyway. That was the treat of a lifetime, I'm telling you. They gave us vegetables, a lot of carrots. And those white carrots, you know, those long big, I don't know what they were called here, but we called them white carrots. They had the shape of a carrot and we ate a lot of that. So, all different kind of staples that they felt weren't really -- beyond their dignity to eat, you know, they just brought into the ghetto and we got a certain amount of everything.

Q: Did you work every day?

A: Yes, except Sunday, I think.

Q: What did you do on the day you didn't work?

A: Cleaned, did our clothes or tried maybe to go outside and see what's going on if you ventured, it you dared to do that.

Q: You had mentioned to me that there was some little ponceon (ph) or someplace where workers could go?

A: Yes. You were rewarded if you were a good worker and you made enough production in the ghetto, and the foreman was favorable to you, they had also foremen there, you know, the one that told you what to do, then you were rewarded. There was a place like sanatorium and

you were rewarded with seven days to go to this sanatorium to rest up. One of my family, my older brother which was younger than I am, but he was the older of the brothers, he got rewarded and he went for seven days there. When he came back he told us how wonderful it was to get three meals a day and to be able to rest and all of us in the ghetto dreamed about going there even for such a short while and being treated like that. So, there were a lot of songs in the ghetto. People were making up songs about Rumkosky in Yiddish. A couple words I do remember in Yiddish, and then there was this song about the Heime (ph). That we sung in Polish. We always made up songs, Yiddish or Polish so a couple songs, those couple verses about Rumkosky I remember and a couple verses from that Heime.

Q: Can you sing or say them?

A: No, I won't sing, but if you want me to say. First about Rumkosky. Okay, it was like this. "Rumkosky, Haim..." (speaking Yiddish). I don't know whoever understands this.

Q: Can you just in a sentence or two just tell me what it's about?

A: Yes. Rumkosky, Haim is a very good man. He will still treat us, we will eat rolls with butter. This will be our treat and what can we do? We Jews, what can we do? It's a terrible thing that happened to us,what can we do, that we are hungry and our stomach demands food every single day. It doesn't understand about the situation and about the ghetto. The stomach demands the food. So, in Yiddish it sounds a little different. It has a better meaning, but everything loses in translation.

Q: What was the other song?

A: The other song was in Polish. Do you want me to say it in Polish?

Q: Sure.

A: (Speaking Polish).

Q: What was it about?

A: It was at the end of the city stands this place called the Heime and it's a jail without bars. I would like to be there for many years. There is this guy called the director, the commissar, they come and entertain you and they give you food to eat. This is the dream of the ghetto that you dream from day to day and living from day to day this is what we dream. Only I am very sad that this, what I'm having here is only for seven days, a short seven days, that it couldn't go on.

Q: Even though you said that you couldn't go out, your father wouldn't let you go out at night, but I mean, did you have a sense that there was a humor and a camaraderie in the midst of all this?

A: There was. I think people were meeting. They had certain organizations. I think there was even little entertainment probably. I was not aware of it because of that reason. But I know there was some culture in Lodz Ghetto, of course. We all tried -- people tried to resist this drudgery and this ghetto and tried to make something normal out of it so we could exist. You see, with us, it was again being in the evening home and talking if you didn't have anything to read, it was just oral support. My father knew a lot of stories. He was a good story teller, and my little brother, he was a natural. After he came home from this resort, before my mother made the supper and it was light enough, he used to go out there in the corner and meet some other little boys and he used to spin stories out of his head and everybody ran after him and used to say "Yankele, tell us another story, please tell us another story," and it was just so exciting to them. That little boy, I think, not because it was my brother, but if he would have grown up, he would have been a genius he was so smart. It was unbelievable because he went to a religious school, at home because he wore all the Hasidic garb, and the director of the public school was trying to persuade my father he should let him go to the public school because he's such a smart boy, he would have loved to have him there. But you see, like I said, boys, Polish boys a lot of them were anti-Semitic. My father said to him, "I understand in the class you can see that no harm would happen to him because the way he looks, but if recess time and the kids go outside, you can't be everyplace and shield him from all the beatings or whatever things would happen out there."

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Were you aware of in the Lodz Ghetto, various social welfare efforts, medical stations or soup kitchens?

A: There were infirmaries and so-called hospitals. There were also soup kitchens, but we never got food out of the soup kitchen like soups directly. What I think is people that didn't work or sick people that they got help from the soup kitchens. The only thing that we got from the soup kitchens that other like people like us that stood in line waiting for the potato peelings to be thrown out. We brought big sacks home, washed these potato peelings, ground them with a meat grinder, and we made potato pancakes out it. And sometimes when we didn't get enough, if you happened to have coffee grounds left over, you mixed the coffee grounds with the potato peelings so you had something more to eat. I remember eating that.

Q: Did it taste good?

A: It tasted delicious at that time. One time we got raw oatmeal. What a treat, and a little bit of oil and brown sugar. A ration that was very unusual to get in the ghetto, so you mixed a little oatmeal, a little bit of oil and brown sugar and we ate it like that. I kept on saying, "Oh how delicious is this. Why didn't I ever think before the war to eat something like that?" Anything was delicious.

Q: I bet you didn't eat it after the war?

A: No, I didn't.

Q: How long were you in Lodz Ghetto?

A: Two years, from 1942 to 1944. 1944 was the year when they started liquidating the Lodz Ghetto. You see, most of the other ghettos were liquidated already. It seems like we were almost the last ones. 1944 slowly they made up, the Gestapo asked every day so many people have to be resettled, they said, for labor. The ghetto has to be liquidated and the people will be resettled. So they demanded so many people every day for these deportations.

Q: Did you know where they were being resettled?

A: No, nobody knew. You know, there were whispers, terrible whispers, about places like that, about shooting people. But it was unbelievable. We just somehow couldn't understand that one human being was capable of doing something like that to another human being no matter who he was. How can people do this? So it was like unbelievable. Maybe they're making more of it than it really is. Fooling ourselves, that's what it was. So, up to the point with the lists and the sealing off the streets, these deportations they dragged people out but here they didn't want to bother anymore with that. They didn't want to put a lot of effort in

this. So to the end after the first people, they announced that every family that would come quick would receive, each person will receive a loaf of bread and some jam.

Q: Who made this announcement?

A: It came through the Jewish Administration from the Gestapo that this is what we'll receive. So, people went. A loaf of bread was magic. People went. There was no more like, hesitance. No more trying to hide any place. People went and in the beginning we sort of tried to, like moving to the back of the line. You know, when you stand in a line. We tried, but finally there was no way we could avoid it. So, one time they also told us to take personal belongings. Make bundles and take along, of course we're only going for resettlement. You know that. So, we made some bundles, each one of us clutching that loaf of bread. We reported for deportation. We were taken into a train depot where all these cattle cars were waiting for us. So many people counted up in one of the cattle cars. I really don't remember the exact count, 60, 70, I don't know. I just know we were packed in there like herring. One pail thrown on the floor for all our humanly needs and the doors were shut. The train started moving and panic right there. People were crying. People were screaming and it was hysterics because what's going on? What will happen? Where are we going? You could hardly sit unless you sat between somebody else's legs. The movement of the train and people needing to relieve themselves by the time this pail filled up and started sloshing around all that stuff, you can imagine the smell and the situation in that wagon. We traveled the whole night through, and when it got to be light outside, the train slowed down. There was always a little window, even in a cattle car, so the man next to it tried to peek out and see where are we going to because it was slowing down real fast. He turned around and said, "Oh, I can see barbed wire. It's some kind of a camp. People in striped uniforms busily walking back and forth. Hey, maybe we really did come for resettlement and for work," trying to console ourselves and giving a little bit of courage to what was waiting for us. Finally when the train stopped these same people, the prisoners from there, they were the ones that came to the wagons when the door was open to guide us into the camp to tell us what to do. The bundles were left standing there. They told us they would bring it to our places. It has our name on it, of course they will know where to look for us. There were three dead people on the wagon while we were coming out. We didn't realize that they didn't survive the journey. Women and men were separated and told to line up in five and move forward each one of holding still the rest of that bread. We didn't know what happened. Where did we come to? Someone whispered next to me to this prisoner, "Hey, what is this place? Where did we come to?" He said, "You're in Auschwitz." Okay, we knew of atrocities but the names of the camps we didn't know. It didn't ring a bell. We didn't know what Auschwitz was all about. Looking forward to the gate to walk in, we saw the sign, the famous sign that said in German Arbeit Macht Frei, English, work makes you free. Big joke. My father, my two brothers on the other side in the line. My mother, my sister and I in one side and two more people. Always in five. That was their military thing, lining up in five. Moving forward and my brother was on one end on the edge and I was on the other looking over to him. He said to me, "Why do you just hold the bread? Eat some of it. You need your strength. We're only going to showers and we'll meet again." I still didn't. I looked at him, and that was the last

time I saw him. I never saw him again. That was it. So, anyway, we moved forward. Finally we came in front of these S.S. with their canes, sort of like batons pointing to the left, to the right. My mother was in the middle. She was dragged out right away. I still remember what she was wearing. A beige sweater and a blue dress with little flowers. She looked back, but we could do nothing. He dragged her out and pointed to the left. My sister was told to go to the right. When I stepped forward he looked at me hesitating, saying in German, "How old are you?" I could not speak I was so stunned. I couldn't -- it didn't register what was going on here, not at all. I couldn't figure out what was going on here. So my sister standing on the side said, "Oh she's old enough. She can work. She's strong." I don't know why she said that. We didn't know which side is good which side is bad. She just said that by instinct, you know. So, he stood hesitated and pushed me towards her. Over there again, we had to line up moving forward closer towards the shower. Before we entered we had -- walking farther down the line we were told to strip naked and this on line always in five they looked us over again, anyone that had a birth mark or a scar from surgery or some women if they were middle age that survived the first selection and had some wrinkles on their body, were also taken out of this line. From then, before they took us into the shower, they shaved the hair on our bodies. Every place a person has hair has been shaved. It was horrible. My sister was standing next to me and I didn't really know who she was. It was terrible. We had to call out to each other to realize who we were. Then in these shower stalls, so-called shower stalls, a couple drips of water came down, running to the other side each one of us were given a dress. And what they did usually, on purpose, as the tall persons got a small dress and a small person like me got a huge dress. There was a problem which we did ourselves adjust exchanging the clothes between ourselves. From there they lined us up again of course in five, marched into an open field and told to sit down. We were surrounded and guarded by women, hardened criminals that were there I think for a couple of years, and they were the so-called kapos. And they had canes, walking around with these canes and making sure we sit in an orderly line of five on the ground, on the bare ground there in an open field. Well, the air was heavy there , but seeing so many people, we thought maybe it comes from some kind of an industry. There are so many people, someone must be doing some work. So, this is what we always thought, but they straightened us out. Trying to move to warm ourselves one and another's bodies because it was a very raw day, windy, and Auschwitz is not so far away from the Carpethian Mountains so the air is always sharper. We were called. They screamed at us and called us a bunch of cattle, pointing out to those big chimneys, that smoke, black smoke was belching out of there and saying, "You're not worth anything anyway. Tomorrow this is what's going to left of you. Look up there, you see this? This is what is going to be left of you." So you can imagine how we felt, but still somehow, it didn't penetrate. We didn't really and truly realize in what kind of a situation we were. We were numb. Dehumanized there already at this point. So, we just sat there. Somehow it didn't happen that way. In the morning, they lined us up and marched into a barrack.

Q: Did you stay in this field overnight?

A: Yes, on the field we sat all night long.

Q: I just need to clarify one other thing. Do you remember what month this was in 1944?

A: I think it was the end of August. So, they marched us into a barrack. There were 500 women of us, always, in this group.

Q: All from Lodz?

A: Yes, from the ghetto, we were all women out of the Lodz Ghetto. Naturally some of them were not natives of Lodz City, like I, from all different little places, and even some of them from different parts, from different countries, that happened to be deported into the Lodz Ghetto. We had one woman we called "the Francisca." She was originally French and was deported there and she used to swear in French something terrible, and she was mad after a while, but the others were mainly from Poland and the same place. So many women assigned to one bunk, just plain, bare bunks and another one of those prisoners ruling the barrack, and she was -- her title was the Blockova (ph). A barrack was called a block and she was the Blockova. She ruled this place like a queen. You had to do everything according to what she told you. You could not on your own go and relieve yourself if you had to do it. Only when she told you it was time. Some people could not control themselves, and she used to beat with that cane people half dead almost. With the rest of the barracks, every morning when it was still dark out there, we were lined up and counted. The German tzail-a-pelle (ph). You could stand there for hours if they thought the count wasn't right. It could rain, it could storm, and we had to stand there and be counted and be sure we were all there. At noon, we were lined up again, always lined up. Five women were handed a bowl, some soup in that bowl. We did not get any spoons so we had to count swallows and be sure we didn't take too many swallows to it would be enough for all the five of us. That was the thing. We were there for several days, I really don't know exactly how many, but let me tell you, every day was like eternity, it was never thinking that we would ever get out of there.

Q: You didn't work there?

A: No. I don't know if it's true, but after the war, the assumption was that the end of 1944 they were bringing in people for extermination at such rate that the gas chambers could not accommodate them. You see, we were marked strictly for extermination because we did not get any tattoos anymore. That was the thing. So, people were just sitting piled up waiting their turn and this is what happened. We were just sitting in these barracks like waiting out turn to be exterminated. And somehow one morning at the tzail-a-pelle they took this whole group of 500 women from this block, drove us into a shower, gave us some more clothes, some wooden shoes, underwear different dress, a little portion of bread and again into a cattle train. There were less of us in each train, we had more room, a pail for our needs. The train started moving again. A couple stations I remember they stopped opened up this door and the S.S. man that guarded us told us we could empty that pail, so we figured that's better treatment than what we had before. We traveled several hours and final destination we ended up in the city of Hamburg, but our camp where we dwelled was outside of the city in a place called Tzazel (ph) and the station where we traveled into the city for work was called

Popinville (ph). The camp was Tzazel. It was a sub camp of Noyagomen (ph). There we were assigned to barracks. The barracks were much smaller and every morning of course we lined up again for tzail-a-pelle. After that, we were released back and took turns going to pick up the ration of bread for the whole day. I remember we were in a real -- I and my sister found ourselves in a real small barrack. There were about 15 women only there, which was very lucky. It was unusual, so we took turns. Every day another woman went out and brought the bread which we divided by some miracle we found a string. We had to see that it was the same so we made a measure out of that string and cut the bread accordingly so each one had the same amount. Coffee, they gave us something warm to drink, the so-called coffee. It was slop, but we didn't have any other utensil except the pail that we used during the night for our needs because there was a curfew after a certain time in the camp and we could not even go to the latrine. So, whoever's turn it was to go get the provision, emptied the pail, swished it out with cold water and this is where we brought the coffee. And this is what we did drink from. You can imagine how dehumanized we were. It didn't matter where this stuff came from, as long as you could keep warm, as long as you could fill your stomach. That's what it mattered. The conditions were a little better in this camp. On the weekend, on Sundays we could wash our clothes. Naturally we had nothing else, so we walked around in our coats, the so-called coats they gave us, our underwear and dress were washed and hung out or in winter by that little stove that we had and dried it out and if it didn't dry in winter good enough by the time we had to put it on, we had to put it on the way it was. It just dried up on you. Wooden shoes, every morning we were divided into groups, certain people stayed right there in Tzazel. They were marched to Popinville and they were digging foundations for little houses they built for people that were bombed out in the big cities. But it seems like I was always the unfortunate one traveling into the city of Hamburg and my job was cleaning the rubble from the streets, from the bombs that destroyed the homes. We had to clean up the rubble on the streets, put it in wheelbarrows and push it into a certain destination. That was the beginning of 1945. At that time already when the Allies started bombing day and night, Hamburg, of course Hamburg was an important harbor city, so their aim was to destroy anything that was of importance to the Germans. Three, four times, even sometimes five times a day they came. We worked in a place called in German the Heileche-gaistvelt (ph), and it was a radar station right next to us. Everytime you could hear the little house up there, that radar turning and beeping, we knew that the Allies were coming to bomb. And it was funny, when the first alarm sounded for the Germans to take cover, the population, we watched them run with their suitcases and their buggies and their children and a great panic trying to hide before this disaster. We looked at one another and we were laughing because this did not represent this big superman race. They were scared. They were just like you and I. They were afraid to die, you know, so and now finally they came to the realization that Hitler cannot save them in any other way. It gave us great satisfaction. The only thing we didn't know if you ever live to see. We knew that Hitler was losing the war. Seeing the situation in the city, we knew he could not win this war, but if he ever would be alive to see that, that was a big question.

Q: Did you have any contact with these people?

A: No, you mean the German people? No. One time, only while we marched in the middle of the road to work, some German woman walked up to the guard and asked him who we were. We were wearing wooden shoes, kerchiefs on the head, we had shaven heads and numbers on the back and front, and the guard told her that we were prostitutes, that's why were were punished. We did not have contact with them, but sometimes we walked on the way back to camp into the train we walked past prisoner of war camps and sometimes they would feel sorry for us and throw some food in between us to be picked up. You see they were treated differently. They used to get packages from the Red Cross and also probably from home. I have no idea, so they did that. I think we passed by this French camp and this one woman that was French, she could speak to them and she naturally got a lot of food from them and a lot of support.

Q: Were there a lot of camps in this area?

A: I think in Hamburg there were a couple of prisoner camps, like I said I could not distinguish at that time what language. I just know that she spoke French and I knew those had to be Frenchmen.

Q: Was your camp a woman's camp?

A: Yes, strictly women where I was in Tzazel, that was all women.

Q: How large of a camp was it?

A: 500 women. It was a small camp. That's all there was there, all these 500 women.

Q: From your group?

A: Yes.

Q: So, you were -- had there been people there before you? Was the camp just --

A: I really don't know. There could have been something else, some kind of a German thing, which I don't remember.

Q: Were the guards better there?

A: Well, they treated us better, of course, than in Auschwitz, not that they were real fond of us, but if you watched your step you didn't get beaten up. You just had to work and be on your toes that they wouldn't catch you like they would say, slacking off. Some women were beaten, and we had SS women and I tell you these were worse than the men. Some of them were just vicious, just waiting for a chance to pounce on us.

Q: Who were the kapos? From where were they?

A: We didn't have in this camp kapos. We had like two women from the prisoners that were like inside administering the camp, from inside. Just like administration in the ghetto, there were two women and they were Czech women. I remember their names. One of them was Vera and one of them was Gerda. But then, we also rebelled and decided we should have a representative, a Polish representative, and this girl, she really worked hard at it, that she should be the one, and they picked her. And she happened to be a girl from my father's home town and she knew the family so it was -- so this is what happened. We had an infirmary in the camp. There was a Czech woman that claims that she was a doctor. She was the one that you did see, but the way she was doing things, I myself at that time could question her ability to be a doctor. But this is what we had, and we had to be satisfied with whatever help we could get.

Q: For example?

A: You cut yourself, you had a wound, or a fever, you were ill, you had a fever, to go for some kind of a medication, those minor things.

Q: What did this Czech woman do that made you doubt her abilities?

A: She -- well there was this incident when I got blood poisoning in my hand at the place where I was working. I must have hit a rusty nail and I had so much pain I couldn't sleep. I was howling with pain, so I went to this infirmary and she looked at it and she kept on poking at this with her instruments like trying to open this up by herself and she didn't know what to make of it, you see. The funny part, like I said, the situations I was in I thought I wouldn't survive, and this was another one of those situations and this labor camp, for some reason, I have no idea for what reason, I and another couple of women that needed to take care of some teeth that had to be pulled were picked with one S.S. woman and we were taken into Hamburg into a prisoner of war camp to a doctor there. They had a doctor there, which was a prisoner of war to take care of this. Can you imagine that? It's just unbelievable. I walked in there and he looked at my finger right away. I didn't know what he was saying, but the thing I could see was this and like this and this is what he would do. Then he pointed at this plain wooden table. I should just go and lay down there. I had no choice. I lay down. He took a bottle of ether and poured it on top of my face and my nose. Have you got an idea the sensation I had? I was choking. I couldn't breathe. All these bells were ringing in my ears and I thought, "Well, this is it. I am dying." I really thought I was dying. But I woke up -- after I woke up -- when I woke up I was sitting already in a chair, and my finger was bandaged. Then afterwards I had to go for changing the bandage in the infirmary then I could see what he did. My nail was gone completely. He cut part of my finger off, and there was a bandage between -- my finger was like that thick. There, there's a mark, you can see, you can see this. Look, my finger is much smaller than the other. And to this day, I can't do much with this. There's not the right sensation that I can function right with this.

Q: Was the doctor a German doctor?

A: He was a Frenchman or Italian. I don't remember what it was. It was a prisoner of war. It was in a prisoner of war camp that we went to. Then after all this, waking up from this anaesthetic, we walked back for almost close to two miles to that train to take us back to the camp. On the way there, this woman from -- this Polish woman that she -- that was in the camp, she went along, and she felt so sorry for me. She had some extra food, and she gave me something to eat, but that was very wrong because on the way the anesthetic and the food, I threw up so many times on the way, I thought I would never make it alive back to camp. But somehow, like I say, determination and strong will sometimes helps to survive this. My finger was sore for a long time. A couple days I stayed in the camp and then I went to work back, because you were afraid. You just didn't know how good it was to be in the infirmary. There was this fear remembering from the ghettos that it wasn't safe to be sick. That's what it is. Slowly it healed up. It took a long time naturally, with no food, you know, and healing takes a long process at that time with proper nourishment. But somehow I did survive. So you see, I don't understand these coincidences and I don't understand what happened. It seems like a miracle that I did survive and this is what happened to me. It's no fairy tale, it's registered there, you know.

Q: Did you build up friendships, relationships, with the other girls in your --?

A: Two, two girls from Lodz Ghetto. There were four of us, my sister and I and two other girls. We always kept together. If we were separated working somewhere else, if they just happen to work close by to German people like they were in the village right there digging those foundations, some of the German people took pity and gave them some food. So, they used to bring in the camp, and we used to share. We used to divide all this among ourselves and also give our moral support keeping together, encouraging one another just to keep on going. It was very important there to have someone. You didn't feel so alone.

Q: What kinds of things did you -- do you remember what you talked about or did you dream about?

A: Oh, yes. Oh yes. We talked about home and we dreamed about having a loaf of bread to eat and thinking maybe, maybe there's a chance that we would live through this, and there will be an end. We talked about a lot of recipes and things we used to eat at home and then once it got out of hand we'd say, "Stop, stop, we are starving. We can't take this anymore, it's too much."

Q: Did you ever laugh?

A: Not a lot, believe me. No. There weren't many causes to laughing in these places.

Q: Did you -- I mean, you were young women, did you talk about guys at all? Did you think about that?

A: Not in this situation, none of us did. We were primarily occupied with the thing of survival. That was not in your mind. How could you? I don't know how it was in other camps. We were never near other men at that time. You see, in the ghetto, friendships were formed sometimes with other young men, and some women even got married in the ghetto, but in the camps where I was it wasn't possible. You had no contact with any man, so we never thought about it. All we thought about was food. How to survive, how to fill your stomach.

Q: You never had urges or anything like that?

A: Never thought about it, no.

Q: Were there any efforts for people to get out of there, to try to escape when you were in the towns?

A: No, there was no where to go. We wore all these funny clothes. We had shaven heads, and the Germans themselves were rationed. You know, we didn't know anybody. How do you chance knocking on the door thinking this is a good German he will take you in? You had to have a place to hide somewhere and you couldn't hide on your own because you needed food. You would starve to death right there. There weren't any options.

Q: Was there much punishment or beatings, or --

A: There were beatings, yes, there were beatings.

Q: Were there selections in this camp?

A: No, not in this one.

Q: Anything else you can thing of to tell me about Tzazel, your daily life there?

A: Our daily life, what was it like? Work, coming home, trying to -- after we came home we lined up and got our soup. And we prayed that we got some potatoes in this soup, not just a bowl of water floating around. That was our main concern. And the piece of bread that we got in the morning had to last us all day long. Some people could not control themselves and they ate it right away and later on they just were terribly hungry. We always divided it in half. One for the morning, one for lunchtime, because we didn't get anything else. That was it. One time only, I remember by chance, we didn't go into the city to work. They took us with a boat across the Elbe. The water was called Elbe, and we were loading bricks on a boat. The village was called Krantz (ph). I remember that vividly. And the farmers, there was mainly farmers there, and they felt sorry for us. I don't know how they risked it. They brought a sack of potatoes and we cooked those potatoes and we thought we were in heaven. It was unbelievable. But it was only like a few days it lasted and it was gone.

Q: You were able to cook those in the camp?

A: Yes, they made it possible there on the place where we were working, not in the camp, right there, for lunch. That's where it was. So it was amazing, certain things that happened.

Q: One more question that maybe a little abstract, but during the time in these camps, did you ever think about being Jewish? Did you pray? Were you at all conscious of the Sabbath or a holiday?

A: We knew when the holidays were. We couldn't do much about it. We just commemorated in our hearts. We were conscious. We know we were Jews. The only question was why do we have to be punished like that because we are Jews? What did we do to deserve something like that?

Q: Did you ever resent being Jewish?

A: I envied the other people because they were not subjected to this. They didn't have to worry about their lives. They were never in danger, never persecuted the way we were. So, I envied them. And sometimes, you know, when you're a child you question, why was I born a Jew? Why wasn't I born a Christian to avoid all these persecutions and all this harassment? So, there were sometimes questions. After I was liberated and found out that none of my family survived, I was in a great rage for a while. I did not pray. I did not believe for quite a few years, because I could not -- it could not get through to me that there is a God and he could look down and allow this to happen. That's the way I felt. But you go back eventually because you have to have faith. That's what happens. Try to justify but still in my mind I don't justify what happened. I can't justify it.

Q: How long were you in Tzazel?

A: About nine months only.

Q: What happened? How did you get out of there?

A: Well, the Allies came close by to liberate the city, an we know that Hitler was determined to destroy the Jewish people, even when he was losing the war, we had to go down with him. So, he tried -- Hitler was determined that the people would be moved, evacuated, not being liberated. So, one day again, we were transported by train, taken out of Tzazel, Hamburg. We traveled several hours, and after several hours we got out of this train and found ourselves in Bergen-Belsen. That was something that at first didn't register what we did see there. It was unbelievable. It was the beginning of April, the first days. The camp was in disarray. They did not bury the bodies anymore. Dead bodies standing up in one pile like cardboard. The rest of them strewn all over the ground. They assigned us a barrack. There was 500 women in one barrack. Nothing, just bare floors, and this is where we were. No food, we did not get any food. We did not work anymore. The water was turned off completely, nothing. There was only a skeleton crew of the Nazis. The camp was mainly guarded by their volunteers,

militia that joined their ranks. Hungarians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, they were guarding the camp from outside. The way, after a while, I knew we were on the barbed wire, but there were other camps on the other side. A man camp, men were there and also some children were there. But in our place, there were only women. You came into a camp, there were only women and different barracks and you did nothing. In the beginning they attempted to count us in the morning. Soon, they abandoned this also. We didn't work anymore. All you did is just walk around in a daze and make some sense of what is going on here, you know. Dead people all over the place, typhoid fever, dysentery, lice, terrible.

Q: How did you make sense of it?

A: None of it, we just -- like I said, we were in a daze. What was there didn't completely register in our mind. What are we doing here? What is it? It's something that we didn't understand. What is it? What's going to happen here. That's what it was. Outside of the camp they had collerabi laying up that high. That was supposed to be food but they didn't feed us anymore and since it was a very warm spring they decomposed and smelled so horrible and with the rest of the dead bodies, the stench was terrible. You could almost choke, breathing that air there. And, you know, still, we were so starved that some of the prisoners tried to grab that decomposed food and eat, and these guys that was guarding us, they were wearing arm bands of surrender but they still were shooting at the prisoners trying to grab a hold of this and quite a few people were shot close to liberation that way. We came to this camp with a little bit of bread, the four of us, my sister and I and our two friends. We ate this and there was nothing. Nothing, we just didn't know what is going to happen here. My sister -- I don't know where my sister found a potato. Another miracle, she found a potato so we shared this potato every day a slice each one of us just to hold us together. We walked outside and people dropped dead in front of you. You just kept on walking. You didn't even pay any attention to that anymore. It was horrible. I met -- we met a woman from our home town. I looked at her, and I thought, "Oh gee she looks wonderful." In Bergen-Belsen, unbelievable of all the circumstances, we met a woman from our home town. She came over and talked to us and she said, "I hope that I live to be free some day. Do you think I will survive? What do I look like it to you?" And I answered "Oh, you look wonderful," but you know what? She was swollen. The next day she was dead. So, you see this is what happened. We were walking corpses, all of us not knowing who would go the next day. So, you see we were getting weaker every day and the barrack was so small that if you wanted to lay down and sleep you had to go between somebody's legs. Somebody had to stretch their legs and you'd put your head in between, and if you were on the other end, and you had to go out on the latrine, all the sand and all the dirt were falling on top of you from these people passing you by. That's what it was. Some people were so desperate and so thirsty, that they went to the place, the so called latrine, and they licked the sweat from the walls for water. You know, that's why we had so many diseases there.

Q: You didn't?

A: I didn't. I don't remember doing it. But the last day when there was no more potatoes we

were so weak I could barely walk any more and I told my sister and my friends that I'm just going to go into the barrack and lay down. I want to die in there. I don't want people stepping over me, you know, lay there like a -- sort of like a dog or anything. You just walk by and -- so we all went in there. We all lay down. One of them, it was the youngest, she thought before she laid there and give up she has to take one more look what was going on out there in the camp. She came back to me and said, "You know what, there is something funny going on out there." I told her, "You're hallucinating from hunger. Why don't you leave me in peace? Let me die in peace. I have no strength. I cannot make efforts to go and look what you think is going on there." She persuaded my sister to go out. My sister did. And she came back, she came back running. I don't know where she got the strength to do that. And she said to me "Get up, get up. Everybody is on their feet. Everybody is running. There's a man sitting." I don't know was it a jeep or a tank, to this day I don't remember. He was speaking through a loudspeaker in a different kind of language. We don't understand the language, but somebody is translating. The gates are opened. Everybody is running. I think she said, "We are free. We are liberated." It was -- a thousand times I talk about it and every time I cry. So, she grabbed me, I walked out, and I looked there. It didn't register what I have seen. Is this really true? So, I told her that she has to grab me here, she has to slap me or pinch me, to make me realize that I am alive and this is what really happened. We are free, we are free. The English Army liberated us the 15th of April. It wasn't their main aim. They were just passing by. That's what I was told. To a different destination, but they were attracted by the stench that came from this place and they wanted to investigate to see what was going on and this is what they found. They were astounded. They did not have enough food. They did not have enough medication. They did their best they could in the beginning to help. And it was really heart-breaking to see those live corpses that were laying, you know, in the camp getting a piece of bread with the last strength tried to hold it with it falling out of their hands because they died in the minute they were liberated. They were so far gone in starvation that it didn't help. You know, we the survivors were really lucky. I estimate that 20,000 died after liberation, but I think it's much more. Someone says 28, someone says 30 people died of diseases and starvation. It didn't help -- the medicine didn't help any more, and the food didn't help any more. They were at that point that they couldn't heal them anymore. And this is what happened. So, I was a free person. And from then on, another chapter in my life had started.

Q: How long did you remain in Bergen-Belsen?

A: Not very long, for a couple months. The reason was that the youngest friend got a message from the American zone that two brothers are alive and they would come, they wanted her to come to the American zone. And since we didn't find anyone, you know, lists came every day from different liberated places, with people's names, we never found anyone on those lists, and then her brother's came, she persuaded us to travel along. We thought, well maybe by any chance what have you got to lose? This is a camp and over there is a displaced camp, why don't we stay together for a while yet? We were liberated together. Maybe by some chance we will find someone there. So, we traveled with them to Faldafeng (ph), the four of us.

Q: How did you get there?

A: Freight trains, coal wagons, one time we ended up in a passenger car and he passed us by but the guys that were traveling, her brothers, the conductor came over to them, and you know what he told them? He should go to Hitler for payment. I thought that was funny at that time, you know, but we didn't have any money.

Q: I don't want to necessarily have you to go over everything that you told this morning. You talked quite a bit about Faldafeng. Now, just a few questions, did you ever think about going back to Lodz? I know that was a very busy place after the war.

A: Lodz wasn't my hometown. The little place Ozerkoff where I was born and I lived until the war came and until we were transported to the Lodz Ghetto. In the beginning no, we knew there was no one left. It was Communist and everyday I experienced the feeling that I was a Jew by deed and by names, the Polish population let us know we were just Jews and not really welcome where we even grew up and lived there for generations. So, it wasn't a place I really wanted to stay. We really didn't want to stay in Germany either. Too much Jewish blood spilled there. You sit in these displaced camps, waiting where do we go from here? It was a no-win situation, even after survival. Sitting in a displaced camp trying to figure out which country will allow you to emigrate and make a new life.

Q: How did you decided where to go?

A: As a child, I heard so many wonderful things about the United States. I was not able to travel to -- at that time they had these illegal allias to Palestine. I wasn't strong enough to survive a journey like that. So, I thought I need a place where I could feel more relaxed and more sure of myself. I would love to go to the United States. There were choices. You could go to Canada. Some went to Australia. But I preferred the United States. I always heard my mother admire the United States and think well of it that people could live free here. This is where I wanted to go. This is the place I chose, finally, when we were allowed to emigrate from there.

Q: This was in what year?

A: 1951 I came to the United States.

Q: What was your first impression when you arrived here?

A: Of disbelief. First of all, we did not know English. It was a new ball game. You had to learn all over. It's like being newborn again. Different customs, different way of living. The way people shopped and the way you lived and what you did and because we had missed our education, it was hard for us to make a living and not knowing the language either, you did menial work, whatever was suitable for you at that time. We had no choice, you know, but

we worked hard. My husband and I were very determined to succeed here. We saw the freedom that we had here. Although in the beginning I was wary of uniforms and I walked down the street and I saw policemen on my side of the street, I'd cross the street. There was something -- like in the camp after I was liberated in Bergen-Belsen. The gates were opened and when I finally decided I would venture beyond escape I kept on looking back, if nobody was going to shoot me in the back for walking out of this place. It was being very insecure and not really you were free, and not really believing that you were finally free and you could live a life of your own without being afraid. So it was the food, amazing what you could buy in the supermarkets. The choices you had, what you could eat. It was something I never dreamed of. Even living in Poland and considering ourselves middle class people, we always had a enough to eat, and it was nourishing food, but this we called luxurious food that people ate every day here. We couldn't get over it. And the way the big department stores worked. In the beginning people were so friendy where I came to Shaboigen (ph). Everyone said hello to you on the street. Everybody tried to communicate and the people I met always said, "Listen to what we say and just try word by word speak. We will help you along." Naturally we had to go to vocational school because we wanted to be citizen of this country. So, you had to go and learn English and about the government. We did this right away. I wanted to belong somewhere. I wanted a place that I could call this is my country and I'm welcome here. So, we went and in 1957 we got to be United States citizens. Let me tell you. My older daughter was born in Germany and she was so envious we got our citizen papers. I think she was 11 or 12, she could have waited until she was 18 and got automatic citizenship, but she wanted to be a citizen right away, so we had to go to the courthouse and she went through the whole process. She was very proud to present her citizen paper -- she envied her sister. Her younger sister was born here and she was a natural citizen and she envied her this.

Q: How did you get to Shaboigen?

A: Well, you see, actually my destination was Trenton, New Jersey, but my sister came two years before me and her destination was Shaboigen. Every city -- every Jewish community decided to take in so many people. Since there were only the two of us, she wanted us to be together and asked the local Jewish council to bring us over here. This is how I ended up being in Shaboigen also.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: I think there may be a few stories we might have missed. When you were in Tzazel and you were working in Hamburg, as I understand it there was a situation where your guard was trapped or injured. Can you tell me about that?

A: He was not injured. The thing is that they were bombing the city like I said before, day and night, the flyers came. The German population fled into the bunkers, but we had only a basement to go into. They did not think of our safety. They just didn't want the flyers to see any movements from above, so we were herded into this basement and this is where we stayed through the bombing until it was all clear. So, one day, these flyers came so close and the bomb fell so close we all from the impact of it, from them, we all flew on top of each other and the lights went out. This was the end, we thought. We were buried alive. When the all clear sounded and we made our way back up, we saw, see I consider all these savings like a miracle, we saw why we were saved. The bomb fell a distance away. It did not explode. It made a huge hole. We could see that bomb in one piece, but the rubble that was flying buried our guard, the S.S man up to here in that rubble. He was leaning against the wall of that basement where we were downstairs. See, he was not allowed to go in with us -- not together, you know -- so he was leaning against the wall, and he stood there helplessly buried into this -- in this rubble. Well, who do you think digged him out? We did. And you're always astounded, why did you do that? So what should we do? What choices did we have? We had wooden shoes coats with marked numbers, shaven heads, and a strange city that we don't know anyone. Where do you think you could run without any money and without any destination? Any door you would open, maybe they would denounce you. Sooner or later someone will come and free this guy, then they will hunt us down, one two three. We stand out in a crowd, right? Because we were running away, we would be shot on the spot. None of us wanted to die. Because of the situation in Hamburg, each one of us deeply in heart hoped that by some miracle, by some chance, we will survive this, which did happen, that's why I am here to tell this story. So, it was a good thing that we did not try to run away, but before I finish telling the reason, every place I speak everyone is astounded. They couldn't figure out in the beginning why we did this, but there was no choice. We had to do it.

Q: Did you stand around and look at each other and say, "What should we -- should we do it?"

A: Well, one started doing it so we just all helped along. He did not even -- he didn't say anything, just went about his business, you know, the way it was.

Q: Did he treat you more kindly afterwards?

A: I really can't remember that. Some of them were nice guys. Some of them were like they were forced into this service, but you know we never had any personal contacts. They never expressed their feelings or whatever they felt about this place that we would know exactly what they were thinking. But some of the actions, you know, talked for themselves.

Q: Maybe I missed something, this particular guard was male?

A: Yes.

Q: Were most of your guards in your camp women?

A: Most of them -- no, they were sort of half and half I would say.

Q: This was a women's camp?

A: It was a women's camp, but we had men in the beginning, then women guards, women, S.S. women started coming in and they also marched with us to work, watched us and like I said before, they were more vicious, some of them, than the men.

Q: Were any of the men to your knowledge flirtatious at all with the prisoners?

A: Maybe, I don't know that for sure. Maybe, with those people that were on top, that they had to be in contact, like convey the messages what we should do or whatever, it could happen. I don't know.

Q: And actually, because we're so out of order will you just state for the record where we're talking about. When we're talking about a camp, where are we now again?

A: In Hamburg.

Q: And the camp?

A: Well in the city of Hamburg when we digged this guy out of the rubble.

Q: Right, but the camp you were part of at that time was which one?

A: We were at Noyangomen. It was a subcamp of Noyangomen, which was also an extermination camp. So, you see, like taking us out from Auschwitz, it was no big deal to them. They could always get a hold of us and exterminate us whenever they felt like it. It was a labor camp. We were treated better than a real concentration camp or an extermination camp. But we were never sure of our lives from day to day what's in their mind and what they could do with us. So it was really --

Q: Were you taken directly to Tzazel, or did you spend any time in Noyangomen?

A: We spent -- no, not in Noyangomen. From Auschwitz, actually we were taken directly into the city of Hamburg while they were preparing this camp in Tzazel, we stayed in sort of a huge building. It must have been a military building. One side was leaning against the water there. I remember that. There the 500 women were also in barracks with the same people

were ruling it and then after several weeks we were transported into Tzazel there.

Q: Did most of the 500 make it?

A: Some of them died after liberation of typhoid fever, quite a few of them from our group, but I would say quite a few of them made it too. Our -- my two friends and my sister, they made it. We were liberated together. One of them died after the war here in the United States, several years ago. She died of cancer.

Q: What did you learn about your family and how did you learn it?

A: We learned from -- first of all my mother was taken out of line and went to the wrong side. We learned the other side meant extermination. About my father and two brothers, we weren't sure, but this man which was a neighbor in Lodz Ghetto, he was in the line behind them. He told us that they went to the wrong side. Still, we searched. By some, by some coincidence we thought maybe by some miracle, maybe they did survive, even going the other way. It happened. Very few, but it happened. So, we still fooled ourselves. You know, we -- when we were separated, we made sort of a pact that if we survived and could get back to the home town where we came from, we would meet there, but I never had a chance to go back. After I was so many years in the United States that nagged me, thinking maybe, I haven't found anybody anyplace maybe some one is in my home town, maybe somebody that survived. I went back in the year of 1978, ended up in my home town there was, like from close to 5,000 Jews, it was like a dead city. One Jewish man lived there. One person, would you believe that? Of course, there was hardly anything Jewish around. My sister knew I was going and she said, "Remember to go to the cemetery." The only one that died a natural death was my grandfather, "Go visit his grave." So I asked this man he should take me to this cemetery. He said, "What cemetery?" You know, they made a pasture out of the cemetery and they took all the stones, you know, the matzevos (ph), and they made a sidewalk. And when I looked at Schindler's List, the movie, and I saw that, and I says, "Oh my God, he did exactly the same thing in other places." After liberation, this man petitioned the Polish government to get this sidewalk out, but you know they don't come out in one piece and not exactly the same shape anymore. All these stones were taken back in the place where the cemetery and they're just laying there in two piles of rubble. It was impossible to distinguish who was who and there was no graves. It was like nothing. That's what there was left.

Q: How did you find this man?

A: Should I tell you something? The minute I walked into the city, my younger daughter traveled with me, I knew right away where I was. I saw the place where we lived and because I was standing there looking around, it's such a small place, that one guy walked over to us and said, "What are you looking for?" And I said, "Well, I used to live here once." Then he knew right away I was Jewish. So he said, "I'll take you to a man here, he lives here," and he took us to this guy. So this is how we did communicate. You know, I went back to

Auschwitz that year. I traveled a little bit and I thought I have to go back there. My younger daughter was hysterical. She almost had a nervous breakdown going there. It was like she was -- after a while she said her feeling, she thought I'm not safe here. Here they come to exterminate me too. Then she looked at all these things, but what I wanted to do, and the reason I went back is, this is where I left my parents. This is where I left my brothers. I don't have a grave. You know, it comes a High Holiday, people go on the cemetery before Yom Kippur. They say prayers. I have no one. I have no where to go and here I am in Poland and I have this chance. So, I went and said Kaddish and sort of communicated, and I felt good. I paid my last respects to them there. So, I have a little peace of mind that I did that. It made me feel good.

Q: How do you think you survived all this?

A: I don't know. When I talk about it, some people say, "It wasn't your time to die." And when I go and speak in places, they say, you see, you survived so you will be able to tell us what happened. So this is their interpretation. You had to be here to tell us what happened so we know what was going on.

Q: Do you think it required any special inner strength?

A: Well, my sister, for instance, cannot do that a lot. She does it where she lives in Milwaukee now, once in a while.

Q: I mean the actual surviving, do you think that that took something special?

A: It did. It took determination. It took will power because I know that a lot of women were in the same situation. They were just as weak as I. They gave up. When you give up, you die.

Q: But you didn't?

A: I didn't. I don't know why I kept on going and like people said to me when they look at me, "Amazing that you could push that wheelbarrow with all this rubble. You're so little." I said, "You'd be amazed what you can do under threat and determination if your life is at stake."

Q: Did you ever want to die?

A: There was a time where we thought -- there were instances where I thought what is it all for? There's no end to it. What's going to happen? And I thought, "Maybe it's better to be dead and not suffer any more." But then, I talked myself out of it, because my parents always said, "Remember life is precious and hold on to it as long as you can." My father was very Orthodox. He was a Hasid, but when all this came out and we were observing the kashrut, the laws, you know, but then all this came out, he said that the Bible interprets anything, any measures to survive and live are excused. So, it's excused to eat anything that help you to survive. That's the way he felt, and I always remembered that.

Q: One more question, I'm sure that when you think about or dream about these years and I'm sure it's often.

A: I do dream a lot, yes.

Q: Are there a couple really strong images that constantly come back to you?

A: Yes. The time when I lost my parents, the time of liberation, that all comes back to me, and sometimes I have nightmares after this. I wake up my heart beating, the Nazis are chasing me, I'm trying to hide, and every hiding place they find. One time I was running so fast I was out breath and I thank God that I woke up. I could hardly catch my breath while I was waking up. I could remember everything so vividly. So, it's hard. I think the Holocaust will walk with the survivors till the day we die. It's a part of us, you know. It will always be with me. It'll never leave me, I don't think so.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say?

A: Pardon?

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: No, just that I'm glad that I'm living in this country, and I'm grateful for the people that want to listen to me and maybe, doing this, maybe I'm doing something good. I know the children in schools are listening. I know from their comments because they write me notes. I get stacks of letters and from their comments I can see that they were listening to me, because I know that they quote certain things that I said. It made me feel that I'm doing something good and useful in this world, and maybe I will not change the world, but I have a tiny little part in trying to do that. This is very satisfactory.

End of Tape #3
Conclusion of Interview