United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Romana Koplewicz
October 8, 1993
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with Romana Koplewicz, conducted by Gail Schwartz on October 8, 1993 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's volunteer collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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ROMANA KOPLEWICZ
October 8, 1993

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: The following is an interview with **Romana Margitte**(ph) **Koplewicz.** The interview is being conducted at the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum on October 8, 1993, by **Gail Schwartz.** What is your full name?

Answer: **Romana Koplewicz.**

Q: And your maiden name?

A: **Margitte**(ph).

Q: And where were you born?

A: **Warsaw, Poland.**

Q: What was your date of birth?

A: April 26, 1919.

Q: Tell me something about your household growing up, who you lived with?

A: I was living with my parents and with my sister, which was six years older than me and played extremely important role in my life. It was rather a normal life. I attended private school all my life, and it was expected of me to do my homework and to be a good student. And it was a girls' school. The name of the school was **Frieda Mierlos**(ph) in **Warsaw**, and I went there from kindergarten through 12 – no, the – I graduate gi – this was a gymnasium, which I graduate in 1936. I became – I got very good education in the school and after this I apply to law school, which

wasn't my first choice. Originally I wanted to be a pediatrician, but since being Jewish it was impossible to get to medical school in **Warsaw.** I even mentioned to my parents that I would like to go to **France**, but my parents were old fashioned and the idea of a girl going to **France** didn't appeal to them. Could be if I would really fight, and wanted very much, I would go, but the upbringing was totally different than it is now of young people. And I was two years in law school, which I didn't finish because it was in subject that it was ancient law and middle age law which appealed to me. And then for a – before the war started, I was helping my father in his factory, where I was typing a little bit, doing some bookkeeping, but nothing to get excited. And then the war started –

Q: Okay, let's talk a little bit more about your home. Did you live in the town, within the town center?

A: In – in the city of **Warsaw** I was living, we had a very nice, comfortable apartment. I had the room which I share with my sister, which I adore. She paints my life with roses. She was the best person before I met my husband, in my entire life.

Q: And what was her name?

A: **Edith. Edith, Esfia**(ph).

Q: Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood, or –

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A: It was a Jewish – not a goo – not a nice neighborhood. I would say too, except the janitor, hundred percent people were Jewish. Had three courts. The name of the street was **Simonhof**(ph) **13.** It wasn't a nice neighborhood.

Q: Why? In what sense?

A: Why? The streets were narrow, the people – the stores were ugly. Everything was – if anybody knows **Warsaw**, they know that it wasn't a nice neighborhood. I was walking to school, we had always a housekeeper and we're going for vacation, I went to camp. And I went even before the war to **Latvia** to see my father's family, my grandmother, which I hardly knew, my aunts and uncles and cousins. And I had many, many friends and it was a nice, quiet life, I would say. I didn't know any better.

Q: Were your friends Jewish children?

A: Majority of them were Jewish. As I say, except the janitor and the housekeeper, everybody was Jewish.

Q: And at school were your other classmates all Jewish also?

A: This was a Jewish private school. However, my first encounter was in law school, where, you know, it was a slogan, down with Jews. But the Jewish girls were the – we should be with the Jewish women but not with the Jewish men. And I

witnessed when they were cutting with the blades, the coats from the Jewish students, it was winter. Do you know what I am talking about?

Q: Well, you want to tell us a little bit more about that? Who was doing it?

A: It was tremendous hatred toward Jewish students. I went to University of **Joseph Pilsudski,** which was – at this time he was dead, because he died when I graduate my gymnasium. And the hatred, there were many things which couldn't – Jews couldn't get. The majority of Jews who wanted to be physicians went to **Italy**, to **France,** to **Czechoslovakia**. And they tried everything, although some of them were very poor and it was very hard to support themselves overseas, but they were working as waiters and some help from the parents. However, since I was accepted to law school, and in the beginning I thought maybe I'll be a law-lawyer, and – however when the instructor professor was coming to the class and you know, the Jews were sit – standing behind the benches and he said still, the Jewish student will not sit on the left hand side, I will not start the lecture. And he was leaving, and this was right away totally chaos in the class because the Christian were beating up immediately the Jewish male students. The women they didn't touch. And many times when I was walking on the street in **Warsaw**, in so called mixed neighborhood **[indecipherable]** Christian, I saw men who were attacked by young Christian boys.

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Q: Did you yourself experience, an – I mean, I know you observed anti-Semitic incidents, did you yourself –

A: I tell you, til the war –

Q: – experience any?

A: – I didn't have any contact exactly, I didn't have any Christian friends. I – so i-I – I was very limited because I was living in a ghetto, you know, yeah. I was going to shows, and we went to opera. I remember "**Madame Butterfly**" was a Japanese song – singstress – sa – woman who was singing. And however my direct contact, so different from my husband, who went to a state school, was totally different. Some of our teachers in my gymnasium were Christian, however, it was a different relation.

Q: How religious was your family?

A: My mother was a believer, my father wasn't. He – Friday within – my mother was lighting candles, but my father was never there because he was working Saturday. The business was open on Saturday and Sunday he was off. And my mother was kosher – the home was kosher, however, my father outside was eating not kosher. And I was not believing at all, and my mother was always very upset because she couldn't understand why I cannot believe it. However, came a moment in her life when we're thrown out – during the ghetto, from our apartment and we're

living not far from **Umschlagplatz**. You know what is **Umschlagplatz**? There were the trains were loading the Jews, and the Jews were going to the trains with the name of God **[indecipherable]** I heard this, I remember. And she said, children, don't believe in God. And I will never forget this because it was coming from a woman who was so blindly believing in God that if the hole would open in front of me, and I will go in, it would be less than to hear from my mother that there was no God.

Q: Did you have any Jewish schooling?

A: No.

Q: Any training?

A: No. I don't know how to – I understand Yiddish, and now when I am working with Russian refugees, they are very happy when they hear. My Yiddish is very poor, but I can manage very nicely. And they getting much better rapport than to – through translator, which I always have. And since I'm Polish, I understand Russian too.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: Polish. And I was angry at my par – at my mother that she didn't speak, I was ashamed a little bit that she didn't speak a perfect Polish. However, when we came

to this country and it came to my daughter friend, she said, why your mommy is talking Spanish? In her eyes it was that I was talking Spanish.

Q: What were your parents' names?

A: **Maria** and **Samuel Ma-Magitte**(ph)

Q: And what kind of work did your father do?

A: My father had a factory, dyeing factory, where he employed 50 people. It was in his building, he had few of the real estate. He was dyeing wool, silk, **[indecipherable]**, rayon, felt, feathers, everything possible. And he had this – he came to **Poland** before the first war in 1914, I think, and he built up to – he was a very comfortable man.

Q: So you were considered middle class?

A: Yes, upper middle class.

Q: Upper middle class.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. Why did you want to become a doctor?

A: I loved children and I wanted to be a pediatrician and I felt – although I think I was wrong because I'm very poor with science, I am rather for humanities. And it was glamorous and that's what I ar – but i – I – most likely i-it – it was not a strong wish, because I could go abroad, my father could support me.

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Q: All right, well let's come up to the time now when conditions started to change and war broke out.

A: It started to change September first, immediately, the – our –

Q: T-Tell me what you were doing and what you remember from then.

A: September first – sept – August 31st or 30th, I came from my boyfr – in – not – not even a boyfriend, a friend who is now my husband.

Q: How did you meet him?

A: I met him in law school when he was – and through his brother-in-law, who was a lawyer for my father. So when my sister was going there which was helping my father in business, she said to his brother-in-law, I have a very good looking sister and how about if we'll introduce? And when he saw me he decided that he fell in love with me, most likely, but he was fighting – he wasn't ready to get married, my husband. My husband was thinking about having a child with a rather healthy Christian girl. Why Christian I don't know, and to raise the child right.

Q: What year did you meet your husband?

A: 1935. '36, excuse me.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were – you know, were –

Q: And you saw each other –

A: Yeah, but we never had a date. Then the war start – wi – I met him – I – I don't remember if I knew that he is going. I went with my girlfriend to the country, to the mountains, it was August for a few weeks and he was there coming h – and I saw him, he was always wearing tiny shorts because he is a very good tennis player. So I always remember, and – and as a matter of fact, he made the ji – I had the cold and I was sharing the room with a girlfriend and he came in to find out about me, and he said make room. I was 20 years old and I got very insulted and I didn't talk to him for a week. I was very naïve, stupid. And then I saw him occasionally, but whenever, as I said never had a date. He had some girlfriends and I have some boyfriends and the life went on, and in the ghetto when the ghetto was being closed – we were in the part which was ghetto, because it was a Jewish neighborhood.

Q: Okay, let – let's an – before we get to the ghetto.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, it was August and you were in the country, and then –

A: And we came back the same day and I remember my mother was waiting on the balcony because she was very nervous what happened to me. And we came in September first –

Q: Correct.

A: – the Germans were throwing bomb on **Warsaw.**

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Q: And where –

A: And the Polacks were robbing the stores and killing the Jews, before the Germans occupied **Warsaw.**

Q: And what happened? What other memories do you have of that day?

A: And it was a three court house. You know, in **Europe** mostly are courts. The first one, the second and the third. You know, in – it was – i-in **New York** you have very few houses where they have a court. Do you know what I'm talking? In the middle ha – you know, the – the part of the building in the middle, th-they threw the bomb and killed some tenants and **[indecipherable]**

Q: This was your building?

A: This was my building where I was living, but we're living in the third one.

Q: Yeah.

A: And we're always running to the basement, I remember, because they were bombing to **Warsaw** – seven days and – and they right away walked in. And the life changed completely. What I was doing, in the beginning were able to go to my father' factory, which was still working, slowly. You know, it was outside of the ghetto, his factory. And –

Q: But the ghetto hadn't been formed yet, not –

A: No, no.

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Q: – for another year.

A: No, but you know, there were strictly Christian neighborhoods and Jewish neighborhoods.

Q: You were in the Jewish neighborhood.

A: Yes, I was living in the Jewish neighborhood. And then it came January 1940, my sister moved with her husband to us. She had the different apartment, but we decided to be together.

Q: From September to January, you were working at your father's factory?

A: Yes, helping **[indecipherable]**

Q: Did you have enough food?

A: Yes, yes. We were comfortable, and we had jewelry which later on we're selling to survive, so it wasn't bad. I never suffered hunger. I – I didn't have a place where to sleep later on when I was acting as a Christian, but I had money to buy food. And then in January, Gestapo came, three men from Gestapo and ask for **Michael Minz**(ph). And my sister grab him and run away through the kitchen entrance. That were to **[indecipherable]**

Q: This is her husband.

A: Yes. They left a note. They said that they came to **Michael Minz**(ph) to find out some things from him. He wasn't from **Warsaw**, he was from a different small town

in **Poland, Międzyrzecz,** and they left a note. And when my father came back – that he should go to the Gestapo they left a note – my sister didn't want to let him go to Gestapo but my father – and we had a manager, my father, of this dyeing plant, who was German descent. He was Polish, but he was a **Volksdeutsche.** His wife immediately, you know, decided to, because they had privileges, they were like Germans. And he went with them. My sister was standing outside the Gestapo and her husband, they were married two years only, and this – this foreman, and they arrested him.

Q: Arrested your brother-in-law?

A: Yes, and since then we didn't hear anything from them, and then we find out from other people, doctors, teachers, anybody who had some education was arrested. 300 men. My just – my sister got very busy with some lawyers to find out what happened to them **[indecipherable]**. Then we find out that they were killed right away in the forest near **Warsaw**. This was the cream of a cream, you know, the elite of the Jewish intelligence. As a matter of fact, she had a nervous breakdown after. She became – she got a nervous hiccup I remember, and she was going to neurologists. We never heard from them. And then it was – we started to see – my father was extremely enterprising, decided, you know, that he will dye – he will be buying some linen and dyeing this home and selling maybe to outsider, this – but

this didn't work. Then he started to plant some vegetables in some lots near the houses. But by the time the vegetables were ripe, they were stolen by other people. He was trying everything, he was extremely energetic, and – and he was even smuggling – when the factory was – when the ghetto was closed, to supervise the work, which it was there –

Q: When – when did his factory close down?

A: I don't remember, but it was walls and walls and we didn't let him and he was denounced by a janitor from the place where it was in the factory, that he said when **Hitler** will come, my father will kill him. The Christian janitor said this. They arrested my father and they put him in a space where he couldn't stay, only he – he could see – sit with the knees, you know, like this here. In those days a number wasn't called, they kept him 48 hours and they let him go, and he came back.

Q: What month was this?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Spring of –

A: Yeah.

Q: – 1940.

A: Yeah. It was getting worse and worse and from the small town around the war zone, which were German liquidating, they were bringing everybody to **Warsaw**. So

we had five rooms, two rooms we had to let – to sublet for people from **Lódz**, two families. And the quarters are getting smaller and smaller, we are sleeping in the dining room, we are sleep – and I was sleeping together with my sister. Altogether – the ration was bread which wasn't edible but **[indecipherable]** it was more sent that it was bread, but we didn't suffer hunger. However, was interesting, when somebody, when the neighbors sometimes were coming, we were trying to clean up from the table, because not to show that we have food and maybe they don't have it. And then they liquidated second part of the ghetto which was in a different part of **Warsaw** and they brought everybody to this part where we were.

Q: So your house was already in where the ghetto was –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay. And the ghetto was closed off in October of 1940.

A: Yes, but this time already we had two ghettos. In 1940, originally a different part of **Warsaw** had the ghetto, and where I was living. Then, slowly, they liquidated the other part, and everybody was here, you know. Don't forget the meantime they were grabbing people more and more and sending and many people voluntary were coming because they were starving from hunger. I remember some second or third cousin came. They took away her husband. She came with two children to say goodbye. She said, I was told that there were work, and I will be able – they will

support us, and she was going herself to **Umschlagplatz.** And there were many like this. They couldn't survive. They were more and more dead body on the street in **Warsaw,** especially children, who are dying with their genitals covered with those garbage flies. It was awful. And I remember I was carrying in a packet stockings, which I was taking to somebody, you know, I – it is very hard for – when you had to run, there were people who were fixing this. So a kid grabbed the bag from my hand and started to eat. They thought this is a brown bag, that this is food. It was getting worse and worse, you know. The Gestapo and the Germans were beating up walking on the street. You couldn't cross the street. And the walls which they built, you know, people were smuggling because there was still some getting food. Kids were smuggling and they were killing those children near the walls, if they were carrying a bread, or something. It – and less and less people were, because the trains to **Treblinka** were going all the time. We didn't know the **Treblinka** – some people were even getting cards, come here because we are working and everything is fine. The German machine was so sophisticated and complicated, that they could accomplish that people voluntary were going. I-It was totally unbelievable. And we were selling many things. I remember my mother had the chain which was from my grandmother, and – and every time, you know, we – we had to – there were still people who were selling this to the Christian. First of all, the first time we had to

give away the radios, bring to the precinct. Then the fur coats. Then everything that was valuable, they could come to you and – and clean up the whole house, you know, yeah. And the quarters, living quarters were getting smaller and smaller. My mother was kosher, and my father brought, how you call **slonina**, felt from the pig? How you call in eng –

Q: Lard?

A: Lard, yeah. And h-he brought a big piece, and she was, you know, a – how you call –

Q: Cooking?

A: Not cooking only, because it was a piece, so she had to make like butter, how – how you say –

Q: Melting it.

A: Melting it. And she said, I'm – and he told her that this is lamb fat. And she said, I wonder why I didn't – why we didn't use this before the war, it tastes so good, you know. She was very naïve in this respect. And he was much more enterprising, he was a very strong man. When you couldn't get coal, and our apartment were warming u – warm up by coal, he brought half a ton of coal up on the 10th floor on his back. And then it came that they moved – they started to build the shops for German industry, you know, we were working. First of all they throw us out from

this apartment, there were still four of us, from the ghetto. And they took – they gave us one room near the **Umschlagplatz** where –

Q: Do you remember when this was?

A: May I ask **[indecipherable]** maybe he remembers?

A2: **[indecipherable]** I remember it?

Q: That's all right, okay.

A: We were there a short time. Few months, I think we were. So we left the apartment the way we were. We weren't allowed to take anything. We went down and I will never – one room and it happened that this apartment, I met later a woman who survived **Russia**, was her parents' apartment. I will never forget this apartment because the bedbugs were coming from the ceiling.

Q: This is the new place?

A: The new place, yeah. And it was a balcony and we heard the trains coming and the Jews going to the train, and praying to God. And it was constant. The trains were going constantly. And then they opened the Germans shops, and we were able – I and my – my mother, when we're going to the shops we're hiding her. We put a big closet, you know, and cover part of the wall and **[indecipherable]** because she couldn't work. She – she had heavy arthritis and she was overweight. So my father was working in a different shop and my sister and myself were working not far from

my father in a different shop. The name of the shop was **[indecipherable] roefrich, r-o-e-f-r-i-c-h,** from **[indecipherable]** and we're sewing uniforms. There I met part Jews, which I never met before, it was the working class of Jews. **Bund, b-u-n-d.** And they were singing the Jewish songs very, you know **[indecipherable]** you know, all those **[indecipherable]** and – you know, and they were those one who started later the uprising. They were very, very important Jews that I met in my life, which some of them survived. And they were much more doing for the Jews than people like me, who was a Jewish princess. And then we're sewing, but then started selection. All the time the Gestapo was coming. We all had to go outside and they were looking if there were older people or some people who had the pimple on the nose or something, they were taking away. And meantime there was, in 1942, the street of – name was **Millar**(ph) and this time was a big selection and they took tremendous amount of Jews. And I will never forget my neighbors, who had the little girl **Marilka**(ph) and they put her in a suitcase and they made holes in the suitcase for air. However, she started to cry. They were living on the same house, and Germans put the cara – machi – guns, and shot this suitcase, as – this couple left the suitcase and walked away. There are things which always stays in your mind. So there were less and less Jews in the ghetto because they were killed, or they were taking to **Treblinka**. We didn't notice the – there were some people who are coming

from **Treblinka** who threw themselves together with the clothing, because they were telling them that you have to go and you know, to the shower and this – those things, you know. So, you know, some of them who are helping to sort the clothes into this, th-the shoes, and – th-they got back to **Warsaw** and they say remember, **Treblinka** has ba – is burning – crematoriums are working day and night. So with that already, the idea that this is not that they are sending them to work, only they are sending them to be killed.

Q: So you were called out some – for selections that time?

A: I was not, no, because we're young. My sister and I were young, and my father, who was this time in the late 50's was hiding when they were calling. You know, you never knew for whom they were looking. However, one week –

Q: Were you ever called down to – to the street? You were never called down to –

A: No.

Q: No.

A: However, once we came, and the hot soup was on the table, my mother was gone. She came out from this hiding place to cook the soup for us, and they came and they took her away. I run to **Umschlagplatz,** but she was gone. We continued work, and once I came and I heard that they took my sister. And I went to **Umschlagplatz** and they told me that she was on this and this train, which was staying, and I entered the

train. When I was in the train, they told me that my sister was hiding, that she wasn't on that train, and I decided to jump. It wasn't – the train was just moving, so I – I wasn't a heroine, you know. They helped me, you know, and they picked me up and through the window, because the doors were locked. My sister heard that I was in the train, she went to the other train. She was extr – extremely important to me. In the same time, we jumped from two different wagons and we met on the outside of the train and we went back to the ghetto. And my father was sitting on the floor near the door. He said, I knew that you will come back. We decided that we have to do something to leave the ghetto because we didn't have a chance. My father knew a man, a Christian, he was a lawyer, who took over the management of his factory. And through him we got false papers for my sister and for myself. I was looking more like Christian than her, because the whole Jewish tragedy was in her eyes. You know, they say **[indecipherable]** in Jewish eyes, there is such a thing. I was always smiling and – and really, although – and my Polish and her Polish was excellent, and this was extremely important. And we said – and it was very hard for her to move around because she could be very easy recognized. So through this man he found somebody, and she was sitting mostly inside. This was April, before the uprising.

Q: April 1943.

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A: Yes. And I got papers too, and I went – I rented somebody – my friend told me that she's coming back to the ghetto because her husband – as a man you didn't have a chance, because of circumcision. And I took over her room. And I was working in the ghetto as a Christian this time. I could see my father, I had papers as a Christian.

Q: What kind of work were you doing?

A: This was factory for **Germany**.

Q: Manufacturing work.

A: Yeah, I was very gutsy. They were making – I – from lead or something. It was a short time. I was coming in the morning, and leaving five o'clock. This time I could al – I could always bring for my father some food, who was in a different **[indecipherable]** this time. My sister was already on the false paper hidden, you know. And then it was Passover, the first **Seder**, Sunday night and I stayed, I wanted to be with my father. And he asked me stay there today, maybe it was Sunday night. I say okay, I will stay. And the next morning when I got up, it was Monday, I found out that the uprising was, but it was in different – it was in the part of the ghetto where my husband was. And I got dressed, I had the coat with the collar from a rabbit. Jews weren't allowed, so when I went to the false paper, I bought myself a rabbit and I put to my coat to look more like Christian. And I went to the guard and I passed the – it was a house ba – from – who had two entrances from the street. The

Jews in towers were staying in the court and praying to God. It was quiet in this part of the ghetto because the uprising started there. And I went to the guard, I showed him the papers. He said, what you are doing in the ghetto? I said **[indecipherable]** caught me, and I decided I didn't have a choice, I had to stay. He looked at me, he looked at the paper, and as I say, the number was **[indecipherable]** and he let me through. And near the guard were children six, seven years old, **Jude, Jude**, waiting for the Jews to show them to the German. I had guts, and I walked in with my head up. And my sister, maybe one street from there she was waiting. She knew that to get out I had to come there. She knew that – she was sure that she will never see me. And I met her and I said, don't go in there, because it was the worst time. The Polacks were showing left and right, you know, and they could recognize me. No Germans stopped me in two and a half years. But the Polacks, who knew me from university one, my husb – my father's work and – and luckily that I had money, because this man, my father gave him money, and whenever I needed. And there was incident when I was living in the room, in the furnished room, there was a little boy, the first question he asked me, if I ever saw a Jew. So I said yes. Is this true that Jew have a tail? I said, I don't think so, but I don't know. And when they started the uprising in ghetto, I – I knew that I have a father there and I had a husband – husband, not a husband, we weren't officially married, but I – I felt, you know. I

went to the wall, and I was looking and next to me was standing a Christian woman and she said, very good that they burning the Jews, only they spoiling our Easter. This was **vox populi**, it wasn't a single voice, everybody felt the same way. As I was living in this furnished room, once is coming a woman and she said to me, may I see your papers? I said yes. What happened to the woman which was living here before, she was Jewish, are you Jewish, too? I said, I don't know if – I never met her, but I'm not Jewish. She said, anyway, we'll go to Gestapo. She – it was after the curfew. She was a Polish woman, but she was working for the Germans, and she – we're walking, it was quite a walk. We were walking, I said look, I can give you money, I have a watch, let me go. She said no, we're going. Suddenly she got tremendous pain, and we stopped near the pharmacy where she was ringing the bell, it was after the curfew. And the owner was living in the same building, opened the door for us, and we walked in and she said to him, if you will let her go, she is Jewish, you will be killed too. You have to help me. And he gave her some medication, I don't remember, and she continued to walk with me. We're maybe quarter of a mile from Gestapo, she said give me the money and give me the watch. I will **[indecipherable]** but I will not do anything to you. And I didn't move. I get out from this room and I didn't have a place where to go. I went to the hotel in a very nice neighborhood in **Warsaw**, **Marshal**(ph) **Kostka**(ph) street. And the man

who took my papers said, I am sure your papers are all right because Gestapo is coming every night and checking the papers. I didn't have a choice. I said, my papers are okay. And I was sleeping there, nobody came. And I was looking through the window, and I wanted to commit suicide. I had nothing to lose. And I said, if they will find me, they will not know even who am I. But I was young, an-and I said no, you cannot give up. And the next morning I walked on the street, and I met my friend, a Jewish woman who was working as a governess, French governess. She was studying medicine in **France** and her French was perfect and we were very friendly. She was working for a very nice family. She was taking care of two girls. And she said – I said, **Marisha**(ph), I don't have a place where to go. She said, today we're interviewing for my woman where I'm working. She has a mother in a small town **[indecipherable]** and we're looking for a housekeeper. You come and I am going to interview, and you'll get the job. I went for the interview, you know, it was like I – I am talking to you and I think I am lying. I-It's hard to believe. I went there and this woman came to see me and then she said to her, you know what? She looks a little bit Jewish. But she was a nice woman. She said oh no, you know, she's from a different town only. Because my papers were from a small town, from **Częstochowa**, and I went there.

Q: What was your name then? Were you –

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A: **Stefania**(ph) **Dolinska**(ph). I have the **Kennekarta.** And I was two years older from 1917, and the parents were illiterate, you know, I – I had to – to have a family. So wherever I went I had an aunt, an uncle, you know, everything was fiction.

Q: And what town were you born in?

A: I was born in **Warsaw**, and it was in **Warsaw**, and this was **Częstochowa**.

Q: No, I'm saying the papers –

A: That it said what –

Q: – the papers said you were born –

A: **Częstochowa.**

Q: **Częstochowa.**

A: And this – there was a well known shrine of **Saint Mary**, she was black, that **Matka Częstochowska,** yeah. Very well known. And I was carry – wearing, of course, a big cross and all the things. And if you would wake me up during the night, I could recite all the Catholic prayers by heart.

Q: How did you learn them?

A: I learned. I got the book and I – this was survival. And I went there and the – wa – one was deaf and one was blind. And I wasn't prepared to work, I was a Jewish princess, I got the wrong education. And when I cook potatoes I didn't know that you need water. So I felt the potatoes will give waters all when they started. When

she walked in she said oh**, Stefcha**(ph) forgot to put – not enough water. So it dawned on me. They once were going to confession, so she said, let's hurry, because I was going to church with them. I said yes, only I will finish my breakfast. I forgot that when you going to confession, you don't eat anything before. You know, they were such a little things which – here I am coming from a family which wasn't assimilated one and here I am suddenly a Christian. The best place was ch-church. Then nobody was touching you, you know, you were pretending that you praying and you cover your eyes. But I-I was working. Like, I was washing the floors, I put sud on the floor and then you – you had to put clear water to remove the soap. So I was swimming in the sud and I didn't know that you need clear water. And I was there and it was rather good, you know. I – my sister, before I left, she dye my hair, you know, blonde. And I couldn't become blonde somehow, I – I'm very dark, now I color. And I was a reddish hair, but I was good looking and I had guts, you know, yeah, I – and my eyes were happy. And I was working there for a short time and then I went to **Warsaw**. I – for – I was going for weekend, I – I said that I had – and **[indecipherable]** said, oh good that **Stefcha**(ph) because the **[indecipherable]** came and he is checking everybody's paper, so I said that you will come tonight. I say, oh I am so sorry. My aunt got very sick and I have to stay with **[indecipherable]** it was split of a second. I came only to get – I had a small suitcase, and a pillow you know,

I was carrying here like – because this was a – the servants were, pillow and a blanket, you know, you – you needed your own. She says, oh please tell him that when my aunt will get better, I will come back and I will go to him. And I disappeared.

Q: Let's go back. Did you ever go to confession in the church?

A: No. I said that I am going, but I didn't. And – but I was going to communion, you know, and I was whe –

Q: You took communion?

A: And I went to **Warsaw** and I had a friend who was looking very Jewish. Her name was **Roma**, too. This is the same friend that when he came and he saw the name, you know, he thought this is a man, yeah. She was living with her mother. Her mother Jewish was atrocious – Polish was atrocious, so she pretended that she was mute. However, my friend had very curly hair like black, like afro, so she couldn't leave the house, so the mother was coming out and going, you know, shopping, pointing, you know, the – and the daughter was always home. So whenever I was desperate, which was not fair to them, I was going to them for the night when it was dark, and the janitor was the biggest enemy. Sneaking, and spending the night.

Q: What was her name?

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A: **Roma Fleischman**(ph). The mother was a wa – I was telling them when we're sitting there, the first train I will be sitting, and the mother said no, we'll stay here. And then, you know, I heard that there is a job on a farm, to milk the cows, to help with the far – I was all used to farm like – now I would go, maybe as astronaut I would be better. So I went there and there was a wife after a – a – a widow after a judge and a big farm. And she said to me, do you know how to milk the cow? I figured, what's a – wha-what's so easy th – bi-big deal, you know? I was wearing silk stockings, and my Polish was so good and my handwriting was so good. You know, for a maid in **Poland**, who were mostly illiterate, but I told them that I was working as a bookkeeper in this different city. So now I – since I moved, my parents die, everybody, you know, to convenience. Sometimes they were alive, sometimes they were dead. And she says okay, so milk this cow. I started to pull, kill me, couldn't get a drop of milk and the flies were biting me through the stockings and the cow was hitting me with the tail. And – and she looked at me, she said, you don't look like a girl who knows – who was working on a farm. I am sorry, but I cannot keep you. I left again. In between there, there were jobs where I felt that this is not safe, that I have to leave, you know. So after two days I was leaving without, you know, and I didn't – I had working papers, which were extremely important. By

the way, I forgot to tell you, when I was going to get my **Kennekarta**(ph) with my birth certificate, which I got to my hand –

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

A: – I got my false paper, I needed a **Kennkarta**, which was the official germ – German document to live in occupied **Poland.** And when I went on the way there to this German office where they were giving the **Kennkarta** with my picture, I had a picture with my nose like this, I – you will see the picture. And on the way there somebody stole from me the – the – my pocketbook. And I didn't have the birth certificate. And I called up this man, Mr. **Rokulski**(ph), he said, I cannot get – you have to go to the Church of che – of Three Crosses, that was a big church in **Poland,** and ask for the birth certificate. I didn't have a choice, this was like – like going in a – in a mousetrap and I went there and I ask and they gave me. I don't know if she was alive or she was dead, you know? Could be if I would ask for death certificate, they would give me too. So again I went and I got the **Kennkarta** which w – and a **arbeitskarta**, work paper, which was extremely important because when the Germans were stopping me, when I had the **arbeitkarta,** this work **karta**, they let me loose. My dream was to get to **Germany**, to work in **Germany** as a Polish girl. However, you couldn't volunteer, because if they would see a woman like me

volunteer, there was a priest who was specializing in recognizing Jews. He would see right away that the woman, you know, with my Polish, is not voluntary to go to work as a – in labor camp. So my only hope was to be caught by the German, and to send to **Germany**. But because of my **arbeitkarta,** they never – I went to library, the ju – Gestapo came to library. I showed them my paper, they let me loose. And –

Q: You were – you were talking about you left the farm –

A: I left the farm.

Q: – where – where you couldn't milk the cow, and then what happened?

A: Yeah, and I looked and I-I – I was at the end – I – I – I looked in the paper. However, it – it was – I went on – on another job where I was two days. And the man – I didn't – the man was looking at me very suspicious. You know, you develop a different sense, where is – wh-where you are not sure if – if you will not be caught, you know, yeah. And it was split of a second was deciding about your life. So I flew down to that – near **Warsaw** was a summer place where they were before the war sending **TB** patients. **Otwotski**(ph), it was. And they are looking for people to – chambermaids and other workers to change from that hotel to hospital for German soldiers. So I went there. It was run – supervised by nuns, and I was working there, it was empty. They were preparing for the German soldiers.

Q: What time of year was this?

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A: It was summer.

Q: Summer ’44?

A: Yes.

Q: And I was there and so I read, you know, from the employment, a German employment that they are looking for a governess in **Garmisch-Partenkirchen.** **Garmisch-Partenkirchen** was **Hitler**’ summer home. And intelligent, educated and I went there to this office. Well, the moment I walked in, I saw that I made a mistake. There was sitting a **Polis Deutsche**, a Polack who was a German, a German descent. And I remember him when I was working when the ghetto started. You know, they took the Jews to work to put the names in every building, you know, who were – and he was there. And I – you know, I figure out he couldn’t recognize me, but I – when I saw him, he was talking Polish. And I ask about the job, he said yes, yes, I will let you know. Where are you now? I said, I am here in this, I am working here and here. When I came back to this place where I was working, the nun was waiting for me with a – my little suitcase. And she said, ste – **Stefsha**(ph), right away go to back **Warsaw** because Gestapo is coming to arrest you. They recognize you. She took me to the train. I said, but I don’t have a place where to go. She said, go to th – our convent. She gave me the name of this Mother Superior in **Warsaw** and I went there. And they talked to me, they say we don’t have a place

where to keep you for the night, but we have in the country a place, a convent. Take the train and go there. I spent – they kept me three months there.

Q: What convent was it?

A: **Marie's** family – **Mary's** family. **Regina Mary.** The priest knew that I am Jewish, the nuns didn't know. I shared the room with a nun who was shaved like **[indecipherable]** you know. And since I am very curious, I was asking what made them become a nun, so I'm – different story was there. And they had some Jewish children there in this convent. The ones that – I was working on the f – that was gardening, and they were, you know, vegetables, things, all I – and going – four o'clock in the morning we're going to church. And it was already cold, it was coming winter.

Q: What town was this in?

A: **Grodzisko Mazovieke, g-r-o-d-z-i-s-k-o,** one word. **Mazovieke, m-a-z-o-v-i-e-k-e.** And he said, I am very sorry, but you cannot stay here any more, because we'll jeopardize the life of the children. And people are asking question what – I wasn't a nun, you know, I was in my normal thing. I said, so – but I have no place where to go, so they sent me back. I ca – bought the paper, and it was my last job in **Warsaw** and they said in case they will need reference, I can give them their references, which was extremely important.

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Q: You had stayed there three months?

A: Yeah. After the three months, you know, in the country. And I started to work with a woman who was a white Russian. She was Russian Orthodox. You know, ye – after the revolution in **Russia**, there were white Russian we – who went to **Poland**, to **China**, to all over the world. And he was a **Volksdeutsche,** again. He recognize me, but I was good for him and he was good for me, because he knew that is coming end of the war, and he had the uniform. Once, I took the uniform and I put on the balcony, and I thought that he will kill me. He grabbed the uniform because he didn't want any Polacks to know that he's a **Volksdeutsche.** You know, **Volksdeutsche** was a person who was born from German descent. **Lempke**(ph) was his name. It was and it wasn't a German name, but it was convenient. He got the Polish villa in the country from a – a – a Jewish villa, where Jews used to go, a beautiful apartment and he awa – had a sewing – a salon, you know, where she had the manager, and women sewing dresses made to order. Everything that they had was from Jews, different monograms, you know. And th – he had girlfriend, because when the telephone was ringing, when I was picking up, nobody answered. However, when he was picking up, he was oh, how are you Mrs. this and this, you know. And she was older than him, and she had the dog, a Pekinese dog who hated my guts, the dog. I hated the dog, too. I was sleeping dressed up – dressed. I couldn't

get undressed because I felt in case somebody will come from the front door, I will be able to run through the back door. And I was singing in there, you know, it was curfew hours, eight o'clock. I was singing in – every home had the altar. So who was singing? The maids were singing. And everybody was sending the maids to sing and to pray in the altar. I, who doesn't have any – if you would hear me singing, like my husband said, **[indecipherable]** this, I wasn't a main singer that, you know. And then, once I – I didn't know how to cook, and she knew it that I don't know. Yeah, I could – so she had the big party and she called a special wo – a woman who was a cook. And I was wearing a – whatever I was wearing, she was asking me where I was buying. I said, oh, I bought this in a flea market. And she said, it looks like a – from a rich Jewish woman. Those were my own things, few things that I had, the black dress with a pin something. And I was wearing a black dress and a white a – white, you know, apron, and I walked to the room and I saw a German sitting in the uniform among her guests. And I got so scared that I fell down, together with a tray, with the food on the tray. She didn't kill me this time, was – once he threw the shoe in my head, this guy, that I didn't do a good job. And you know, we're picked together, this is not important. When we went – it was Easter, '44 – went to the summer place. And this is a custom among Christian, that you share the egg, the hard – and you exchange wishes. I don't know if you know about.

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Q: Where was this?

A: In the country, in the summer place with those people. And she said to me, oh, the war is almost over. You will not be the maid any more, but **Stefcha**(ph) has a very good taste, so you will be supervising my salon and cleaning only the salon. So she looked at her and said, I think that after the war you will be working for her. I can bet you she's a daughter of a rich indust – **[indecipherable]** and not watch only **Warsaw.** And then we went to church and he was watching every step if I didn't many any mistake, but I was smarter than him. When to knee, when to cross, when to this, when to that. And then to get started the uprising, August first in **Warsaw.** The Polish uprising, had nothing to do with Jewish. And the Germans – the Russians stopped on the outskirts of – **Warsaw** was divided by **Vistula.** It was **Praga**, which was the outskirts part of **Warsaw,** but it was outskirts o – actually, and **Warsaw.** The Russian decided to conquer the **Warsaw**, but the Polacks say oh no, they were – they were their worst enemies. When the rush – when the Russians are already on the water **Vistula**, now we'll fight for **Warsaw.** But this was impossible, because the Germans were still very strong, and the Russians said okay, let the Polacks fight their own battles. We're not moving. And the Germans again – and when I told to this my – this woman for whom I was working, I said, I am Jewish. She said, and

your mother for sure was selling herrings on the flea market, she said to me. She was so angry. She hated the Jews so much, it's –

Q: Why did you tell her you were Jewish?

A: Because I thought this is the end, but it wasn't the end. You know, when the Russian were coming, and it was an hour away, but they stop because the stupid Polacks, they said, we're going to fight for our capital. So it was not here and not there. October 15, evacuate the whole **Warsaw**. Many Jews were killed who were kill – who were hidden. My friend from **Australia** was staying in the sewers with rats and mice and her legs when she came out were so swollen, because **Warsaw** was totally flat now. We had one skyscraper, 14 floors, it went, I saw it. And they were flying so low, the Germans, that we're hidden in the basement and part of the basement was destroyed because **Poland** didn't have anything to defend. They didn't have before and they didn't have for sure later. And the Russian didn't move. And they put us on the trains.

Q: So you went back to – you went back into **Warsaw**?

A: I was in **Warsaw** at the time.

Q: When did you go back to **Warsaw**?

A: I was in **Warsaw** at the time, but octob – October fifth they evacuate every Polack there.

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Q: When did you go back into **Warsaw**, before that?

A: I – I was on th – I was what – this was in **Warsaw** I was working for this woman.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: The **Volksdeutsche.**

Q: Yeah, oh, I see, yeah.

A: And we went every weekend –

Q: You came back from the summer place, back to **Warsaw**.

A: Yeah, every weekend we were going there **[indecipherable]**. And I tell you, since he was a **Volksdeutsche** and he suspected that I was Jewish, but I – I didn't have a place where to go any more, you know, we to – I was in so many places, I was – when I went to the butcher to buy, you know, something for the people I was working, when he looked at me I saw that he didn't look at me because I was good looking, or young. I – I didn't – you know, right away I said, oh you don't have this? I disappeared, you know? It was everything split of a second that you didn't make – I didn't tell you something that was important, how I lost my sister and my father. Can I go back?

Q: Absolutely.

A: My father – so we were both on false papers. May eighth – May eighth, or maybe May six, my father through the sewers escaped from the ghetto.

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Q: This is ’43?

A: This is ’43. The Germans stopped him because it was nighttime, and they ask him what he was doing, he said, I was cleaning the sewers. And he knew to cross himself and he went to his worker. This was a third generation worker who was working for him. And he knew my telephone number and he called me up and he said, you have to take my – your father because I have a family, I cannot keep him. And I got in touch with my sister, we didn’t know what to do with him. And as I was walking, I met – everything was li-like – like fate. I believe in fate. I was walking on the street and I met a young man who was working f-from a different city, who was living in the house where I was living with my parents, during the war. He came from a different – and I don’t remember his name. And I said, I don’t know what to do, but my father is here and I don’t have where to put him. He said look, my father is hidden and my whole family is supposed to come but suddenly was the uprising and they couldn’t leave the ghetto. I am very happy that I met you because my father is getting crazy being there all alone. Well right away I picked up my father night time, you know, before the curfew and my sister put him there. It was **Fildierska**(ph) **Oshamashti**(ph), it was in ghetto with. Then she told me there was a woman, a Polish woman and she was hiding them for money, for big money. And it was Saturday, May eighth. We went together, and I said, I like to go in to see

Father and to take the money. And she said to me, you didn't live yet. You are much younger than me. I will go. And when she went there, few minutes after, there came Polish police and arrested them. One of the policemen, the Polish policeman, we gave him five thou – I gave him 5,000 **zlotys** because he promised that he will let him – that he will work. Then he gave me back the money **[indecipherable]** said, we couldn't do anything. And I got a letter from my sister. She gave somebody to put in the mail, I should never forget her, and I should fight for my life. This was May 8th, 1943. Then it was the ghetto, the uprising in ghetto, I never – you know**,** **Poland** is well known for uprising, and when I read history **[indecipherable]** in the 19th century **[indecipherable]** uprising, and I – as – as dispirit as I was, I was young and – and the first time I saw what it means uprising, you know. Since I was on the other side of the fence, I wasn't Polish, I didn't give a damn. And when they taking the **Volksdeutsche** and putting against the wall and killing them, the Polacks. And again, I was on the train with a woman from the same building where I was working. And she said, you know what? The train was going again to some camps, I don't know, but it was –

Q: We're talking about the October –

A: Fifth.

Q: – 5th, 1944 uprising now?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Uprising was August 1st, 1944. October 5th, 1944, I left **Warsaw.** Not that I left, everybody was evacuated. The trains were waiting for us. Where they were going, I think some of them were going to concentration camps, some to labor camp. The train was stopping on a small si – you know, small villages and we're going to **Piastów.**

Q: What kind of trains were these?

A: Regular train.

Q: Regular train.

A: Yes, **Piastów** were one of our general signs of capitulation, you know, was – and then she said to me, you know what? I don't want to go to any camp, she said to me. I said, but I don't know anybody. She said, I have a friend who has a farm in the – one of the small villages. Why don't you go with me? I say okay, and I went there. There were five jew – five Jewish girls.

Q: You got off the train?

A: Yes.

Q: With your friend?

A: Yeah. This wasn't that the train was speeding, you know, there was – you know, like before the train was stopping, you know. Many people went because they – they didn't have where to go, don't forget. Polacks, all were mostly Polacks. This was the worst time for Jews who – which were hidden, because they were the – the color of the walls, you know, they were hidden. They didn't see fresh air for so many years, so when they were coming out from those hidden places, you could recognize them right away. I was looking like milk and honey. I never suffered hunger. I – you know, my eyes were smiling, and – and I had guts. So when we got there, the woman was an alcoholic, a very charming woman, a teacher from profession, whose husband was living with a young girl who was Jewish, was hi – who – whom she was hiding.

Q: What town was it?

A: It was near **Poland**, **Piastów, p-i-a-s-t-o-w.** And then it was October and we were working. We **[indecipherable]** there were potatoes and onions, and I had even, you know, a wagon with a horse that we're sitting, you know, yeah. And the food was scare, but since we had growing there, you know, yeah – we had Christmas there even, and I remember that they killed a goat, which was smelling like anything. And I remember the first time I saw a girl who had epilepsy attack. She was younger than me, a Jewish girl. She fell down on the floor and I remember they

put a knife with a wooden handle between her teeth. We don't do this any more, I wanted to tell you. And we're sitting on – and this woman, she knew. She didn't directly, you know, nobody came to her, say I'm Jewish. We didn't confess. But she, you know, th – was smart enough, but she was – we survived there from October til January eighth, where it was the end of the war for me. It was one day when the Germans left, and the Russian didn't come. I will never forget this day. And it was a awful day, you know, because here I am, I don't have to fight for my life, I don't have anybody. And why I survive? What was the purpose? And I went to my – I went to **Warsaw**, it was frozen, everything. Totally frozen, it was a very strong winter. The Russians were coming and they were looking like beggars. Sleeping on the ground and the Germans, who are escaping, were looking much better. And I went to **Warsaw**, to my – where it was my parents, this house, **Zamenhof [indecipherable]** was living. **Zamenhof** was a guy who this – who started **Esperanto**, you know. And I were – and grass was growing there, and I was very glad that there was no sign of this house. I didn't – I would be upset if somebody, you know, if people were living there, and – I didn't want. I wasn't ready mentally to walk in and to see what – what's going on. And as I was staying, there were two, maybe four young boy soldiers in German – in Russian uniform, you could see that they were Jewish. And they say to me in Polish, you know, what are you doing

here? I said, I used to live here. They said, we used to live here too, we are Jewish. I said, I am Jewish too. They – you know, they say, you survived? Because it was typical what my husband, everybody who survive were sure that I was the only one who survive and a few other people. But we didn't know, you know, there was none n-no – no network, nobody was – was bringing the news like years ago in **United States** by horse, you know, was traveling. They went back to the truck or something, they brought me cigarettes, I was smoking, and cans. They say, how did you survive, how is this possible? Do you know this family, the other fam – I didn't know anybody. And – and they said, and where are you staying? I said, I think, because it was a whole block, that this is **Zamenhof [indecipherable]**. And th-they said, describe to me how the house was looking. And I went to Jewish committee, which was on **Praga,** on the other side of **Vistula** river, and I register, and people started – nobody yet was coming from **Russia**, because later – nobody yet was coming from concentration camp because it was later. **Lublin,** however, was liberated. Have a – you see, if I would be on **Praga**, I would be liberated in August when the Russian came. But since they stopped, and so many Jews were killed in those few months. So this was my liberation.

Q: Wa – and wh-when was that?

A: This was augu – January 8, 19 –

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Q: January 8th, '45.

A: – 40 – '45. And I immediately – I didn't had where to – I don't know even where I – I went to sleep back to this woman, because I told her, we're in the country, I didn't have a place where to go. And one of my friends, this **Roma Fleischman**(ph) she said I heard that **Lódz** wasn't touched. I said, I cannot live in **Warsaw**, you know, I have too many memories and anyway, that was totally destroyed. Went to **Warsaw,** I went to Jewish committee and I was working there as a volunteer, and I remember people, Christian were bringing the children that they were hiding. And I would take all of them, I'm crazy about children. I was eight times pregnant, and I **[indecipherable]** one – one son. And you know, we got apartment, which was partly a – a bomb, you know, that – which wasn't this, but somehow one part of the apartment, one room, you know, you – when you open the door, you could look down, you know, it was on the third floor. And after noon I got the job as a **Stefania Dolinska**(ph), I was administrator, because from my father's experience that I had with his houses, I was collecting rent on the street where I was living, I had few houses. For this I was getting money, for ga – being paid. So in the morning I was **Roma Margitte**(ph) **Koplewicz** – **Roma Margitte**(ph), I wasn't kople – I didn't use my – and after noon I was **Stefania Dolinska**(ph) and I – and they were talking to me how **Hitler** didn't kill any Jews, wherever I went. You know, I was – nobody

recognize, you see, the way they were – I paid the fortune for my life during the war, because I – they – people were recognizing, the Polacks, from my husband – from my father's factory guy, he was running after me from one tram – tramway to another, and I escaped. After the war they got blind. When he came back and we wanted to take a civil ceremony, we didn't want to – we didn't have any papers and I didn't want any religious – so I went to the city hall, so he said no, we don't have civil ceremony, why don't you go to church? I said, that's a good idea. We went to the rabbi, of course he – so they were telling me story, who are – all the time working as a Christian, how Jews were killing children for matzo every year, and what the Jews did to **Jesus Christ**, and yo-you know that after awhile, you know, I – I thought maybe I should start believing those things. And then I was working when he came back. We – he was ready to stay as a judge, you know, since he never could do anything with his law degree, but I said –

Q: Your husband – your husband came to **Warsaw** to find you?

A: He came to **Warsaw,** and he came to look for his nieces, which he find. And my best girlfriend from law school, which I met in a mental institution. In the second year we had some lectures in a mental institution. This time everybody was **Napoleon**, I will never forget this **[indecipherable]** was **Hitler** and then – then was **Napoleon**. I met – because she was from **Lublin** and she came – after gymnasium

she came – and we became and we're – we're three times in **Austria**, she came to the wedding of our son, went to both weddings of her sons. And she survived the war a-awful, because she's looking very Jewish, in a – in a **[indecipherable]** you know, you're unbelievable. And so she was working in **Warsaw** in the Jewish Committee, I was working in **Lódz.**

Q: Oh, you move – then you left **Warsaw**, and –

A: I left **Warsaw** immediately in January, and I moved to **Lódz** after the war. I couldn't live in **Warsaw.**

Q: And then your husband came and found you.

A: He – he – he went to **Warsaw**, and she told him and he said, do you know what – where is **Roma**? If she had somebody, she – she – she said no, she lives in **Lódz**, because we're in touch. And then how he discover me.

Q: And then how long did you stay there?

A: In November we left together. We smuggle, because we didn't have official paper, we smuggle through the rush – and you know, when we are going by train in **Poland** from **Lódz** to – to – I don't remember, **Leipzig**, it was, I think, you know, still in **Poland** it was. It was a very crowded plane, and the Polacks said oh look, there is another poodle – they call – I don't know why they call Jew – they call Jews all the name. Let's get him. But the plane was all crowded. They didn't recognize

me, but after concentration camp he didn't look – I was – **[indecipherable]** I don't have a picture with everybody. He didn't look as he – you know, he was looking very Jewish. And we left **Poland** and – through **Berlin,** where I was sick. Went to **Niederbayern** to the – to **Eggenfelden** where we are waiting three and a half years for the visa to **United States**. We got **[indecipherable]** the visa to **Australia** through our friends, and the visa to **United States** we decided –

Q: Wh-When did your husband find you in **Lódz**?

A: **Joe?** In August? I don't remember.

Q: In August.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you said you were in **Berlin** and you were sick. What were you sick with?

A: Typhoid. From Germans I got. I was very, very sick. I made my own diagnosis because during – in the ghetto my father and my sister had typhoid and I was attending.

Q: And –

A: We had quarantine, I remember we get. The Germans were petrified of typhus. And I got it from Germans who were escaping from **Poland** and other countries.

Q: And after **Berlin**, you went to?

A: To **Niederbayern,** to **Bavaria** in German, and there – it was a **DP** camp which we're never worry in the **DP** camp because we rented a room with a German family. A – the condition in **DP** camps were awful and we didn't want to be there. And he went – I was learning how to be a dressmaker, which I have two left hands, didn't succeed. And he was in the school of **ORT** to be auto mechanic, which he never was.

Q: And how long did you stay there?

A: Three and a half years. Waiting, waiting and making the biggest mistake, we should both go to **Heidelberg**, I should go to medical school, he should go to engineering school, but this is passé.

Q: And then you came to the **United States**.

A: To **United States**.

Q: How did you get here?

A: We came on a general **[indecipherable]** it was a boat that we were like sardines. My husband was the only one who was okay, because everybody was sick, including myself. And we're sick, he was sleeping separate on the boat and I – it was a – I remember we are facing the channel, the English channel, everybody was sick. It was May and the water was very violent. And my relatives were waiting –

we knew a little bit English. Now on the level, I would say it was level four, from the working as a **[indecipherable]** refugees.

Q: May 1940?

A: Five.

Q: I thought you were three years –

A: Excuse me. We came –

Q: May 1949?

A: ’49, yeah.

Q: That’s what I thought. And then you just –

A: And my relatives were waiting and he went to work. We came to –

Q: You settled in what city?

A: **New York.**

Q: **New York.**

A: **Brooklyn** right away here. And he went – we came Thursday night and Monday night from my relatives he got – he was working as a shipping clerk, as a – not even a shipping clerk, was pushing a wagon to the pier. And I got the job – I went to union, and I met somebody who was – who knew somebody and I went to the factory. They show me the sewing machine. I didn’t know how to operate a normal machine. I was breaking 20 needles in – in two minutes, but I manage and I was

sewing straps for the brassieres on double needle machine. I became an expert and every time I was bringing the check, I said I don't know how they making 20 – 30 dollars, I made 10 dollars because you know, I – the speed was tremendous. And the first half a year he had how many W-2 you – I had? 10? More?

Q: And then how long did you stay –

A: 14 double – you know, it's a warning when I didn't like the forelady, I was going after – after 12 o – th-they were looking left and right for operators this time, and I would – and the subway was a nickel one day and then was 10 cents. To save 10 cents, I was walking maybe three miles, but I was young. And I wasn't ashamed to go to the bank with one dollar to save. And we saved up 1,000 dollars the first year.

Q: Did you get any more education?

A: I – I got my – I went back to college. I collected when a – from **Brooklyn**, we were living one year on a furnished room with a – a Jewish lady who was trying to teach us English, that you don't say **bergen**(ph)**,** you said **boygen**(ph)**.** You don't say **carechev**(ph), you said **koychev**(ph)**.** And I said no, I know how to spell it, isn't like this. She said **Roma**, listen to me. I am here God knows how many, and she was here from **Hungary**. I know English better then you. I say okay. But we got our first apartment in **Crown Heights** and we are living seven and a half years there. My son

was born in **Brooklyn**. We bought our first house with the help of restitution, you know, money. And we were living there seven and a half years.

Q: Are you still getting reparations?

A: Yes. And when I was living in **Bayside** I started to take some c-courses in **Queens College,** and then we moved. We adopted our daughter in 1959, and we moved to **New Hyde Park**, we sold the house in **Bayside**, we bought a very nice house from a profit on the house, in **New Hyde Park**, we are living there 24 years. And my son went to University of **Maryland**, my daughter went to **Newports,** she never graduated. And –

Q: Do you have any graduate degree?

A: I have a Master's degree in social work **[indecipherable]** yeah.

Q: And are you working now?

A: Yes.

Q: Where are you working?

A: **NYANA, New York** Association for New American. What – do you know what is **HIAS?**

Q: Yes.

A: **HIAS** brings the refugees to **Canada** airport, from **Canada** airport we're taking over. What I am doing, I am trying to put their life together. I am a case manager. I

send them for retraining courses. Everything I am – the final thing to when we discharge. They are four months with us.

Q: Can we talk now, to finish up, some of your **[indecipherable]**

A: I was interrupt you too.

Q: And have you talked about your war experiences to your children?

A: Yes. My daughter **[indecipherable]** however, my son is extremely interested. In the Second Generation he was with **Ralph Wallenberg,** you know, was very active. He was with **S-Simon Wiesenthal** ar – all over, you know, yeah. He was here when this was being built.

Q: How do you feel about getting reparations? What are your feelings about that?

A: I feel we deserve. I don't believe they should pay us for my mother, father, sister, anybody would never accept. But for the suffering, you know, that we went, positively I feel positive that no matter how much they are paying us, they should pay.

Q: How do you feel about being Jewish? Has that changed because of your war experience?

A: I tell you, because of my work experience –

Q: War experience.

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A: War experience. I am more Jewish than I ever was before. I am not religious, I am not a believer. I believe in fate, I believe maybe there is something which I cannot name. I am a better person, maybe because of the suffering. I was, as I told you, a Jewish Polish princess, selfish. I was the younger, my – my sis – between my sister, which spoiled me and my parents. I – I think I am a good person, I feel. And on my job I am getting tremendous rewards. That people are asking that they want to be with me, and my supervisor, which feels that I am one in a million, and my director who, I had the husband where I had to be – with all the surgery I was taking off, and they went for everything. They were helping me unbelievable. I was going in the morning to the hospital, working one o'clock to five, coming back, taking off. They really – they when – totally we have thousand people working, this is a very big organization and a wonderful, which is giving – getting from philanthropes and half government is paying.

Q: Does the war still affect you?

A: Yes.

Q: In what way?

A: Depression. Sleepless nights, crying spell, changing moods. I sounds like a social worker, but this is true. A song can **[indecipherable]** I very easy to cry. A song, a picture, some similarity, and my si – you know, I never buried them. This is the

story. My son when he was younger he insists that I should go, he said Mom, once forever you have to bury. And I went to a well known psychiatrist and he said your son maybe is right, however he doesn't know that you were a grown up person when it happened. You will never bury them, you will live as **[indecipherable]** sister. I don't think that **[indecipherable]** that I don't remember my sister.

Q: Is there anything else you wish to say, that you want to share?

A: That it can hap – I – over and over again, that people, especially when I am talking on here longer than any other place, and I am American patriot and I feel this is a wonderful country, that American Jews are very shortsighted, that they don't realize, even though here the Turks, that the Greek and the Italian are looking like Jews, and this like that, and we had the scapegoat, we had black people, which are – refuse any more to be scapegoats, but this can happen. Even with a strong club, that would happen. This is the way I feel. And the more, you know, and – and I was maybe selfish because I wanted to save my own feelings. I didn't want to come and to talk and to dig out and then – but at certain moment it was pressure from our son, too, who is a psychiatrist, so – and he said, I remember the holidays and always you were crying. You know, when Passover, it was **Seder** or something like this. And – and you were always talking how was it, you know, and – and the memories and he said now – now that we have holidays, mostly we're going to her – to my daughter-

in-law parents, which are second generate – first gen – her parents were – her parents were from **Hungary** or **Romania** and he is too, but they are totally Americanized, very well-to-do people. And – and they ha – nobody cries, nobody talks about anything. Th-Th – different story. However, we're going for the second **Seder** to a young couple whose father was an editor of Jewish **[indecipherable]**. And she reads in Yiddish, you know, about the **[indecipherable]** ghetto and my son writes in English. And it has a meaning, you know? I became more, not religious, only more traditional, you know, yeah. And I feel this is very little ah – I wou – if – if my son wouldn't be born here, we wouldn't circumcise him most likely. And anyway, he was circumcised by the doctor, not by a **moyl.** A-And – however, he – now that I have three grandson, wonderful three boys, and I-I would like – I would like a ni – and I don't know if I would like because for example, after the war, that I didn't know that my husband survive or no, I could never marry the Gentile. And many people just drop – they said – which, you cannot blame them, decided enough of being Jewish. When I decided to go back to school, you know, I didn't know – I – I wanted to be a librarian because I liked to read, but then I was discouraged. And then after thinking over and between my husband and my son, you know, they said that I – I – I – I should help people, you know. So I was working, when I got my Master's degree in a state mental institution for 13 years, which wasn't that

rewarding because I couldn't do too much for them and you need some happy ending. But I – even there, I was exposed to tremendous suffering, which to compare to my, you know, those were people which were out, totally. They di – they didn't know what – they were for 50 years in a mental institution. And then when it came the time for psychotropic drugs, you know, they started to give them, and – and then they started to discharge them to nursing home which were worse than hell. And it – through all those years I did lots of growing you know, between the war and between my work, you know, I became extremely – much more tolerant and – and a much better person than I ever would be, even not all those things. That's it.

Q: That's it? Oh – **[tape break]**

A: Going back to my life during – starting August first, where it was uprising, Polish uprising in **Warsaw**. There was time where there was nothing to eat because **Warsaw** was surrounded by Germans, and on the wa – **Vistula** river by **Russia** there was no food coming in. All the horses were eaten up. This reminds me on the revolution in **France** when they were eating rats and mice. There was – this was **Armia Ludowa** and **Armia Krajowa.** This was one which was to the left and one was to the right. The **Armia Krajowa** was very much against Jews. I was working there as a clerical person for awhile –

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

A: – Jewish, and I was working in the building there, who belongs to well know **Emil Wedel**, who was German descent, but he never declared himself as a German. There was a – one of the best factory of chocolate which existed now, **E. Wedel, w-e-d-e-l.** And I – the people were – for whom I was working as a maid were – had the apartment in the same building and the ones, the soldiers who were fighting, the Polish soldiers, not officially soldiers, but to defend **Warsaw**, they were cooking in our court, this was barley and some kasha, and they were – supposedly told me that it was a horse, but then we find out that it was a – a dog – a dachshund who belong to a well known Polish writer, **Maria Rodzewiczkofna,** very hard name to pronounce, **r-o-d-z-e-w-i-c-z-k-o-f-n-a.** And then, the second time they caught some kids, I don't know where, because the uprising started August first and it was til October where the Polish people have to capitulate because the Germans by air were throwing bombs and marching, occupying back the **Warsaw** which for a short time was in Polish hands. And there it was a cat cooked together with all the ingredients. When I ate this I didn't know, I didn't get sick, but I was young, and actually it didn't matter what I was eating.

Q: When you found out.

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A: When I found out, yeah. But then it was written a book by somebody, by a Polish writer and she mentioned this **[indecipherable]** dog. I don't know if the dog has a name. But anything that was alive those days was doomed to be killed for food. One of the – after the war, when we're – I was working with my husband in **Lódz** and I saw Mrs. **Lempke**(ph). This was the woman which – where I was working on my last job on a maid. She didn't see me, and I said to my husband, you should hit her a few times. And my husband said, she is a head taller than me, how can I do it? And she wasn't good to you, you survi – she wasn't bad to you, you survive. So why – why do you want me to harm her? I cannot do anything, right? And this was the end. But I had a strange feeling that always I would – I-I would never go back to **Poland,** never, never. Now we're – financially we're okay, that is out of question, but I remember when we we're struggling, I always used to say, if anybody would put a million dollars under condition that we'll go to **Poland** to visit, I wouldn't go. I hate everything that they did for us. And I hated that in a normal country like **Denmark**, even French were – was a excellent underground, although they have their own Gestapo, **Maquis** and in other countries you hear so many beautiful stories. And that's true that the nuns helped me, and there were other Polacks, but it is such a small percentage. Well, a – mostly a – were – where we had th-three and a half million Jews living in **Poland**, well before Germans enter **Warsaw**, the Polish

people already was beating us up. The – before the war, you know, the – there was tremendous hatred always. And I am sorry that I was born in **Poland,** not here. **Joe?**

Q: Any other –

A: Do you want –

Q: – stories that you remember, that you would like to add, any other –

A: I tell you, I had a good childhood, and I was 20 years old in 1939, and looking back, you know, maybe I didn't know any better. However, when I think – when I got my – graduated gymnasium, I thought that I would conquer the world. I had so many dreams which were never fulfilled, and I didn't realize, maybe because I was stupid, or young, that so many things were off the limits for us Jews in **Poland**. They were talking about engineers jokingly, that they are to measure the street. The doctors, if they didn't marry the rich girl, he couldn't open the office. Lawyers, the bar were closed for Jewish lawyers, young one. A Jew couldn't be a janitor, a Jew couldn't be a chimney cleaner. A Jew couldn't get a city job. And now living here for 44 years and to see what the opportunities everybody can have, I am for sure reinforce that it was the wrong place of birth for us. And I see how people are coming from different country, working in my capacity, what the help they getting, what the chances they have to be somebody, to develop, to educate. To compare to

Poland and being born and being Polish citizen and fighting the Polish wars, we couldn't get any place. That's it. Whatever I will say more will be **[indecipherable]**

Q: Well, thank you again for doing the interview.

A: Thank you for listening to us.

Q: This concludes the interview with **Romana Margitte**(ph) **Koplewicz.** The interviewer was **Gail Schwartz.** The interview took place on October 8th, 1993 at the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview