United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Danguolè Gabis
December 10, 2015
RG-50.030*0856

PREFACE

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DANGUOLÈ GABIS
December 10, 2015

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. **Danguolè Gabis**, on December 10th, 2015, in **West Tisbury**, **Massachusetts**, on **Martha's Vineyard**. Thank you very, very much Mrs. **Gabis** for agreeing to speak with us today with – for agreeing to share your story, your experiences, and in this way help us understand how the awful things that happened during World War II and the Holocaust occurred, how it affected ordinary people. I will start with the – from the very beginning, and ask you about your life, about your family, about pre-war years, about your experiences, about how your family was affected, and we'll go from there. Can you tell me, from – one of the simplest questions is, what was your name when you were born?

Answer: My nompa – my name is **Danguolè Gabis**.

Q: What was your maiden name?

A: **Poroneita**(ph).

Q: **Poroneita**(ph)?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: So you were born **Danguolè Poroneita**(ph)?

A: **Danguolè Poroneita**(ph).

Q: Did you have a middle name?

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A: I was born in **Kaunas**, and there were no – 1929, August.

Q: What was the day in August, in 1929?

A: August seventh.

Q: August 7th, 1929.

A: **Taip**.

Q: All right. And **Kaunas**, you mean **Kaunas**, **Lithuania**, is that correct?

A: **Kaunas** in **Lithuania**, yes.

Q: All right. It – did you grow up in **Kaunas**?

A: No, my father worked at that time, for the Lithuanian border police.

Q: Okay.

A: And he was – they were just visiting **Kaunas**. And after I was born, we – they moved somewhere, I'm not sure, but they left **Kaunas**, and **[speaks Lithuanian]**

Q: All right, why don't we say that in English? Your – you said your memories from **Lithuania** are having lived in **Jaimalas**(ph).

A: **Jaimalas**(ph), **ir – irga –**

Q: Excuse me for a second –

A: – and also visiting my uncles on their farms.

Q: I see. We'll get there. I'll want to hear about all of that.

A: Uh-huh.

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Q: But first I'd like to know a few other basic questions. So we know your date of birth was August 7th, 1929.

A: Yes.

Q: You were born **Danguolè Poroneita**(ph), and you were born in **Kaunas**.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me, did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I had brother and sister. My brother was born afte – they are both younger.

Q: So you're the oldest?

A: I am the oldest child in the family, yes.

Q: Okay. What is – who was born after you?

A: My brother.

Q: What was his name, or what is his name?

A: **Romwildus**(ph).

Q: Oh, his name was **Romwildus**(ph) **Poronus**(ph) then?

A: Uh-huh, **Romwildus**(ph) **Poronus**(ph).

Q: And what year was he born?

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: You don't remember very accurately?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: He was three years younger than I.

Q: So probably –

A: So, would be ’32.

Q: Okay. And then your sister was born?

A: She was the very youngest one. She just turned 79.

Q: Okay. So she –

A: So she was about seven years younger than I am.

Q: So she was born ’35 – ’36?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: All right.

A: And I think – I don’t know where my brother was born. My sister, I think was born in **Jaimalas**(ph).

Q: Okay. And what’s her name?

A: **Garda**(ph).

Q: **Garda**(ph).

A: **Garda**(ph) **Poroneita**(ph).

Q: Okay. Let’s talk about your parents a little bit. Tell me about your mother. What was her maiden – what was her first name, and her maiden name?

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A: **Ona**(ph).

Q: **Ona**(ph) was her first name?

A: **Ona**(ph) **Martinarichuta**(ph). Her maiden name was **Martinarichuta**(ph).

Q: Okay. And your father's name was?

A: **Pranas**(ph) **Poronus**(ph).

Q: All right. Tell me a little bit about your mother's family, and –

A: I know –

Q: – what you know of it.

A: I know very little of my mother's family. They didn't – we never lived anywhere close to them, and my connections were with my father's family, but not my mother's.

Q: Okay. So did you ever vi – you never saw – knew any aunts, or uncles, or grandparents, or anything?

A: Not on my mother's side.

Q: Okay.

A: I knew that her mother was dead, and actually, when I – I had si – I had met her sister, who lived, at one point, in **Kaunas**, and my father and I went to **Kaunas** when I was probably seven, eight years old, and we stayed at my Aunt **Julie's**.

Q: So her name was **Julia**?

A: **Julia**, mm-hm.

Q: Okay.

A: I do not know her last name, she was divorced. She was divorced, she had two sons, I believe, and I knew one of her sons who was a priest.

Q: I see.

A: And he had – he came to visit me here on the island, on **Martha's Vineyard**.

Q: On **Martha's Vineyard**?

A: Yes. He had come to **Martha's Vineyard** to vi – visit me. He is now dead.

Q: I see. I see. But he was in – in truth, your first cousin.

A: Yes.

Q: And so, you've met his mother one time when you were a seven year old girl?

A: Yes.

Q: And then you met him only when he came to **Martha's Vineyard**.

A: I met him here in **United States**, and I don't quite remember now when I met him first, but he did come to **United States**. I met him when I was in **Chicago**.

Q: Oh, I see, I see.

A: And at one point he was a priest in **Oklahoma**, I believe, somewhere. And I remember taking a train to go there – we lived in **Chicago** then – to visit him.

Q: I see.

A: And he had come to visit me in vineyard **–** in – here on the island.

Q: Okay.

A: And I also – my aunt, who took care of us after my mother was deported, my father's sister had a small house in **New Jersey**. And I li – visited her there, and he was there too, he came to visit her too. I don't know where from.

Q: Okay. So we will – we will talk about some of these me – the events that you mentioned in a little bit. Right now, I'd like to – did you – I'd like to find out more about your family, the background of your family – **[phone ringing][break]**

A: So, you would like to know?

Q: More about your mother's family. So, if you'd never met them –

A: I don't know much about my – as I say, I didn't – do not know much about my mother's family.

Q: Did she ever tell you anything about it?

A: She told me that she was very fond of her father, but she did not much – think much of her mother. But I haven't met either of them.

Q: I see.

A: Either one of them, so –

Q: Did she talk about her own childhood, her own youth?

A: She told me that she was sent – she went to school, she finished high school, gym –

Q: Gymnasia.

A: – gymnasia. And they lived somewhere around **Panevėžys**, I believe.

Q: Uh-huh, **Panevėžys**, which is one of the larger cities, or towns, shall we say, in **Lithuania**. One of the five largest.

A: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Q: Okay.

A: But not in a city, because they were on the farms.

Q: Okay. Was it a well-to-do family?

A: Was fairly well-to-do family.

Q: Uh-huh, you knew that.

A: She had – she had a couple brothers, as – two sisters, I think there were five in the family.

Q: Okay.

A: One of the sisters had married very well, the one who lived in **Kaunas**, but divorced. Then she had another sister, I don't remember her name now, who was a nun, for a while. And then left the –

Q: The order.

A: – monastery –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and married. And from what I understand, it was not a good marriage, but at one point we visited them. I don't know much, not much.

Q: So tell me why – it sounds unusual. She comes from such a large family, and she has siblings, many siblings. How i – did it come about that you didn't have much contact with them?

A: We didn't live close by. And remember, at that time, to get – get together was not as easy.

Q: I see.

A: I mean, you had to take a train.

Q: Okay.

A: Expense, where to stay, even if you stay with the family. And we had – my family – my mother had me, and she has another baby who died, a little – he was still a little baby, I have no memory of him. Then she had my brother who lived. Then she had – I think there was another child that died. And then she had my sister, and also my father continued to work on the Lithuanian borders – border. Usually – my memory is working on the Latvian border with **Lithuania**. And my

mother then, at one point, when we lived in **Jaimalas**(ph), she worked in the library.

Q: We'll come to that – th-that.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's interesting that – that, you know, it – it shows she had enough education –

A: Yes.

Q: – that she would be working in a library, which is unusual in those times for young women, and – and – and girls, to – to do so.

A: I think most of her family were well educated.

Q: I see.

A: All of them.

Q: Okay. Okay. Now let's turn to your father's family. You say his name was **Pranas**(ph) **Poronus**(ph).

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And what part of **Lithuania** did they come from – did he come from?

A: They were farmers, and his – they had – the family had – his mother had 12 children.

Q: Oh my.

A: His mother could neither read nor write. They too – family thought that my father was very bright, and they send him to school.

Q: What part of **Lithuania** were they from?

A: They lived – let me see, **Plungė** – ne –

Q: Uh-huh, **Plungė**, in – in – so they were –

A: Yeah, somewhere in that area, **Aukštaitija**.

Q: Oh, that's **Žemaitija**. **Plungė** is **Žemaitija**.

A: **Žemaitija**.

Q: Yeah. So **Plungė** is also very close to the Latvian border. It is in the northwest corner of **Lithuania**.

A: No, had – my father's education had nothing – at that point had nothing to do with the borders.

Q: Okay.

A: They were all farmers.

Q: Okay.

A: And not large farms, but small farms.

Q: Were they well-to-do as well? Your – your family – your father's family?

A: They did okay, but they were not a wealthy family.

Q: Did you ever visit your grandmother –

A: Yes.

Q: – who had the 12 children, in her own home?

A: Yes. But by then – I mean, my father was married, and I went there sometimes in summer, to stay with my grandmother and my uncles. One of the uncles had my grandmother living with him. Another one had his farm not too far away, you could walk there.

Q: Okay.

A: And my Uncle **Danielas**(ph), I spent time with him.

Q: And he was your father's brother?

A: Yes.

Q: So, of the 12 children that your paternal grandmother had, did all of them survive?

A: Eight survived.

Q: Four died in infancy?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: That's what I hear.

Q: Okay.

A: That's what I was told, eight survived. I know that one emigrated to **South America**, and actually my sister had been in touch with him. But he is dead now.

Q: Okay.

A: And the rest of them lived in **Lithuania**. I don't know all of them. I never met all of the, but I met quite a few.

Q: I'd like to find more of what it was like when you would visit them in the summertime, on your – on your grandmother's farm, or your uncle's farm where she lived. Can you paint a picture for me, what the house would be like, what the bar – you know, how much land they had. Describe it.

A: I don't know how much land, but they – it was not a big land, hectares.

Q: Okay, it was in hectares?

A: Yes. And it was – I really can't tell. Nobody told me.

Q: Okay.

A: I did not discuss that kind of an –

Q: Of course.

A: – but it was a modest house. It had a big oven in the kitchen, where you bake bread. You put it inside, and bake brick loaves of bread. There were other buildings. There was a – there was a – where the animals were kept.

Q: The barn?

A: The barn. There was another building where the grain was stored, and also had a bedroom there that was used in summer. There was a la – most of the living were done in the – in the kitchen, in the main room, with benches around a large table, and benches for the table, and all their meals were served there. During the day the family had servants who worked in the fields, never in the house.

Q: Okay.

A: In the fields.

Q: How many other rooms were in the house, or was it –

A: No – okay, there was this big room where they – a s – big stove was, and there was a smaller room, it's almost like a cool room, where they kept smoked meats and things. Then there was a hallway, and led into the other part of the house, where there was a very lovely bedroom.

Q: Okay. Wa –

A: There was a bed in the hallway, there was a bed in that first large room. So I would say there were probably three rooms.

Q: And all the family lived in those?

A: All the family lived in there. But when I met them, then I went there, there was only my uncle, his wife, my grandmother.

Q: I see.

A: The others were all – they had gotten their porsh – their land portions.

Q: I see.

A: Their farm was divided, a large farm was divided. They had their own land, their own houses, and they were away.

Q: But did they all grow up in this house, all of those surviving children?

A: I assume so.

Q: Okay.

A: I assume so.

Q: Okay.

A: That the eight of them grew up there.

Q: And was your father amongst the youngest, or the oldest?

A: He was not the youngest, and he was not the oldest.

Q: Okay.

A: I think he was somewhere in the middle.

Q: Okay.

A: I know he had a younger brother, **Danielas**(ph) was his younger brother. He had an older sister, **Ona**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: His brother **Peter** was older, his brother **Paul** was younger. He married a woman from not the same village, through – a bit farther away, who apparently had no brothers, and who inherited her parents farm and property. And **Paul** married her, and in such way he –

Q: Became a far – a larger – yeah.

A: – became larger farmer. One of his – my brother's sisters, **Marita**(ph), whom I knew very well, because I met her when I went back to **Lithuania** after the wars, married a man who turned out to be a drunk.

Q: Ah. So this is wa – your – one of your father's sisters?

A: Yes.

Q: Father's sister **Marita**(ph).

A: These are all my father's siblings.

Q: Okay. I see.

A: She was th – **Marita**(ph) was the youngest.

Q: I see. Did you know your paternal grandfather?

A: No, he died. He w – he was dead.

Q: Okay.

A: When I – when I started coming to their farms, he was dead.

Q: Okay. Did you –

A: I never met him.

Q: Did you like going to the farm in the summertime?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: What is it that was the most fun for a little girl to be on that farm?

A: I liked – everybody was very nice to me, people who were working there on the farm in the summer – I had a great deal of freedom to – to go to the fields and ask – and see them mowing the – the hay, and then raking the hay, playing in the hay piles.

Q: Did your brother and sister go with you?

A: Yes.

Q: So would be the three of you.

A: There would be three of us.

Q: And –

A: Sometimes I will go just with my brother, because my sister was too small, and my mother didn't want her to – didn't want to leave her.

Q: Okay. But in some ways, this was both a relief for your parents, that they were able to have a little bit of a break from raising children –

A: I-I don't know –

Q: You don't think so?

A: – never – it was never put that way to us.

Q: Ah. How was it put to you? How was it put to –

A: Just simply, do you want to go to see your –

Q: Your grandparent.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, your grandma.

A: My grand – grandmother and – and, you know, go to the farm. And we say yes, want to go to the farm. And we – we were taken.

Q: What was your grandmother like? What was her name?

A: **Barborra**(ph).

Q: **Barborra**(ph).

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And sh –

A: **Yuseeta**(ph).

Q: **Yuseeta**(ph).

A: Yeah.

Q: **Barborra**(ph) **Yuseeta**(ph). Did you like her?

A: I liked her very much. She was a lovely woman.

Q: Yeah?

A: She very – was very kind, very loving. I remember her saying that – talking about me, that I was – would be such a pretty girl, except my dresses were way too short. Because in the villages then, even little girls wore dresses practically below their knees.

Q: Knees, yeah.

A: And my dresses barely covered my butt. So my dresses were too short.

Q: What kind of a person – she was very kind to you. Was she also somebody who was like the family matriarch? Was she the person who –

A: Not exactly. I mean, they respected her, and she was very much involved in, you know, the work in the kitchen, the making the cheeses, the – probably smoking the meats. And the family was quite religious, and they would go to church, we would go to church on Sundays. Not every Sunday though. I don't remember. And she was – she wore long clothes. She wore a kerchief on her head, tied under her chin.

Q: The white kerchief that so many used to wear?

A: Not necessarily white.

Q: Not necessarily, okay.

A: Not necessarily white. But I remember that if they went to church, and that would be going to church, where would that be? **Palėvenėlė**.

Q: **Palėvenėlė**?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Was that sort of like a small little village that had a church in it?

A: Small little town.

Q: Okay.

A: Maybe a couple stores, the church, the house where the priest lived. **Klebonija –**

Q: That's right.

A: – in Lithuanian.

Q: That's right.

A: And they had – that's about all, but I had to – sweet memories that on – on summer si – some saint's day, or what, everybody would bring food, and after the services, they would gather in the grounds around the church and sit and eat, and they would have very good sweet cheese that I loved, made from milk that was not sour.

Q: Oh, oh.

A: And actually my – one of my uncles married a town woman.

Q: From this town?

A: From this little town, mm-hm.

Q: Okay.

A: She was a seamstress.

Q: Did she lengthen your dresses?

A: She went from farm to farm and sewed.

Q: I see.

A: Mm-hm. And my uncle mad – one of my – my Uncle **Danielas**(ph), my youngest uncle, married her.

Q: Okay.

A: Bron – I forget her name.

Q: Okay. And –

A: It was a good – it was a – it was not a rich life, but it was a good life, I think, all in all.

Q: Well, it sounds very nice, it sounds very warm.

A: Yes. The family was very close. They visited on the holidays, they visited each other in other farms. And it was a good time, I mean. My father, as they say, was sent to – to the – to school, and then he went to the 1918 Lithuanian independence, he fought with the Lithuanian's army, the partisans. And then he worked – he was in the army, and then he was – so he did not farm.

Q: So, was he the only one from all the children, who was sent to have more of an education?

A: Yes. However, they all could read and write.

Q: Except Grandma.

A: Except Grandma.

Q: Okay.

A: Though she carried a prayer book to – to church all the time, though she couldn't read it.

Q: Oh.

A: I remember the pretty flower garden that she had.

Q: Did you help her, either in the garden, or with preparing any of the foods that you mentioned?

A: I did not work.

Q: You played.

A: I played. I was too little to do anything.

Q: Okay.

A: Not even wash dishes.

Q: Okay.

A: I was not asked to do anything. I was just run around with my brother. My brother, though he was three years younger, was a tall boy, and I was not big. So we were like twins. We spend a lot of time together.

Q: That sounds idyllic for a child.

A: Yes, it was a very easy life. Few demands.

Q: Yeah.

A: When we – when we were in town, I quickly – when – after I learned how to read, I loved to read. And since then later on, when I was now nine, te – eight, nine, I used to take books out of the libraries, since my mother ended up working in the library there in – in **Skarviskes**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: In **Jaimalas**(ph) actually, in **Jaimalas**(ph). I would go and take books out, and sometimes I would take books out that were not appropriate to my age, and I would read them, hiding.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember any of the books that were so not appropriate?

A: Romances.

Q: Ah.

A: Some kind of romances. That's all I remember.

Q: Yeah. Well, they make ma – they're much more interesting i – because they're forbidden, as well.

A: Yeah, yeah. But I read. And I remember another thing that I used to read. I li – I liked very much **Karl May**. Do you know **Karl May**?

Q: Tell us who **Karl May** is. I have heard of him mentioned.

A: He is a – a German writer.

Q: Okay.

A: And he wrote books about American Indians, though he had never been in **America**, or seen a live Indian in his life. But he wrote about – what did he write? About **[indecipherable]** one of the – he glorified American Indians. And –

Q: So he was translated into Lithuanian?

A: He was translated into Lithuanian, he was quite popular, and I read the books, I remember. We used to play Indians.

Q: Did you? Well, it's interesting, because a whole generation of people – I have heard him mentioned before by some of the people I've interviewed who are from **Germany**, and they would remember **Karl May**, reading him as they were growing up, as well. And we never heard of – here in the **United States**, it was not part of our childhood, not part of the books that we would remember, you know. Let's turn a little bit now to your father and your mother. You say your father was – was fighting in the 1918 war for independence, is that right?

A: That's what I understand, 1915 - 1918.

Q: Okay.

A: He was very nationalistic.

Q: Okay.

A: The whole family was nationalistic.

Q: Your – your father's family?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. It was of value for them. How do you –

A: They weren't – they weren't marching anywhere, but they certainly –

Q: How would you desc – you know, when someone says someone is nationalistic, different images come to mind.

A: What images –

Q: How would it express itself?

A: Okay. They liked the fact that there were Lithuanian schools, that their children were taught Lithuanian reading and writing, because rem – I don't know if you know it, but under the tsar's occupation, it was forbidden to print books in Lithuanian.

Q: And they all remembered this, then?

A: I remember the stories about it, I mean –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it was before my time, but I remember people talking about – the stories about it, that you had. And we were even taught it, explained to us that they used to print books in Lithuanian, across the border in **Prussia**, and smuggle them into **Lithuania**. And that's how they had books, Lithuanian books in their villages.

Q: I see.

A: And you could be punished very severely by the tsar's agents if they found out that you had Lithuanian books. But – so, there was this feeling that now they cannot tell us. We have our own books, our own government. I don't think anybody was too interested in how the government ran, or what was happening. They – their lives concentrated on their farm, on their families, on the weather.

Q: Cause this – it affects the farm.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's it. But, as I say, they would not have – they would never have welp – welcomed any foreign country taking **Lithuania** over.

Q: Well, some people will call that patriotic, not necessarily nationalist. That definition of it, that people find themselves to be patriots of their own country, and willing to defend it.

A: Well, defend it – it's interesting how it happened, from what I remember.

Q: Okay.

A: Again, keeping in mind that I was now talking about the first thing that happened was the Russians coming in.

Q: Are we talking now about World War II, or World War I?

A: Two.

Q: Okay.

A: I-I in – in 1918, **Lithuania** became separate. The Russian – the tsars were defeated. The – now I'm talking because I learned about it, not because – it was much discussed in my family, because that was way before.

Q: Got it.

A: Nobody would sit down and – we didn't have **TV** or radios. We did have a radio. Nobody listened to it so much, except operas. But what I learned later on, after the communists took over **Russia** government, and then stopped a war, Lithuanians declared independence.

Q: We're talking 1917 - 1918.

A: 1917 - 1918.

Q: Yeah.

A: 1918. And my father fought then.

Q: Got it.

A: To get that – everybody out of **Lithuania**, he was in the army then.

Q: So, what year was he born, do you remember?

A: Hm?

Q: What year was your father born?

A: What year was my father born? I don't know.

Q: You don't know. Okay.

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you know how old –

A: He must have been then – he must have been then in his early 20s.

Q: When – in – so, in 1917 - 1918?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Okay. So he would have been born in the 1890s.

A: Probably.

Q: Okay, okay. And tell me a little bit about how did your parents meet? Do you know about this?

A: I have heard – I have heard about it. I don't know quite how it happened, but my mother used to tell stories that she m – they – they met somewhere no-not in – not where the farms were.

Q: Okay.

A: Not in **Jaimalas**(ph). Somewhere – I'm trying to remember. Where could have it been? **Panevėžys** maybe –

Q: Okay.

A: – or **Kupishkis**. Anyway, my father showed up there. My mother was in – lived in that area, and she actually was dating somebody, and that friend of hers was not – she found out he was cheating on her. Again, my mother tells the story. And so, she got mad at him and married my father, to spite him.

Q: So your father was a – a rebound?

A: He was a rebound, and it was not a happy marriage.

Q: Oh.

A: It was not a happy marriage.

Q: In what ways?

A: Well, my mother felt that my fath-father never accomplished much, that he was not ambitious enough, that he was sort of happy-go-lucky person, and that she made a mistake marrying him.

Q: Did you children used to hear that?

A: She would talk about it to her friends, and I would hear that.

Q: I see.

A: She did not talk it – about it to me, or – or any of us children, but she would talk to her friends about it. And – sometimes – and – and that's how I heard about it.

Q: Did they argue?

A: Yes, they argued. What did they argue about? Money. I think my father probably had a relationship with somebody, and my mother just simply did not have much respect for my father.

Q: Ooh.

A: They just – it j – it just was not a happy couple.

Q: Where – was the atmosphere then, much different in your home –

A: It was not happy atmosphere in my house, no.

Q: Yeah. But it – so it's a big contrast to when you would go spend the summer in your grandmother and uncle's –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: They do not abuse each other openly, or in front of us, and was not much arguing. But they just was – I think in some ways, my father loved my mother, but he just never measured up to her expectations.

Q: Now, you described what she thought of him, what did – how would you characterize your parents' personalities?

A: He was – my father was easygoing, I would say. And I think he really loved my mother. It's just that she did not really love him, and he could just not measure up to what she expected of him.

Q: That's pretty harsh.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's pretty harsh.

A: Yeah. So it was not – it was not a happy marriage. And they were both very caring, as far as we were concerned, the children. But –

Q: Were you closer to one, or to the other?

A: I think as a little girl, I probably leaned more – more towards my mother, but not really, because they were wise enough to never, in front of us, bring their troubles, bring their dis-disputes, and try to tell us, oh, he is not good, or she is not good.

Q: Okay.

A: They never did that.

Q: Okay. So it would be what you had overheard, and just the general sense –

A: That's what I were – that's what I overhear, that he is not ambitious enough, that he is not really supporting his family the way he should, that he is not working hard enough. Mostly that was coming from my mother. I never, ever heard my father talking against my mother, never.

Q: What kind of personality did your mother have?

A: My mother?

Q: Yeah.

A: Hard.

Q: Really?

A: Tough.

Q: How did that express itself?

A: Well, my father was much more open and loving and fun, where I don't remember my mother playing with us much. I mean, she made sure that we looked as good as possible. When you see that photograph, we are wearing beautiful, red velvet outfits, with my brother. I remember the – they would – expected me to do well in school, when I started going to school. But I would say my mother was not very affectionate, whereas my father was. My – my father would not – would – was not much of a disciplinary person, and he was not much of a – he was very easygoing.

Q: So in some ways, all of this fell to your mother. She – she –

A: Yes.

Q: – needed – she had to do all of the hard work.

A: Yes, yes, she did.

Interview with Danguolè Gabis
December 10, 2015

Q: Tell me –

A: And she got that – she got that job. She did not work all the time, as I remember, but she did get a job running that library, because they did need the income.

Q: Got it. Tell me how that library looked. Can you describe the building?

A: The library?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Sure. I loved that library. I still love libraries, though I can't read now without my g – machine. And it was on a corner of street, and market square, in the middle of the – of that town, there was a square where the – they would hold market days. They would have a market day, and the farmers from the area would come and sell eggs, they sometimes had animals to sell to other farmers, even horses. And they would sell all kinds of farm produce, garden stuff. And on that square – I mean, on that open place, there was a Jewish bakery at one – on one side, I remember, and on the other side, on the corner was the library. Steps in, one story. My mother's desk there, and bookcases in the – in the room. I don't think there was a – there were – was no second floor.

Q: Okay, so was one room library.

A: Yeah, but fairly large room.

Q: Okay.

A: I mean like the whole floor.

Q: Okay.

A: And you could – you took the books out and brought it to their desk, and how she marked them, maybe wrote it in by hand. That so and so took this book.

Q: Okay.

A: And I-I think so, because I would take them out whatever I – whenever I decided to go and browse around. So that was my **[indecipherable]**. And I remember I would ask my mother to give me 10 cents, and I would go to the Jewish bakery, and buy a sweet.

Q: Oh. What ki – do you had – did you have a favorite sweet?

A: I know exactly what kind of a sweet. It's a – made from what we call now gingerbre – bread. But it was made in a shape of a mushroom, and it had icing on top. And that's what I will get. That was my sweet. And it was – you know, it was very eas – easy life. There was no other buildings in town that I remember, down, away from there, was a very nice Lutheran church.

Q: You're talking about **Jaimalai**(ph) now?

A: Yes.

Q: And **Jaimalai**(ph), can you f – can you place it for me geographically? You said it was close to the Latvian border?

A: Yes.

Q: And would it have been in **Samogitia Žemaitija**, or would it have been in **Aukštaitija**?

A: I think it was farther west. I think it's must be **Aukštaitija**.

Q: You think it's **Aukštaitija**? Okay. We'll – we'll eventually take a look on the map and see.

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: Was it a large town?

A: No, small town.

Q: Okay.

A: I te – when I st-started reading, really continued reading as an adult, and started reading **Chekhov**, it reminded me of some of **Chekov's** stories.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your town, **Jaimalai**(ph).

A: Yeah. Little, provincial town. Was nothing there. Had a train station, but that was about it. I mean, there were no – the big – the big heads in that town were the mayor – I used to play with the daughter, mayor's daughter now and then, and I used to go to her house to play, too, and she had a very fancy house. And then there

was the chief of police. The wife of the chief of police was my – my sister's godmother. And for – I remember one Christmas, she gave my sister this beautiful doll that had eyes that closed up. And I never had anything like that, so I was very jealous. I was very jealous of my sister to begin with.

Q: And why is that?

A: Because everybody said, oh what a beautiful child, oh my gosh. And up to then, everybody said I was beautiful. My sister arrived, suddenly she was beautiful.

Q: The nerve. The nerve.

A: The nerve, exactly. So who is she, this little, bitty thing?

Q: Yeah.

A: So actually, it took us a very long time, though she, when she was growing up, she said she adored me.

Q: Really?

A: She said, I was think – I would think if only I could be like **Danga**(ph).

Q: Oh. Well see, that's the memories that children have, and the urges, you know? The little ones always want to be with the bigger ones, yeah.

A: And the bigger ones don't want **[indecipherable]**.

Q: No.

A: Now, as I say, I got along with my brother just fine, but my sister did not count. I didn't even see her, if I could avoid it.

Q: Well, she had this doll.

A: Yeah, she had this doll, yeah, yeah.

Q: In – you mentioned the Jewish bakery where you would get some sweets, and that brings me to a question that I had. In **Plungė**, where – when you would visit your – well, it was outside of **Plungė**, but when you would visit your grandmother **Barbara**, and your father's family, was it all Lithuanian, or were there other peoples?

A: Ah, it wasn't **Plungė**, it was **Palėvenėlė**.

Q: **Palėvenėlė**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Is that close to **Plungė** or not?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

Q: So we – I was wrong in thinking **Plungė** at all. So it's **Palėvenėlė**.

A: **Plungė** was where my mother's family – some of her family lived. But no, we were pe – **Palėvenėlė**.

Q: **Palėvenėlė**, okay. And so were there any Jewish people in **Palėvenėlė**?

A: There must – could have been.

Q: Okay.

A: **Jaimalas**(ph) had some Jewish people.

Q: Uh-huh. More than just the bakery.

A: Just – more than just the bakery, yes. Na – how many, I don't know. I do remember that there used to be some kind of Jewish holidays, and they would all go, wrapped in some garments to the river, there was a river that ran through town. We children – we children were talking, that I don't know. Children stories went – you know, nobody really – I mean, I did not believe, I don't know who believed, but there were stories that the Jews li – used the blood of Christian children for their baki – baking at the holiday, some holiday.

Q: Okay, so those were the types of – when Jews were talked about, that was something that you remember –

A: The kids.

Q: – the kids would say.

A: Kids –

Q: The kids would say.

A: – gossiping. My family did not really have prejudices. I mean – but there was a kind of a separate feeling. I don't – I think somebody arrived in that town, and he had a position as a banker maybe, or even a lawyer, and I remember my mother said, well, I – she had a dinner party, and she had this man included with her friends. And she said, and I served pork. She said, I did not know he was Jewish, I served pork. But she said, well, he ate it.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: So, in some – I mean, my family as such, and I did not hear them saying anything bad about Jews.

Q: Did they have interaction –

A: But they were separate, they really –

Q: Yeah.

A: – you know, some of them did not speak Lithuanian, or they knew just enough to run the store.

Q: Were there more stores than just the bakery?

A: Yes, there were – there was a butcher store. I don't think that was run by Jews. There was a – some kind of a dry grocery store, because I remember my mother used to send me there to buy her cigarettes.

Q: She smoked?

A: She smoked. Yeah, she smoked.

Q: Okay.

A: And I don't think there was really much more. If you wanted clothes made, you got yard goods, and you went to the seamstress and she made it for you.

Q: And this was a Jewish seamstress –

A: No.

Q: – or Lithuanian?

A: No.

Q: Okay. And you say there was also a Lutheran church in this town, in **Jaimalai**(ph)?

A: Yeah.

Q: So were there many Protestants there?

A: There must have been Protestants there.

Q: Okay.

A: And there was a Lithuanian church. And probably there was a Jewish temple, but I did not know about it.

Q: When you say there were – we had a Lutheran church, did that mean they were not Lithuanian speaking? It was a – it was also either Latvian or – or German or something.

A: I had so very little to do with Jewish families. I did have a Jewish girlfriend for a while.

Q: You did?

A: Who was in school. I think she was a little older than I was.

Q: Okay. Do you remember her name?

A: And I don't remember her name, I don't think we were friends for too long a time, but I do remember going to her house, which was much nicer than mine, and it smelled funny. It did not smell like my house.

Q: What wa –

A: And it probably was garlic.

Q: Ah.

A: Spices that we did not use. We lived in rented apartments in **Jaimalas**(ph), we did not have a house. We lived in an attractive rented apartment, and then we left that, I think when the Russians came. I don't – something went on in the family, I don't know, but we moved out of there and moved in sort of very rundown place, I would even say.

Q: Okay.

A: That's where we – there was a – like a small stable in the back of our yard. There was no grass around.

Q: Was in – in – in your rented places, did you have running water and electricity, and so on? I want to get a sense of how modern the town was.

A: There was electricity.

Q: You had a radio you told me, yes?

A: We had a radio. There were telephones. There was a train station.

Q: Did you have telephone in your home?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: Okay.

A: There was – at least for a while, we did. And we hardly ever but – ever used it. I couldn't call anybody, I think. The farms did not have telephones. Post office, police office, a-and to me the police seemed to be – chief of police seemed to be much bigger shot than my father. I don't know why. I think maybe they lived somewhat better than – than my family. I don't think they had any children. The townspeople basically had their friendships in their own social class. They had their jobs. There were no demonstrations of any kind.

Q: No political demonstrations.

A: No. Except on – on the – February 18th, I think, was the day of independence.

Q: Sixteenth.

A: That there would be a parade, my father would be dressed in his uniform, and maybe even carry the s-sword. I don't remember, but it was definitely – the schools would be closed, and there would be sp – speeches, and very often cold, and miserable.

Q: Yes.

A: But that was about all. And then, people also were connected to their churches.

Q: Did your family go to church? Your father and mother?

A: We went sometimes.

Q: Got it.

A: We were not a very religious family.

Q: Okay.

A: Sometimes – all the children were baptized. I was prepared to go to communion, first communion, and I remember my mother had a very pretty white dress made for me, but no sleeves. Just little straps, flowers. And – but there was no celebration at home at all for that. And my father did not live with us any more.

Q: Oh, so did your fa – parents sep –

A: My father, at one point, I can't quite remember, got a job somewhere else. That must have been when the Russians came, or maybe even before that. But he moved out into an ad-adjoining town, and had a job there. And he would come and visit us.

But my mother was basically in charge of the family, and pretty much probably, of family finances. So he did go into **[indecipherable]** some way, I unders – my understanding was. And –

Q: It sounds like a separation.

A: Yeah, kind of. And then, as far as the town goes, there were no cars. Everybody would come and went there with sleighs, horses and sleighs. And we kids would love to run after the sleighs, get hold of the back of the sleigh and go for a ride, which was very dangerous, because you could fall down and be trampled by other horses, so you had – you were not allowed to do it, you had to sneak out to do it. And was very safe. I mean, I was never afraid that somebody will steal something from me, or beat me up, or what –

Q: Did people talk about political things? Did they talk about what was go –

A: I am sure that some of them did. Nobody talked in my family much about political things.

Q: What was your father's job at the – when he was border police? What did that involve?

A: That involved, as all borders have, patrols. At least at that time, I'm sure they do now. And he was in charge of that – of a stretch of a border, in charge of the patrols. I guess he would ride out. He had a beautiful horse, I remember that. **Lila** was her

name. And he would ride out there and check on the patrols, I suppose. I think now and then, maybe every six months, or once a year, some kind of a superiors would arrive, and he had prison documents. I remember it because my mother would fill these documents out for him at the last minute, so everything looked okay. That's what I understood.

Q: Okay.

A: But he didn't have to be out there anywhere – or every day, all day, or what.

Q: Did he have an office?

A: No, he didn't have any office.

Q: Okay, so there was no place – there wasn't a place he had to go to every day to go to work.

A: No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

Q: So before he found a job in another town, he hung around the house?

A: Mm-hm. Or he was away, inspecting the borders.

Q: Okay. Did you ever join him doing that?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: But I remember him bringing in er – in spring bringing a packet made of birch bark, full with first wild strawberries.

Q: Oh, that must have been nice.

A: Tiny little strawberries, they are **[indecipherable]**

Q: How do you say that in Lithuanian?

A: **Žemuogės**.

Q: I've had them myself, they're quite delicious. They're quite delicious.

A: **Žemuogės**.

Q: Yeah. When you used to visit your grandmother, how did you get there?

A: Horses. Someone from the farm would come and pick us up.

Q: Mm-hm. And then bring you there.

A: That's the way they picked us up. When my mother – I mean, my father came to **Jaimalas**(ph), showed up in **Jaimalas**(ph) because, from what I hear, there were rumors that he's run – ran away, and he was afraid that they will – family will be punished, so he showed up. And then there were rumors going on that things are not going to be good. Something's going to happen. So –

Q: You're talking now at what point? Still –

A: '38.

Q: '38, or '39?

A: Eighty – ’38.

Q: Really? So when he was living far away, you know – not far away, in the adjoining town –

A: Yeah.

Q: – but separately –

A: Yeah.

Q: – there – there were rumors going on that things were not going to be good?

A: The Russians were there.

Q: Oh, so that’s already when the Russians were there.

A: Yeah, the Russians were – the communist regime was already there.

Q: Okay.

A: I can tell you about what I know about them.

Q: Okay, let’s break just for a second. **[break]** Okay, so –

A: Okay.

Q: – let’s – you started to talk about the Soviet occupation, and before we get into what happened during it, I’d like to step back just before, and ask about when did things change, and how did things change? That is, here you live in independent **Lithuania**. By 1938, you’re already a nine year old girl. And August 7th, if you

were born, in 1938, you'd be nine and August 7th, 1939, you'd be 10. And in late August of '39 is when **Hitler** and **Stalin** signed the **Molotov-Ribbentrop** Pact.

A: Right, right, right.

Q: And I'm sure that nobody – but I'm leading you here, maybe it's true that people did know about it, but from what I have heard, most people didn't know about this pact that they had signed.

A: I have no idea because, as I say, we did not discuss family – in my family, politics or –

Q: Yeah.

A: – I think in – in – I – I'm sure that some people who followed, knew about that, but we did not listen to the radio.

Q: Okay.

A: We had no information, and I never heard about anything. I just knew that the Russians took over **Lithuania**, and that our President **Smetona** ran away. And there was some kind of – some gossip going around, no fight, nothing, he just left. Which was a disgrace.

Q: Okay. So –

A: There – there were even some – some little songs **[indecipherable]** made about **Smetona** running away.

Q: Do you remember any of them?

A: No, I don't remember that. I remember another one, but I don't remember that one. I remember about both German and Russian –

Q: Tell me.

A: **[speaks Lithuanian]**

Q: One is ye – black as the devil.

A: Yeah.

Q: One is red like a dog. I don't need any **Berlin**, I don't need **Moscow**. Is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. So that was something that was –

A: That was already when the Germans came in.

Q: I see. Okay –

A: But first we have to deal with the Russians. So what I heard about Russian occupation, I had not – in **Jaimalas**(ph), I haven't seen any police, or – I mean, soldiers coming in, or anything. The library was running like it did before, no change.

Q: What about school?

A: Huh?

Q: What about school?

A: Schools were running, however they brought in an organization called **[indecipherable]** pioneers.

Q: Okay. So the – did your teachers change? Did new teachers come in?

A: No, the same teachers. And I think there could have been classes about communism, and how the common man was – there were – there were probably some people in town who liked the idea that it was – everybody's going to be equal type of a thing, but I don't know. I do know that the farmers were very concerned, because they were required by the gub – by the government now, to deliver so much food, grains of all kinds, maybe even animals to their government. For which they got paid, but very little. So slowly – you know, depending how much land you had, it looked like slowly you will have to sell it – to leave it, because you will not able to – to have enough to deliver to the government. And after that, they would start building **kolhauses**(ph). **Kolhauses**(ph) is a farm that the land belongs to the state, and everybody works there, for the state. So that was going along, and – but as far as my life, or I would say, my mother's life, did not change. She still worked in the library. I still went to school.

Q: Your father still did his job?

A: My father just was nowhere to be seen. He ha – I don't even know if he had a job of any sort.

Q: He just wasn't there.

A: He wasn't there. I do remember that once he showed up to – just to make sure that everybody saw him, that he was still alive, and there, and – and then di – disappeared again. And then just before the deport – huge deportation was staged, he came home, and I have a feeling that the people knew, or sensed, or heard something, that something is going to happen. So, my father or my mother, I'm not sure who, got in touch with my – my uncles, and they came, and they picked us three up.

Q: The children.

A: All the children, all three of us.

Q: Okay.

A: And took us out into the farm. And –

Q: Okay, before we get there though, before we get there, when the occupation happens –

A: Uh-huh.

Q: – it comes in stages. August ’39, right after your birthday, is when the pact is signed. Later on in the fall, the first Soviet troops are stationed in **Lithuania**. That might be going in different places, not in **Jaimalas**(ph).

A: That’s going on somewhere –

Q: Yeah.

A: – but it’s just never regi – as far as I’m concerned, a child in that small town, I did not hear people talking much about it, or you know, the change –

Q: Right.

A: – from one to another. It seemed to me that people just – I just knew – what I knew of it was that **Smetona**, the president left, and that now I – it’s the Russian government.

Q: Okay.

A: The – the communist –

Q: Government.

A: – are here.

Q: Okay.

A: And that –

Q: But different things happened, and I want to find out – as I'm saying these things, I'm wanting to find out if any of this triggers anything for **Jaimalas**(ph). And that is –

A: No.

Q: – after the – the army has its soldiers based, then – then you talked about the requisitioning, and the taxes that the farmers had to pay.

A: I don't even remember seeing any army.

Q: Okay.

A: In **Jaimalas**(ph).

Q: Was there a change in the police chief, a change in the mayor –

A: I don't – I – I – there must have been.

Q: Was there anybody who lost their business, let's say a little store, or that it no longer ran –

A: Not that I knew of.

Q: Okay.

A: Not that I knew of. I don't think they had market days any more.

Q: Okay.

A: I think these were stop. I also – I remember my mother talking that it was getting more and more difficult to let's say, get meat.

Q: Okay.

A: Or other shortages –

Q: Started to –

A: – I heard about –

Q: Okay.

A: – in – in the stores.

Q: Do you remember the following summer? Not even a year had gone by, but I think it was June or July, the new communist government voted to be included in the **Soviet Union**.

A: No.

Q: So none of that was something –

A: No.

Q: – that affected you in **Jaimalas**(ph).

A: If something happened, happened, but it was just –

Q: Okay.

A: I – I think there must have been newspapers around.

Q: Okay.

A: But I certainly was way too small to read any of them.

Q: Okay.

A: And nobody in my family read any of them. And there no changes in town, as such.

Q: Okay.

A: So for us, no matter who sat there in the na –

Q: **[indecipherable]** difference.

A: – in – in – yes. There was – there was a patriotic feeling that, you know, they went that – bu-but that was straight from the beginning, I think. It was right from the beginning, as soon as **Smetona** left.

Q: What was the patriotic feeling?

A: Wat – independence.

Q: Okay.

A: Don't – do not want the Russians here, or anybody. Want to be independent. And – and people felt sad there was na – it – it was as far – what I have heard talking, and what my mother talked about, at – we're unhappy that it – **Lithuania** was no longer independent.

Q: Okay.

A: And was part of **Russia**.

Q: Okay.

A: The – actually, you know, the communists, there must have been some communists in town, as there were communists everywhere at that p – time in **Lithuania**, and they probably were ha-happy, but there were no flag raisings, or big parades, or you know, hurray, we are now part of **Soviet Union** or not, it – none of them happened. None of it.

Q: So here you are, just over a year and a half later, you know, August – I mean, excuse me, September 30, or – the fall of '39 is when the troops are stage, July of 1940 is when there's the annexation into the **Soviet Union**, and almost a full year before this time that you're talking about, of people feeling like something's going to happen. And your uncles come – I'm just putting a date to this – your uncles come and take you –

A: They come – it was just before the deportations started.

Q: Okay.

A: That's when I-I-I mean – I personally, nobody told me anything about it.

Q: Okay.

A: And did not discuss anything, or talked in front of me about it. But I was told later on that my family felt something is going to happen, that something – and that other people felt – knew that something is going to happen, so my mother decided to send us out.

Q: Got it. So then you –

A: And she did not want to go herself, because she did not want to leave the apartment, and whatever we had, because there would have been no – though she did not sleep at home any more.

Q: Really? And why would she be frightened that she shou – she couldn't sleep at home?

A: Because people were afraid of there so – of their **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay, so even though life really hadn't changed much –

A: No. Yeah.

Q: – and things went on, there was a sense of – of insecurity.

A: Now, because they also felt that the war will be coming. There were rumors about the war coming. I believe there were also rumors that – I mean, the Russians, or the – the Soviets started demanding more and more from the farmers. They probably demanded something from the stores – store owners, or other people. It just – obviously that the population was feeling uneasy.

Q: Okay.

A: And uncertain of what was going to happen.

Q: Do you –

A: Were definitely, definitely did not like the Russians. Hated the idea of them coming.

Q: Do you remember leaving **Jaimalai**(ph) then, with your uncle?

A: Yeah.

Q: What do you remember from that?

A: Leaving? They came from the farm with the horse and buggy, and a cart, and just said you are going – you know, my mother said, you are going to go to the farms. Which was not so unusual for us because we went every summer – practically every summer there anyway.

Q: And this was –

A: So we did.

Q: Yeah, so this was like in late May, early June, something –

A: June.

Q: It was in June.

A: Because it was – schools were closed.

Q: So was June 1941, yes?

A: Thirty-eight.

Q: N – I think the deportations – ’38 **Lithuania** was still independent.

A: Well, when did the war start with **Germany**?

Q: June 1941.

A: You mean, the Russian-German war started –

Q: In June 1941.

A: 1949 – so the Germans did not come to **Lithuania** until ’49?

Q: No, until ’41. So that’s when it started.

A: Yeah.

Q: The Russian-German war started on – in June 1941, and the deportations happened the same month.

A: So wha – when did deportations start?

Q: June 14th, 1941. And a week later –

A: Oh yeah, ’41, yes, yes, ’41. A week later, the war started.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: Yes, I remember now.

Q: Yes.

A: The week later, the war started, yes. So we were taken out to the farms, and I ha – so the – I think the population felt that some – there were rumors, there were probably spies, there were some kind of information floating around that the Soviets will be pushed out, an-and the Germans will come and push the germ – the Soviets out, and everybody felt ve – I think most people probably felt oh well, that’s good.

Let's get rid of the Soviets. At least the Germans are religious. So that was it. So when they took us to the farm, I did not think anything of it. Now, I tell you the one thing. Once I – once we got there, after staying with my uncles for about a week, we were taken away from my uncles, our uncles distributed the three of us to different farmers around.

Q: Family members, or not?

A: No, not even family members. I don't know where my brother was, or my sister. I know that I was with some people who I could have met, but they were not family members, and I just stayed there, and I did not know why. I thought maybe because the war was coming, because at one point, the family had even a – a kind of earth tunnel built, or something, that you could go in, if the bombs start falling, if they start shooting around.

Q: Do you remember anything about this family that you were with?

A: No, don't remember. I don't even remember their name.

Q: Okay.

A: But, you know, they were kind to me, they were good to me. They did not – they did not tell me what was going on, they just said, you know, my brother was somewhere else. I wanted to be with my brother and sister, mainly my brother.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I – I-I just didn't.

Q: So that was the one unusual thing. It was not unusual that you would go with your uncles to the farms, but it was unusual that you'd be split up.

A: That we were taken from my uncles, to the different farms.

Q: So –

A: And then, at one point, when the Germans came, we were taken to another farm, another uncle. And finally, we were – all three of us got to gi – together again.

Q: Do you ni – remember about how long a time span that was?

A: No. I – I mean, it – it – the same summer.

Q: The same summer.

A: Yeah, in a few weeks, probably.

Q: Okay.

A: Or at the most, a month.

Q: Okay. That's –

A: July.

Q: – that's all we ne – that's all we really need to –

A: Yeah.

Q: – understand –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – what's going on. So, and what goes on with your mother and your father? What happened with them?

A: Wherever my father was, from what I understand he had joined a Lithuanian partisans, and fought the Russians leaving **Lithuania**. Chased them – helped them chase them out. My mother was deported. That's why we were – that's why they thought that something was going on, going to happen, and that's why they – we were sent to the farms. We were – and after she was deported, we were sent to different farmers. And then, after Russians left, and the Germans came, they found my famil – my uncles found out that my mother was deported. And how I found out –

Q: Tell me.

A: – my – my aunt, and my godmunt – godmother, my father's oldest sister, **Ona**(ph), we were going to some adjacent farm, where I ha – I had left something there, or some – for some reason we were walking. We were walking little paths through their farmland, and someone was working on the land. I don't know, my aunt knew him, and they start to talk, and they start to talk and the man said, I hear that **Poroniena**(ph) was taken away. And my aunt said, shh, don't say anything, because I did not know. And then when we walked away, I asked her. I said, what happened? And then she told me that my mother was deported. And that –

Q: Did she know the circumstances of your mother

A: She – she knew – the only thing I was told, that the Russians took my mother. Deported. That's all I knew. I never went back to **Jaimalas**(ph).

Q: Ever?

A: No. Let me th – I have gone to **Jaimalas**(ph) – did I go to **Jaimalas**(ph)? I don't think so. My sister had gone back. Had gone back to found the same apartment, the last apartment that was stayed in. She said the brick stove that we used was still there.

Q: So this must have been decades later.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: A long time later.

A: Now, from **United States**.

Q: Did you see your mother again?

A: Hm?

Q: Did you ever see your mother again?

A: Yes.

Q: When?

A: I saw her – she came to **United States**, we got her out. She came 49 years ago.

Q: So that's means it would have been 1965?

A: We fou – somehow we found out that she was back in **Lithuania**. Somehow, there were some relatives, or people from the same village, here in **United States**, and they have seen my father and us, because we were in **New Jersey** for a little while. And they have written to their friends, their family in **Lithuania**, telling them, well, we saw **Poronus**(ph) and his family here in – in –

Q: **United States**.

A: – in **United States**, and they told my mother. That's how she found out that we were alive, because when she came to **Lithuania**, they did not know if we were alive or dead. And then she managed through – because my – my aunt was writing letters to **Lithuania**, through family members, she found our addresses in lith – in gi – in **United States**. And I was living then in – in **Chicago**.

Q: Were you already married yourself?

A: I was married, I have my third child.

Q: So – so this must have been the mid-1960s?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So it would have been at least 25 years later. When she came to the united –

A: She came to **United States**, yes.

Q: And did she stay, and – stay in the **United States**?

A: She died in **United States**, yes, she stayed. She stayed first with my sister in **Chicago**, and **Stanley** and I and our children – no, **David** was not born yet. I know – I saw her for the first time again in – 49 years ago, but we first heard from her, I had two children, I did not have **David**. So, she wrote to us, and I wr-wrote to her. And then **Gerda**(ph) and I kept sending presents to her. She lived in – where did she live? **Plungė**.

Q: Maybe that's how we know of **Plungė**.

A: Yeah.

Q: She lived in **Plungė**.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: She lived in **Plungė**, and **Gerda**(ph) and I kept sending – we were – the – at the beginning was very difficult to send anything. You had to send through some kind of organization that was connected with the Soviet regime, that would allow the stuff to go in. We send, basically, yard goods, of all kinds, so she could trade them for food. She had acquired a tiny house in that town, that belonged, actually, to my aunt – to my took – to **Ona**(ph), my father's sister.

Q: Sister.

A: She acquired that house. And she – she would request all kinds of very fancy goods, so we would send it to her, and she would exchange them. She worked also in a parish, I think there, as a head cook, or – I – I – it's something – I don't – I don't know.

Q: In **Plungė**?

A: Yeah. And – but she basically lived of what we sent her. And she started bribing the authorities, applying – trying to apply for a visa to get out, and go to la – to go to **United States**.

Q: Your parent never divorced?

A: No, no. And –

Q: Whi – when she came to the **United States**, did she ever tell you the details of how she got deported?

A: How she lived in there – when she was deported?

Q: Everything, from the last time you had seen her, to when –

A: Some. Some. She – she arrived in **Chicago** – I then lived in **Columbia**, **Missouri**, and I came to **Chicago** with my three children, and stayed at my sister's. My brother came in. He lived down in **Kansas** I – I think in **Kansas** already. And his wife, and we all went to the airport to meet her. I remember it was – must have been close to Christmas. I stayed there for a while, and then I went to the apartment,

because my baby was sick, and I couldn't stay out there. I had to go then – to my – to the apartment. So, this is what my sisters told me, she said, when she got off – out of the plane, we somehow, all of us recognized her. But we also knew that once she was able to fly out of **Russia**, and fly to **Switzerland**, that when she got to **Switzerland**, we knew she was safe. So that's – what she told about the camps, she said actually, first she was kept in prison, and was interrogated, and was badly beaten up, and they wanted to get names of other partisans, partisans that were involved. And she said she didn't tell them anything. So she then ended in camps way out the **Altai** mountains. And it was very difficult. She had had, at one point, some training as a nurse. So for a while, she actually helped out in one camp, as a nurse, and she caught **TB**. She almost died. And then they – they worked in the fields, and she said sometimes the peasants from the area would leave packages of food in the fields for them, for the prisoners, because they knew they were starving. She said by that time, a cat appeared in the camp. We knew that we lived much better, because nobody ate the cat.

Q: I can't imagine what that must have been like, for you, for her.

A: Hm?

Q: I said, I can't imagine what that must have been like –

A: Yeah.

Q: – for any of you.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So –

A: And of course, she did not get anything – didn't hear anything from us, from – about her family. And then she served 15 years, as she was required apparently, her punishment was to serve 15 years, so she did. And then they said, the authorities told her that she can stay if she wants to, and work as an – a nurse, or so – and they will pay her. But she said no, she wanted to go back home. And so she – she went back ho – back to **Lithuania**.

Q: So that – if she w – was there for 15 years, that means it would have been 1956 that she would have been released from her servitude.

A: Yeah.

Q: And – and went back to **Lithuania** in the mid-50s, or right after that.

A: Right after that, she went directly to **Lithuania**, and stayed in **Plungė** because her sister – one of her sisters lived there, or close by. And anyway, she was – she was given housing.

Q: By your father's sister.

A: By her own sister.

Q: Okay, by her own sister.

A: Yeah.

Q: By her own sister, so her own sister took her in. And when she came to the **United States**, who did she live with?

A: She lived with my sister.

Q: **Gerda**(ph).

A: With **Gerda**(ph), yes, in **Chicago**. And to describe my mother, she was very thin, somewhat gray, and I mean, she was emaciated, she was very thin. **Gerda**(ph) took her to the doctors, and she s – they said, well, if we did not know that she's living with you, with th – we think that she was being starved. But she was not happy. I think what she missed, she missed having her own place. She did not like living with **Gerda**(ph), she did not like living with me.

Q: Did she ever live with your father again?

A: She lived, at the end, with my father, and she died in **Kansas**, with my father and my brother, my brother had both of them. And she went there because she – she lived in **Chicago** with my sister, and my sister, they had bought a house in **Park Ridge**, the same house that they are in now. And she had broken her hip, and she could not climb the stairs, and there was no way for her sleep downstairs, so my brother took her because they had a one floor e – floor house, sort of little shack in **Kansas**.

Q: Did you recognize anything of the mother that you knew as a child?

A: No, nothing.

Q: So, was it like getting a stranger –

A: A complete stranger, mm-hm. And very unhappy woman. Very unhappy woman. No matter what you did for her, and how it went, nothing really pleased her.

Q: Do you recognize any of that from growing up, or was the mother you knew, as hard as she was, not like that?

A: No, no, I don't, I don't remember that. I don't remember that. I knew that she was ni – not a happy women when she – when I was growing up, but partly was – that was sort of that she and Father did not get along. But no, you know, I really don't remember my mother laughing, smile, or really meeting anybody with great joy. It just – there was something in her character that – of course the deportation, and the – the arrests and all that, were difficult, but some of that inner sadness was always there, and I don't know what for. Now my father was very different.

Q: I don't know what –

A: So she – she died in **Kansas**, where in she – my brother called me, it was right at New Year's, I don't remember how many years ago, but he called me and he said that Mother had to go into the hospital. And I called her and talked with her in the

hospital, and she said, oh, I am feeling – I don't feel bad. So that was okay. There is somebody here who can speak – her English was not good, not very good, but she says somebody here can speak Polish. And she knew Polish, and of course she knew Russian. And so she said was very good. And she died next day.

Q: How many years did she eventually live here in the **United States**?

A: Maybe 10, I think. She was 80 when she died, I know that.

Q: Do you remember her birth date?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I flew out to **Kansas** for the mer – burial. And now, my father is dead, and my mother is dead, they are both – and my brother is dead, and all three of them are buried in **Kansas**, on this sweeping hill, and you can see as far as your eye goes.

Q: Is it a good resting place?

A: Hm?

Q: Is it a good resting place?

A: Very good resting place, very quiet. Very good resting place, yeah.

Q: Well, it also – it sounds like when you went away in that wagon with your uncles, in 1941, was when you actually lost your mother.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Thank you for sharing this. I think we'll take a break now. **[break]**
All right. So, before the break, we were talking about what had happened your – with your mother, what her destiny was, and one thing that I wanted to see if we could bring some clarity to, would have been, what was the reason for her deportation? Why would she have been taken? Can you supply any explanation for that?

A: I do not have any specific informations. What I heard people talking about, that there were more people – she was not the only one from the town that was taken, there were more people taken from that town. I think the mayor of the town, and his family. And i-if it – it's strange – strange coincidence, one of the daughters, small daughter of that family, was staying with her grandparents in the village, and she was left.

Q: I see.

A: So everybody was taken in the family, but her. And she grew up and actually came to **United States**. And from the people there was a feeling that they were trying to pick up better educated people, and probably people that might have been a problem. I had never heard anything said that my mother would have been picked up because of my father. I haven't heard that at all.

Q: Why would she then, have been picked up? If not because of your father, what would be the – the reason?

A: But I think it's nobody was given any reason. They just showed up and said you are going, period. That is my understanding. There were all these people, they're taken from – from this town, and it was a massive deportation all across the country. People were taken from other cities, too, and shipped straight out to – to – to **Soviet Union**. And much later on, one of my uncles and his family were deported. That was during the 40s.

Q: After the war?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes. When the Russians stayed in **Lithuania**.

Q: Okay. So there was no – your mother had a feeling –

A: There was no – there was no specific charge. It was not like somebody showed up and said okay, you've wrote this pamphlet, or your belong to this group, and that's why you will have to go.

Q: Okay.

A: They – from what happened to my mother probably happened to very many people. Very often I heard those stories that they separated small children from their

parents, and some of these very tiny children were given away to Russian families to raise.

Q: Oh really?

A: I don't know if that is true. I really don't know. And as far as I was concerned, the way I found out, I told you how I found out about it, nobody ever explained to me why she was taken. He just said there were a pla – many other people taken.

Q: Do you remember missing her?

A: Oh, I miss her terribly. The – everybody – I mean, my sister was tiny still, she was seven years – she's seven years younger. So my sister, she said that – she told me much later, now actually, that for a long time she thought maybe she did something, that's why the mother was gone.

Q: Yeah.

A: And it's just one of these things that happened. And, in a strange way though, now of course, I would question it – if anything that – like that would happen, or similar, I would be questioning everywhere. But at that time I was small, the war was going on, and nobody – and never asked any questions. I never asked any questions, and nobody explained to me.

Q: So, your – at that – even up until the time your mother was taken, you had never seen any Soviet soldiers?

A: No.

Q: No. But soon after that, there was a German attack, a Nazi attack on the **Soviet Union**, and now **Lithuania** was a part of the **Soviet Union**. How did that – how did you ex – do you remember that happening?

A: I was then not staying with my fa – with any of my family. We were separated, the three children, and I was staying with some other people. And then eventually heard that the Russians left, and the Germans came, and as far as I was concerned, and the people around me were glad to see Germans, because the Russians were beginning to confiscate the farms, and impose all kinds of restrictions like that. And the times in the country became more difficult. So they thought well, occupation – at least some of them would say, well, at least they believe in God.

Q: I see. I see.

A: So.

Q: You remember hearing that?

A: Yes.

Q: Di –

A: I remember hearing that. However, did I tell you the little ditty that was passed around?

Q: Tell me again. If it's the same one, we'll find out.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: **[speaks Lithuanian]**

Q: Okay, it starts out with – and it's a variation of what you told me before, which is –

A: Yeah.

Q: – neither **Berlin**, nor **Moscow** is dear to me. For me, one is black as the devil, the other one is as brown –

A: Brown.

Q: – as a dog.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. So, you eventually do get reunited with your brother and your sister?

A: Eventually they – we were all brought together, first on the farms.

Q: Okay.

A: On my uncle's farm, we all came together.

Q: Was this your Uncle **Danielas**(ph), or another uncle?

A: Ah, **Danielas**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: On my Uncle **Danielas**'(ph) farm. And from there, my father showed up there, too.

Q: Okay.

A: He was there. Then I saw soldiers. I saw soldiers, I believe, in **Skarviskes**(ph).

Q: I see. German soldiers?

A: German soldiers, yes.

Q: So these are the fors – first foreign soldiers that you see?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes.

Q: And what had – how is it that your father didn't get deported?

A: He wasn't home. How was it that we were not picked up? We were not home.

Q: I see.

A: Otherwise we all would have been picked up.

Q: I see. But your mother had also been sleeping somewhere else.

A: My mother was sleeping somewhere else, because she also felt that something is –

Q: Happened.

A: – going to happen. But she came home in early morning, before going to work, I think to feed the ki – chickens. We had chickens. And they picked her up.

Q: How did you find out about this, this detail?

A: Huh?

Q: How – when did you find out about this detail?

A: My mother told us.

Q: So that's 25 years later?

A: Yes.

Q: I see. I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, let's go back now, when you see the first soldiers – German soldiers in **Skarviskes**(ph), what happened then? Your father shows up?

A: Yes.

Q: You chil – three children are together. What continue – what happens after that?

A: After that would happen, the summer wo – was coming to the end. My father told us that we will move to **Švenčionys**.

Q: Okay. What is **Švenčionys**?

A: It's a city, a town.

Q: Okay.

A: And I ti – I did not know where it was, or what it was, but – and that he will be the head of the security. I had no idea what the head of the security is, so I asked him – I still remember, I asked him, I said, well, will you be a bigger boss than a chief of police? And he smiled, he said yes.

Q: I see.

A: And that's all I knew about it.

Q: So in Lithuanian, would this have been – he would have been – ki – how would it – how – what was his title in Lithuanian? If it's head of security in English, how did he put it in Lithuanian?

A: In Lithuanian?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: **[speaks Lithuanian]**

Q: And you asked him whether or not that was a high –

A: A bigger – yeah.

Q: – a bigger job than –

A: Yeah.

Q: – **Policijos viršininkas**.

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: And he smiled and said yes.

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: Okay. Did he have a uniform?

A: No.

Q: Oh, he never wore a uniform.

A: No.

Q: He was always in plain clothes.

A: Yes. He wore a uniform when he was working for the Lithuanian government, on the border police.

Q: Okay.

A: Then he wore a uniform.

Q: Okay.

A: But after he – he left sventur – **Jaimalas**(ph), and went somewhere else, to not live with us, he did not wear a uniform. I also remember feeling very strange seeing him in civilian clothes.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, because I was so used to seeing him in a – in a uniform.

Q: Okay. So tell me about your first impressions of **Švenčionys**. Where was this place, what did it look like?

A: I have no idea where it was. I probably could – I knew that it was not too far from **Vilnius**.

Q: Okay, not from far the capital, okay.

A: Yes, I knew that. And we arrived – we moved into this apartment there. There was furniture. I did know anybody. I went to school, which was not too far from the apartment where we lived, and **Krikštamama**, that's my –

Q: Godmother.

A: – godmother on my – my father's oldest sister, who was – was not married and had no children, came to live with us because my mother just was gone.

Q: Okay.

A: And sometimes my **babita**(ph), my – my grandmother would come too. My aunt was very religious person.

Q: Okay.

A: And – so she went to church a lot, and she took us Sundays to church. I did not have many friends. I made – I did not know anything about the town. I did not know anybody, but met a few people in school, in my class. One of my classmates sometimes would come and play with me in our house.

Q: What did – was your house better than it had been in **Jaimandas**(ph), where you lived?

A: Yes.

Q: In what way?

A: It had more room, and it was better furnished. We had a garden, and a flower garden.

Q: Did you rent it from somebody?

A: I assume so.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't think we owned it.

Q: And –

A: Now my – **Rita** tells me that she had gone back there looking for the house, but it was burned down.

Q: You say now your daughter **Rita** went back to –

A: Yes.

Q: – **Švenčionys** to look for it.

A: For the house, but it was burned.

Q: But it was burned down.

A: It wasn't there any longer.

Q: Okay. Did your father ever explain, or ec – or just describe how he got this job, from **Jaimalas**(ph) to **Švenčionys**.

A: No. No.

Q: Cause it's quite distance – I mean, it's quite far across the country.

A: Yes, yes. And he was not working at – well, in my mind, I assumed that we have a Lithuanian government now.

Q: That was your assumption at the time?

A: Yes. That the Russians have left. And so the Germans were there, but then – in the country, but they were there to kind of protect us from Russians. And I – if I don't re – I don't remember why, but I do think there was some quasi-Lithuanian government. How real, how unreal, or am I imagining it, I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: I remember my school that I liked. The children were friendly. I also remember that there was a – a Polish population in town.

Q: Uh-huh. And was this something new for you?

A: That was something new to me.

Q: Okay.

A: But there was a Polish population in school also, and at one point, I think there were classes in school, were given in Polish.

Q: Did you ever go to any of those classes?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: They were – they were discontinued. Everything was in Lithuanian. What ha – say – what – if you know Lithuanian history, that part of **Lithuania**, **Vilnius** and all around there, at one point it was in Polish hands. After 1918, the Poles, they – they were there, and the Lithuanians could not get the land back. So only when the – first the Russians, the communists came to **Lithuania**, they brought this country, these parts of **Lithuania**, back to the Lithuanian Republic then. And the Germans also had it all in the Lithuanian Republic. Actually, when my father was working in **Švenčionys**, we have gone to **Vilnius**, excuse me, to visit with some priest that my sis – my aunt knew.

Q: Mm-hm. Was that the first time you were in **Vilnius** ever?

A: Yes.

Q: And do you remember any impressions from that visit?

A: Churches, basically.

Q: There are a lot of churches there.

A: Yes. And knowing my aunt, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: We went to churches.

Q: Okay. So – so within a number of months, actually one could say rather quickly, your life really turns upside-down, but then gets resettled halfway across the country.

A: You know, in – again, if I think about it now, it's very unsettling. However, I was small, I was still very young, and I wasn't the only one who was being resettled everywhere, up and down. It was – the whole country was being resettled up – up and down. There – there was no – it was not unusual to have to move, and start somewhere else, and I really didn't have a place, some **[indecipherable]**. My mother was taken, so in **Jaimalas**(ph) there was nothing for me, anybody else. And – well, the farms, my uncles' farms were okay, but I had to go to school, so I will not have stayed in the village anyway. And I had never been there in winter, so – so moving to another city, and a – another town, and another apartment wasn't something that was dra-dramatic for a – that si – the – the har – hurtful thing was that my mother wasn't there.

Q: You missed her.

A: That was difficult.

Q: Yeah.

A: And though I liked my aunt, I never – somehow I – in my silly, little mind, I – I felt that my mother was more worldly, more sophisticated.

Q: Was she, in actuality?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: So –

A: That my aunt was this very religious, country woman, and though she was kind enough – she was a good woman.

Q: Yes, but she wasn't your mother.

A: Yeah. I was – somehow I – I had warmer memories of my grandmother. We really liked my gra – were very close to my grandmother.

Q: Yeah. Your father would – did he have an office that he went to?

A: No. Yes, he had an office.

Q: He had an office. Did you ever visit him there?

A: No. I never went there. I never went there, I never saw any Germans around, soldiers. I – I – we knew very few people in town. Actually, when I think of it, I don't remember see anybody that we knew, except people through **[indecipherable]** from my aunt, that in – at the church. And I remember that the priest tha-that parish priest would give huge, very elaborate Easter breakfast at that parish, and invite some people.

Q: Okay.

A: And I went to church a great deal, and was involved with the church ceremonies.

Q: Did you get communion, first communion? Oh, that was before already.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you get confirmed?

A: Yes, in **Vilnius**.

Q: In **Vilnius**, you got confirmation in **Vilnius**.

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: Okay. Now, was the – in some ways what you're describing to me sounds not unusual, because up until the – those changes, in 1939, to 1941, this was **Poland**, this was not **Lithuania**.

A: Yeah.

Q: So it was a new ni – it was new territory for a Lithuanian administration. Were there other Lithuanians in **Švenčionys**, or was – were they a minority?

A: Everybody spoke Lithuanian. We – if you went to the store, or if you went to a restaurant, which we sometimes did, everybody spoke Lithuanian.

Q: Okay.

A: And whoever – in school, whoever was in school with me, spoke Lithuanian.

Q: Now, you said though that you did know that there were Polish children in your school, and for a little while there were classes in Polish.

A: Not after we came.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Before.

Q: Before.

A: Before we came, they spoke – they had Polish, but when we came there, when the Lithuanians had hold of these parts, and then the school was only Lithuanian.

Q: Did Polish children, however, attend it?

A: I don't know if they were Polish or not. They all spoke Lithuanian.

Q: I see.

A: I did not meet anybody in school that spoke Polish.

Q: I see. One of the reasons I ask is because in **Poland** itself, German – during German occupation, education was severely restricted for Poles. Severely. In some ways, outride forbidden.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And some places, only up until certain grades. So maybe children went to school who were – Polish children went to school, and were able to continue school, but only if they did it in Lithuanian.

A: Probably, because the por – as far – from what I know, our education was not restricted in any way.

Q: Okay.

A: But then, again, there was this – Germans, from talks around, had something against the Slavs. And Poles were Slavs, and the Lithuanians were not. So I think we might have gotten some preferential treatment.

Q: I see.

A: It's possible. Again, I just heard it as hi – as gossips, sometimes, a-among some ad-adults.

Q: Okay.

A: But when we came there, didn't know anybody.

Q: Okay. Now –

A: And we just moved into the apartment. I was taking piano lessons.

Q: From whom?

A: I do know that as time went on, things became more difficult. For example, food became scarce. You could not get meat, or you got very little meat. But we had rabbits, we kept rabbits, and hens, and I think even geese. And a – I ne – I don't remember ever going to the store to shop. Whatever was bought, my Aunt **Oda**(ph) probably went and shopped.

Q: So in some ways it sounds like you were quite sheltered, you know, as children.

A: Yeah.

Q: You didn't – it was – would that be true, that you were kind of sheltered from the chores of everyday –

A: Yes. I never was asked to do anything. I did not have to make beds, I did not have to – to help in the kitchen.

Q: And you were the oldest, so –

A: And I was the oldest, yes. No.

Q: Was your father still as easygoing as he had been before?

A: There were times when he would disappear for a couple days or so. There were times that he would be drunk.

Q: Oh really? Had you ever seen him drunk before?

A: No. There were times – well, if he was drunk, he was loud, he talked loud. He never talked politics of any sort.

Q: Did you – did his manner change, to you, or to the others?

A: Towards us? No. No.

Q: Did he –

A: He was always very gentle with us, and in some ways I felt he was unusually proud of me, because he thought I was very smart, and he thought that to the very end of his life, which is interesting.

Q: It's important for a child.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: It's very important for a child to feel that from their parent.

A: So to – **Rita**, my sister – **Gerda**(ph) my sister was considered very pretty. I was definitely the smart one.

Q: I see.

A: And there wasn't much shopping of any kind. I think whatever clothes we had, they were made over, changed. But –

Q: Did you make any new friends in **Švenčionys**?

A: I did. I had – especially one – one girl who lived out of town, and she would sometimes after school come to my house and stay with me, and we would play.

Q: And she was somebody you had met from school?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: I don't remember her name.

Q: Okay.

A: That was also just for a short while. When I think of it now, and knowing the history of my father there, I can see that some people probably were avoiding us. I mean, that's what I read into it now. At that time, I had no idea. We were in a place

where I was not familiar. I did not know the place, I did not know the people, I was in a new school. I did pretty well in school.

Q: Well, you mentioned knowing now about – about the – such things. When did you find out, and what did you find out?

A: **Rita's** book.

Q: So, your daughter recently wrote a book.

A: Yes.

Q: That was published less than three –

A: Yeah.

Q: – months ago –

A: Yeah.

Q: – in September 2015.

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: And before then, what had you known about your father's work? We'll talk about what you learned, but I want to find out what you knew.

A: Yeah, what I knew about him. Okay, there – let's see, how long a time was it that the Germans were there, and then the Russians came back?

Q: I think it was from '41 to '44.

A: Three years.

Q: At least, mm-hm.

A: Three years. Okay, so when – at one point, I remember that my father was – let's see – yes. We left **Švenčionys**, and moved to – where did it – **Kupishkis**.

Q: Okay.

A: Because my father was arrested. I was on the farms. I and my brother were on the farms with our uncles, and my grandmother was in the apartment in **Švenčionys**, and my uncles went and picked her up. I think also in that period, that summer, at one point, before our uncles, before I went to our farms, we were taken out of town. Now who took us, I don't remember. And we were placed somewhere in a very wooded place, somewhere in the woods, by some family, for a few weeks or a month or so. I'm not sure how long. But then we all come together – I'm talking children – and we all left for my uncles' farms. And then, while there, at the end of the summer, time came to go to school, and my uncles rented an apartment for my aunt and the three of us in **Kupishkis**, so that we could go to school.

Q: So it was another new school?

A: That was another new school. And I haven't lived in **Kupishkis** before. I didn't even – was not **[indecipherable]**. So I went to school there, and when I were – were – when we were in **Kupishkis**, we heard that my father was in prison. No, we – before we came to **Kupishkis**, we were still at my uncles' farms, we heard that my

father was arrested. He was in prison in **Vilnius**. And so my uncles found out about it. How, I don't know. I remember thinking that it was so unfair. The Russians took my mother, and the Germans put my father in jail. And the school started, we moved to shi – to **Kupishkis**, and there was a break in the fall, there was some kind of a holiday, and my aunt was ready to go to **Vilnius**, visit her father, and I was going to go with her. And just before we left, we received information that he was released.

Q: I see. So –

A: So he was released, he came to **Kupishkis** to see us, and then went to **Panevėžys**, where he was employed again.

Q: So he never went back to **Švenčionys**?

A: No.

Q: I see.

A: Never went –

Q: And do you –

A: – back to **Švenčionys**.

Q: – do you remember what month – oh, what time – what year it was that he was arrested?

A: The only way – I think after two – we mu – I must have spent two years in a school in **Švenčionys**.

Q: Okay.

A: And it would have happened in the summer bef – after that.

Q: So it would be the summer of ’43?

A: Probably, yeah.

Q: Okay. Now, when you moved to **Švenčionys**, you mentioned that there was – it eh – first of all, it was part of **Poland**. There were many Polish people.

A: I did not really even know that.

Q: I know, I know.

A: Yeah. I just knew that there were Poles living there.

Q: Did you see –

A: And I know from the history – by then I knew that there – because I le-learned some history and geography, that **Vilnius**, and the part around **Vilnius**, after 1918 was left for the Poles. But as soon as the first communist occupation took place, that part of **Lithuania** was put back to **Lithuania**.

Q: So some could say that was something that was advantageous –

A: Yes **[indecipherable]** –

Q: – for **[indecipherable]**

A: – advantageous, you know. Yes, everybody – Lithuanians felt good. We have our land back.

Q: Mm-hm. I see. Now, from what I understand about **Švenčionys**, it had not only a Polish population, but also a Jewish population before the war. When you went there, when you lived there, do you remember any Jewish shops, do you remember any Jewish people? Do you remember seeing anything on the streets, anybody on the streets?

A: No. And if – I mean, if they – unless they were dressed differently, or went to s – if they – I don't remember seeing a synagogue. I did not remember hearing any Jews in the stores. Just on di – didn't see any Jews. No – no Jews ever came to our house, and I don't remember seeing any Jewish children in school. But then that's not surprising because when I was in – in **Švenčionėliai**, I did not know if there were any Jewish children in my school.

Q: Okay.

A: They would not necessarily would have announced themselves as Jewish, or try to stand out.

Q: Did you – did you, as children, know what was happening to the Jews of the country?

A: No. No. I don't know, it might have been discussed among my – my family, like my uncles and my au – my grandmother, or even my aunt who lived with us. But they never tried to tell us anything about it – about the fate of the Jews, or did we ask? Now, why didn't we ask? Perhaps we were scared.

Q: Why would you be scared?

A: If people are being arrested, you are scared. If you are small, and people are being arrested, especially if they were people that you knew – though I did not know any Jews – I knew Jews in – in **Jaimalas**(ph), as store owners. But in **Švenčionys**, when we moved into **Švenčionys**, I did not meet any Jews. And I – I mean, I know what happened, but by the – when we arrived there, I would now think that by then the Jews must have been rounded up and moved out of town.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I know that Germans required that they wear – wore a yellow star. Now where did I find that out? Was it there, or much later? Probably still in **Lithuania**, but I never saw anybody wearing it.

Q: Did you ever see somebody wearing ribbons?

A: A what?

Q: Ribbons of some kind.

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: That would mark them as Jewish? No.

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: I really don't think I met any Jews there, or knew what ha – was happening to the Jews.

Q: Would you have ever thought at that time that your father might have had something to do with it?

A: No. I had – my – this is – sounds very stupid, but I had no i – not really knew what my father's job involved.

Q: That's not stupid, you were a child.

A: It's – yeah, well, it was security police, or – there were plenty of reasons to – to want to be secure. I do remember an incident, because it was so talked about that, very much, at that time. That there was a – an incident where a German – two Germans were in car, driving somewhere, not too far from **Švenčionys** somewhere. And they had a translator, a woman. I assume she was a Lithuanian woman. And she was connected with the partisans. We knew there were partisans in the woods. And she asked the Germans to stop the car because she needed to go to the woods

to relieve herself. They stopped the car, and the partisans shot them. And then she was arrested. The Germans picked her up, and I remember that there was – that there were some German nat – **Wehrmacht**, with the brown shirts, had appeared in town, ka – even were in our house, talking to – to my father, and I remember my father making a remark to somebody that she would be better off dead. And I remember then hearing something that people were – were shocked because of this. I remember that they picked maybe that incident, or some other incident, the Germans picked up some – a couple men that – they were not Jews, I think they were Poles, maybe Lithuanians, and shot them on – they took them to Jewish cemetery and shot them there, though they were not Jewish. And I remember I was very – I was afraid. But then I don't know where they were buried, or not buried, or what – or what they were shot for, but I was afraid. And then the Germans kind of disappeared again. There was not – I did not feel a strong German presence in this – in **Švenčionys**, because if you walked to school, if you walked to town, you didn't see them.

Q: Now, did you feel safe?

A: Huh?

Q: Did you feel safe? Given what you're describing to me, that doesn't sound –

A: No.

Q: – like an easy thing to answer.

A: No. You didn't. When this – things – things go like that, you don't feel safe. You don't feel safe anywhere. So there were times in my very young life, where I was – I mean, just the fact that my father was then arrested –

Q: Did you ever find out what for?

A: No. One did not ask. I mean, these things were – people were arrested. So, the government, whoever they are at that point, has something against you, so they arrested you. Why? Who knows? The whole system of justice was non-existent. It was on on the whim of the government that was, at that time, in power. That's it. They did not have to give any excuses or explanations. You could have been picked up walking down the street, and hauled off.

Q: Mm-hm. So –

A: Because it happened. Look, when my mother was taken away, there were thousands of people taken away. So –

Q: So it wouldn't have occurred to ask why. Is that what you're saying?

A: No. Didn't even occur to ask me why.

Q: Okay. Well, now –

A: You know what? And also then, whatever was happening to the Jews at that time, had I even known about it, that they were being arrested and hauled off, it

would be just another thing happening. Can you – another crazy thing happening. Scary. It's a very hard life. Very difficult time. It's interesting when I think about it, heck, here I am. Wonder of wonders. I don't even lock my door. I did for a long time, in my life. I did not feel safe. And then, you know, then we – we were in **DP** camps.

Q: We'll talk about this.

A: Yeah.

Q: But I want to – I want to still stay with this **[indecipherable]**

A: Stay with th – with this – with this period in our life.

Q: Yeah. Now, at this point, I'll interject this – how it even is that we come to speak with you today. And that's by mentioning the book that your daughter wrote, your daughter **Rita Gabis** wrote a book that was published two, three months ago, called "**Guest at the Shooter's Banquet**." And in it she describes her journey to find out more about what your father's role had been during World War II. In a way, to find out who he was. More of who he was. And I've read the book, and in it I also read that you did not want to know until it was finished. You were going to read it, but not until it was finished, as to what her progress was. Have I – am I accurate in saying that, or were you involved in her research work?

A: About what, the book?

Q: About the book, about what she was doing, about her –

A: No, I was not at all involved.

Q: Okay.

A: No. The only – she came here once, with her husband, and my sister was here, and we had one conversation where I think she wa – she was in the process of getting the book going. About our life in **Švenčionys**, and what do we remember of the war, and that period. And she did not feel that we gave her a very satisfactory answers, that we knew enough about it. And it's true, you know. When you think of this – if this – something like that started happening here, you would be up in arms. But I was this young child, the country was up and down, first one invasion, then the other invasion. There was no stable government of any sort. Nobody even taught us about any government, stable or otherwise. So you just kind of stay with your family, and mind your business, and you don't need to ask any questions. The rest was not up to us. The only thing I can say is, what you hear, what you overheard.

Q: Now, since then – you've read the book, is that correct?

A: Yes.

Q: What is it that you learned, that you didn't know before?

A: I thought she did a very good job writing the book. I thought she – not only she wrote a beautiful book – she's a very good writer – but also, she did as much research as was needed, and she wrote about things that I am – truly believe happened.

Q: So – and these things involve some very bitter and very tough –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and one could say brutal –

A: Yeah.

Q: – events.

A: And I can under – I expect her – I won't say interpretation, because it's not interpretation, it's a fact –

Q: Okay.

A: – that was going on. And now, knowing my father, as a grown person, though I always have been his favorite child, and I love him dearly, I know that he was a vain man. I don't think he was a mean man, or a – a cruel man. But I think he was vain, and I think he could have easily fallen into a place where he will do things to promote himself. Now, how far he will go with that – as the book says, he went pretty far. Just about as far as you can go. But then, none of that was ever discussed

at the household. Never. And I have no – I really had no idea what a social – what a chief of security would do, because I never heard of that title.

Q: Yeah.

A: Never met anybody who was a chief of police – of security police.

Q: But as – as **Rita** writes, it did involve sending out orders to round up Jews. It did involve making sure they were brought to certain places.

A: And, you know, if I had stayed, let's say, in **Jaimalas**(ph), where I knew that Jews lived there, and where they lived, now, if th – I was – had I stayed there, and know that they disappeared, I would have been more curious. Then I would have known that something is happening, and what is happening.

Q: Someone was there, and now they're gone.

A: Yeah, yeah, that they were arrested or taken away. The – the talk would be right there about it. I was in – in a city and town that was larger. I had never been there. I never knew there were any Jews there.

Q: And the only thing you see from your father is that sometimes he gets drunk, that he didn't before.

A: Yeah, but then that's also – my father liked to drink now and then. He never was the – a man who would sit down and get drunk by himself. But he would love – he loved company, and he would go – they would go out and they would drink at

somebody's house usually, very seldom in taverns, or something – such thing. Somebody's house, usually. Our house, too.

Q: Did – when you read – when you read what **Rita** discovered, what she wrote –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – she interviewed some of the Jewish survivors from **Švenčionys** –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – she interviewed some of the relatives of the Poles who were shot, as a reprisal –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – for the killing of these two Germans. Did she present to you a man who was a stranger to you, as a father, or was it someone you knew, but you didn't know these things about him?

A: I obviously did not know what's going on. I did not know what was going on with the Jews, and I did not know what my father's part was in it. After everything was over, and I was learning history later on, and I was learning what happened, and thinking of my father in his – his place there, I can easily understand that she could – that that could have happened. It did not take me by oh no, my daddy would never do something like that, no.

Q: Yeah. Okay. Okay.

A: No.

Q: We'll talk about **DP** life, but at this point I want to jump ahead –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – because there's another unusual wrinkle to this story, is that after you come to the **United States**, you meet and you marry somebody who is Jewish.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me about that, how you met, how you married –

A: I was his student.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yeah. Easy. Easy.

Q: What did he teach?

A: Administra– government. I couldn't have cared anything about the **United States** government. Never knew about any government, cared less. **Stanley** would tell me what will be on the test **[indecipherable]** you should study this and this. I would go there and think – I got **Cs**.

Q: He gave you **Cs**.

A: And a husband. It wasn't bad deal.

Q: What was the name of your husband? Your firs–

A: **Stanley**.

Q: **Stanley**.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: **Stanley** was his first name?

A: Yeah.

Q: Last name **Gabis**?

A: Yeah, **Gabis**.

Q: **Gabis**.

A: They were – they were – his grandparents came from – somewhere from **Russia** or **Belarus**, somewhere – from somewhere there. And we were married in **Chicago**, in a little Lutheran chapel on the University of **Chicago** grounds, because **Stanley** knew the minister. And I wanted to be married in church, I did not want to go just to the town hall and sign papers. I wanted to wear a white dress and things like that. The whole works.

Q: Yeah.

A: So he said okay. So this – this minster said he will have a – he will marry us, and we were married, and **[break**, **phone ringing]** Okay?

Q: Yeah, mm-hm.

A: I think my father was a bit – kind of the – he would have loved to have me marry a Lithuanian. I mean, that was his choice. If it was not Lithuanian, I don't think he cared.

Q: I see.

A: And **Stanley** had no religious traditions. His mother had no religious traditions, and I did not have any Christian traditions beside – I did have a Christmas tree up, but that was about it. And so, it did not even occur to me that there is something strange that I marry a Jew.

Q: Did he – did you ever have any disagreements with your father because of it?

A: No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: He was very – as I say, he – he would have preferred me that I married a Lithuanian. The language, the history, the traditions. That he was a Jew, and he was not a Lithuanian. He was so American, that I knew more about Jewish customs than he did, really. So, there was never any – neither at his mother's house, or that **Stanley** ever had any food restrictions, or – nothing.

Q: But, did you – share with you what had happened, at least as far as you knew, during the war, with him, and what had –

A: You know, he never asked me. I mean, I told him as much as he wanted to know, and as much as I thought I should – should talk. I-I was living by myself in **Chicago**. My sister moved to **Chicago** also. I had some Lithuanian friends. I was going to – to a university there, and I was, for a while, very friendly with an Arab. I almost married him.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: Yeah. So, it just didn't –

Q: It was – it didn't come up?

A: No.

Q: Is that what you're saying? Okay. Well, there are a lot of people who have told me, that after the war was over, they just didn't talk about what they had gone through. These are people who were also Jewish –

A: Well, you know –

Q: Yeah?

A: – you don't really – it's – it's like – it's not a happy time in your life. It's such a confusion, and it's such an unsettled time. In my case, my mother was gone, my very religious aunt was raising me, which I wasn't so enthralled about. We were in **Švenčionys**, we had to leave there and hide. We – then my father was arrested. I

mean, it just one thing after another. And you somehow plowed through it all. Then we left **Lithuania** in a hurry, hiding.

Q: Okay, let's go back to that, because as I said, I jumped ahead.

A: Yeah.

Q: And I do want to go back to what life was like after **Švenčionys**, when your father is released, and you all move to **Panevėžys**. That's 1943 – '44.

A: Okay.

Q: We're coming to certainly, as far as the large picture is concerned, **Germany** is now losing the war. The Battle of **Stalingrad** has happened. They have lost that battle, they're – you know, they're pulling back. You're in **Panevėžys**. What did your father do? What was his job there?

A: He was in **Panevėžys**, I was not there.

Q: Oh, I see, okay. You were still in –

A: I was in **Kupishkis**.

Q: **Kupishkis**, okay.

A: All the three children and – and my aunt were in **Kupishkis** –

Q: Okay.

A: – in an apartment there, going to school in **Kupishkis**.

Q: And so what was your father doing in **Panevėžys**?

A: My father had a job. I was never quite sure what kind of a job. I know he had an office somewhere, and he had – he did not wear any uniforms, and he had a small apartment in **Panevėžys**. And I remember going over and spending a day or two there. I had taken a train from **Kupishkis** to **Panevėžys** and back, but he never told me what he was doing. He was working for – for the – for something.

Q: But you don't know whether was for the government, whether it had anything –

A: No, I didn't know.

Q: – with police, or anything.

A: No, I wasn't sure. I knew he was not working in a store, selling something. I knew he'd have to do something more likely with the – maybe the police, maybe the army, or government, maybe? Do not know. And meanwhile, in **Kupishkis**, things were going on a very even keel. Nothing important was happening. It was difficult, there were shortages. And I remember for some crazy reason, I wanted to get a little goat. I set my heart on getting a little goat. So guess what? My grandmother, or my aunt were able to get a pound of bacon. And for that pound of bacon, I got myself a goat.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: I did. I would walk around the town with a goat.

Q: Did you name the goat?

A: No, I didn't. And I would sometimes let her come into the house.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: She would slide on the floor. And if I left her outside, sometimes if she was loose, she would climb up the sand – sand hill – sand pile in front of our kitchen window and stand there and go mah, mah. **[inaudible]** So –

Q: She knew she was your goat.

A: She was my go – my goat, yes. And when we left, I left my goat.

Q: Why did you leave?

A: Well, we ran away.

Q: And how did that happen? Why did that happen?

A: Russians were coming.

Q: Your father was there, or he was not –

A: My father was ga – was in **Panevėžys**, but we got word that we – we were – we will leave.

Q: Okay.

A: And so my aunt, the three of us – how did we leave **Kupishkis**? I guess we took a train to **Panevėžys**.

Q: Okay.

A: Where did my father go? Maybe he was with us. Anyway, we ended up somewhere in the west of **Lithuania**, not too far from the **Baltic**.

Q: So, near **Klaipeda**? **Palanga**?

A: It's – no, no, it was farther south. Some little – actually, some farmers that had a farm and had a house and had a place way in the woods, and my father was there, and we stayed there for several months, I think. And I remember they – my father would go hunting to get a deer, and my brother and I would go in the woods with him, and we would – woods are separated in squares, I think. Anyway, there is a path in between, and my brother would go in the woods, and would go, making a lot of noise, to chase the deer out to – towards my father. And one day when we were out there, we found this package dropped, like a fairly large thing, lying in the woods.

Q: A package wrapped?

A: Which looked like it had a parachute on it. So we called my father, we picked this thing up, brought it to the farm, and my father opened it up with the farmer. There was a lot of money there. Deutschmarks.

Q: Really?

A: And apparently what it was, probably it was a drop for Russians partisans, that must have been hiding in the woods. I was scared. I really was scared then, in that

place. But shortly after that, divided the money, and we all loaded up a – a ve – a cart, and left for – left for **Germany**.

Q: So, was this close to the Prussian border?

A: Yes. We could go, we – not too far.

Q: And do you thi – was it from the balt – you know, like the **Baltic Sea** side, from that point, like **Šilalė**, **Shilukto**(ph), or someplace, no?

A: Mm-mm.

Q: Could it have –

A: We – we were farther away from the sea.

Q: Was it **Kybartai**?

A: We crossed into **Prussia**. We crossed – we crossed the **Nemunas –**

Q: River.

A: – in the evening. I still remember. My sister remembers me saying, oh what a beautiful sunset over the river, that I wish it were not war. But – and the Russians really were right on our tails.

Q: Were there many people on the roads?

A: There were – after we crossed, there were a lot of people going. We had – actually we had a bit of a problem crossing the bridge, because by then – we called them the Brownshirts, who are crossing, and were pushing people away. But we

somehow happened to get aco – we were able to get across. After us, they – when we crossed, they already had put explosives under the bridge, and they blew the bridge up soon after we went across, to slow down the Russians.

Q: And also –

A: So that was my life. I don't want to think about it.

Q: I know.

A: Have you wondered –

Q: Yeah.

A: – why people don't want to sit and remember, the glorious days of my childhood? No, thank you. I – I will be thinking of my glorious old age.

Q: Well, I wa –

A: And my little dog.

Q: A sweet dog. A sweet one. But I – I need to ask you a few more –

A: Sure.

Q: – a few more details about this, because I'd like to find out about your journey westwards, and –

A: About what –

Q: – and what happened – your journey after that. You – I take it you crossed this – the bridge with a horse – horse driven cart, yes?

A: Yeah.

Q: And I'd like to learn more of how this journey took place.

A: Continued.

Q: Continued, yes.

A: I'll continue.

Q: Thank you.

A: We crossed, and I remember one night, we were sleeping somewhere in the barn, in the cla – in the hay, and my father works – walk – wakes us up, he says, we have to move. They are shooting too close. So we got into our cart, and off we went.

Q: Was your aunt with you **[indecipherable]**

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So she –

A: **Ona**(ph) was with us, yeah.

Q: So **Ona**(ph), your father, and the three children.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. So off you went.

A: Off we went. And by then – I remember that day. We would see German soldiers leaving for the front, and then later on we will see bloody German soldier –

soldiers, going back. And we had – then we finally reached some town. I forget – it was not **Königsberg**, it was farther w –

Q: West?

A: – west.

Q: Okay.

A: No, farther east. And we got somewhere, there was a railroad station. Oh, we were in **Görlitz**. Somehow we got there.

Q: Okay.

A: How, I don't know. Anyway, we got on a train. We put all our packages to be sent, and my father had decided that we – we will go as far south as we can, so that the Russians – when the Russians – when the war is over, which he was certain it will be over very soon, that we would not be in the Soviet zone, but in the American zone. So we did. We went all the way to **Bavaria**.

Q: I see. So the – for the southernmost part of **Germany**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And you went wi – by train then, from **Görlitz** by train –

A: By train, yes. We went by train.

Q: And did the train journey take a long time?

A: I don't remember. It must have taken some time. I think we s – did we sleep somewhere? We had money, remember, but nobody wanted any money by then.

Q: No **Reichsmarks**, they didn't help?

A: No, it was not worth anything. So, my father arranged it – he got a job working on a farm in **Bavaria**, in **Bad Bruhn**(ph). Little village in **Bavaria**, on top of a ha – some – one of the hills, beautiful. I li – I lived in – the word slips me. In the parish house.

Q: Okay.

A: There was a Lithuanian priest there, because the German priest was ill, and he was in a sanitary. And his sister was a housekeeper. She was a good woman. I s – I even slept with her into a hu – in a huge, huge feather bed. The food was scarce. There really wasn't that much. None of us were fat. And we stayed there til my father worked on the farm. You couldn't see any men, there were only very old men, or little boys. All other men were out in the fr – at the farm.

Q: This was **Bad Brunn**(ph), you said?

A: **Bad Brunn**(ph).

Q: **Bad Brunn**(ph), okay.

A: It's not far from **Ingolstadt**.

Q: **Ingolstadt**.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And **Ingolstadt** is not all that far from **Munich**. We would hear, in daytime, American planes flying, lining up on top of our mount – hill, because our church was a tall church, and they would line up there, and go and drop bombs on **Munich**. So, we stayed there til the end of the war, and the way the end of the war came for me, it was like this. I was in the garden, looking for the first flowers, and I saw a **Jeep** driving out of **[break] –** soup kitchen there, we had our choir where we sang. We made – we put up plays, we – we lived a good life.

Q: These were all refugee kids from **Lithuania**?

A: All lithu – they tried – when they bil – when they organized the **DP** camps, very cleverly they tried to put the same nationalities together. So in that camp, there was just Lithuanians.

Q: Okay. Was there any talk in those camps of people saying we should go back, we should go back?

A: No, we didn't want to go back.

Q: Okay.

A: Because of the Russians were there.

Q: Okay.

A: We didn't want to go back.

Q: Was there any pressure to go back, from anybody?

A: There was. The Russians send some kind of a delegation, where they interviewed every single one of us, asking why did we stay here, and what brought us here. And we said, our teachers told us, just tell them your parents came and – and so you went, you don't have any idea why. Which we did. And they all went away. They didn't take any – they couldn't take anybody.

Q: I see. I see. So there was some effort made to –

A: Under Soviet – yeah, they would have loved to get us back, I think, but they couldn't.

Q: So how long did you stay at this gymnasium, then, in **Eichstädt**?

A: **Eichstädt**? I stayed there four years. And then – and the rest of my family was in **Ingolstadt**. My aunt was the first one to emigrate to **United States**.

Q: How did that happen?

A: So, her connections with the church, the Catholic church provided – you had to get some kind of an affidavit. **Trumans**. **Truman** helped take it – to take the refugees into **United States**. **Truman [indecipherable]**. But you had to have assurances that you will have a job when you come. And my aunt, through the church, managed to come to **United States**, and she ended up in **Jamesburg**, **New**

Jersey. And from there, there were various possibilities. Some of us went to **Canada**, some of us went to **Australia**. I wanted to go to **Australia**, because it was a long ride, and I thought that would be interesting to go. But I ended up in **United States**. Came on General **Hershey's** boat.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Ship. Yes. Army ship.

Q: Do you remember the date? Do you remember when?

A: In March. Probably March 1950.

Q: Oh, so quite a while. So you lived in ive – in **Germany** after the war for a good five years.

A: Yeah.

Q: And was that because it took so long to be able to get permission?

A: I think it was. I don't know, maybe my father was – I mean, I wasn't even 21. So it wasn't up to me. But my father had to get permission, and had to have some kind of a job guarantee also, and a permission to emigrate. So – and I – I was – as far as I was concerned, I was in no hurry to go anywhere. I have –

Q: Did you finish gymnasium?

A: I finish gymnasium, I moved into **Ingolstadt**, and I lived in a camp there.

Q: When you left for the **United States**, did you go with your whole family?

A: First, yeah we all **[indecipherable]** my aunt was already in **United States**. The three of us and my father, they stopped us in **Bremenhaven**(ph). We stayed in a camp there for a while, for a little while. And then they put us on General **Hershey**, and we all came to **United States**.

Q: Through **New York** harbor?

A: Hm?

Q: Through **New York** harbor?

A: Yes. I remember I did not know English, but I remember the cook on the boat. He was telling us, oh, you will see, you will see. When you come close to **United States**, you'll see this lady standing there, and she will say welcome, welcome.

Q: Did you see her?

A: No.

Q: You didn't pass the Statue of Liberty?

A: No, I don't remember passing her. But we ended up in – in **New York**, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited. And then – with all our belongings, which were nothing, and then my aunt had sen – asked the son of the family that she worked for – it was actually a tavern there that she worked for, for that family in the kitchen. And she had the room there. She asked the son to come to **New York** and meet us. So she – he finally found us there, and decided that we must be it. So she

picked my father and the three of us up, and brought us to **New Jersey**, to **Jamesburg**. And here we are.

Q: Did you think of your mother at any of those moments when you came over? Did you think of your mother at any of that time, as you were coming over?

A: I don't – not really all that much, because so many things were going on. She was not there with us. Haven't heard from her, or about her, for all these years by now.

Q: So you didn't know if she was alive or not?

A: Didn't know if she was alive or not. She did not know if we were alive or not either. So –

Q: And how did you end up in the Midwest? Because the – when we spoke earlier, you mentioned being –

A: Oh, because I travel on my own. I worked there – my first job was to work as a live-in maid in **New Brunswick**, for a nice, little Jewish family. They had one son, **Alan**, who was six. And she was pregnant again, and she keep having miscarriages. So she was advised by her doctors that she should not do anything. If she gets pregnant, she practically go to bed and stay there.

Q: Yeah.

A: So they decided they have to hire somebody to live there and do work. They hired me. This young man who picked us up, drove me there, and I didn't – I do not know English, and when they asked him what my name was, he said **Gloria**. So I was **Gloria**. Oh boy, oh boy.

Q: Yeah. When did you go – did you ever go back to **Lithuania** afterwards?

A: I went back to **Lithuania** when I was married already.

Q: Yeah?

A: My son was 19.

Q: So that would have been in the 1980s or so, the 1970s?

A: Seventies, yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah, **Gerda**(ph) and I, we both went back.

Q: Oh.

A: It was still under **Gorbachev**.

Q: Oh, so it was the 1980s, yes.

A: Uh-huh. The first time.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did your father, when you were an adult, ever tell you anything more about his life, about his role, about what World War II was all about?

A: When – you – you mean when I was –

Q: When you were as grow – when you were grown up. When you were already married, or so.

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Nobody told me anything.

Q: Okay.

A: I didn't ask anything either.

Q: Okay. Did your children ask much about war, about what was going on? I mean, **Rita** eventually does, because she writes the book. But before that –

A: No.

Q: – as they were growing up. No?

A: No. I mean, I knew what happened to the Jews in **Lithuania**, like what happened to the Jews everywhere, in **Germany**, and – and in – in **France**. Everywhere there was – the Germans went. I knew that. What my father's role was in this, I had no clue. I did not think he was working for th – for the – for the Germans. So – so

Saugumo policija, **s**ecurity police, well, I did not know that was the German position. I hardly ever saw Germans around.

Q: Yeah.

A: I didn't even see many Germans around in town. Very few. And when we got to **Germany** – oh, I tell you one thing, that probably be interesting. When we first moved to **Germany** and got to **Germany**, in the south, and we were there in the s – first we were in mul – was it **Mulba**(ph)? We stayed in some little hotel. And we had these **[indecipherable]** cards, and we could buy food in the restaurant there, but they – all they served you, there was just watery soup basically, that's it. And so my brother and I, we take our marks, and would march out into the villages outside, and we learned – we wanted to buy bread. We would say **brot kaufen**. **Brot kaufen**. It was late fall, and I remembered the ground would be covered with beautiful pears that just dropped off the trees. And the farmers will come out and bring big half loafs of this beautiful bread, and sometimes even – even some smoked meat. And we could take as many pears as we wanted, and we would want to pay with our stupid marks, and they all said, no, no. They wouldn't take any money from us. But that was something that I learned, being in **Germany**.

Q: Why do you think that was? Why do you think they didn't want to take money from you?

A: I think they just saw two bedraggled –

Q: Children.

A: Yeah. Asking for bread. They did not know if we had **deutschemarks**, or did not have, how much it was, what were they worth, if anything, by then. So –

Q: Mrs. **Danga**(ph), we've talked a lot today.

A: Yeah.

Q: We've covered a lot of territory.

A: Yeah.

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

A: That I would like to say? **[technical interruption]**

Q: I was asking, was there anything you would like to add?

A: Well – **[phone ringing][break]** It sounds – when I tell you that, it sounds – it's such a remarkable, big story. Actually, very ordinary. In the li – in the times that I lived, it's nothing unusual. In the places that I lived. In the places that I came from, and the times that I lived. There are hundreds of s – of stories like mine. I don't know how it all ended up for them, but I think most of us ended up somewhere in the west. And did good – had good lives. And for myself, when I think, I had a very good life. I mean, I had some hardships, and so on. When you are young, things are easy. Fortunately, I did not have any serious illnesses, and we were never wealthy,

but we were never poor-poor. And the fact that I cannot see that much now, but I live here, and I have a great deal of help.

Q: And has this early – all these early years that are not filled with happy things, and that – why would one want to remember and recall them, have they – did they influence the rest of your life in any way?

A: Perhaps. I think all our past influence our presents, to some extent. I don't think of it. Now and then if I am – if I – my brother is dead now, but when my brother was alive, we would remember. And now and then, when I'm with my sister, we sometimes talk about things. But then again, there is a seven year difference. But now and then we can speak about the time in **Germany**, and how it was. Or how it was when we first came here, to **United States**. That was an interesting thing, too. I mean, came here and no language. **Gloria**.

Q: **Gloria**, yeah.

A: And my sister went to high school here, she finished high school here. But I don't think of my life as something extraordinary, or something greatly difficult, or tragic in any sense. It just what it was. I consider myself very lucky that I am here – the heat is coming on – that I have this house, that I am able to take care of this house. And that I know good people around me, and that **Lithuania** is free. I know that they probably are fighting about the government all the time, but –

Q: Your children – your children are half-Jewish, as well as half Lithuanian. What would you want them to carry away?

A: It's their choice. **[indecipherable]** is great friends now with a Jewish man, and I think they will marry this spring, coming year. She changed her name to re – to **Rachel**(ph), and I kind of think of her as **Rachel**(ph). She used to be dark – she had dark, curly hair, and now it's blonde and straight, very fashionable. She is nowhere as curious or interested, or searching as **Rita** is. **David** is doing okay, he works for a univers – **Boston** University. He's saving his money so he could retire and come live on the island.

Q: It's a nice thought.

A: Yeah. And I really, in many things that happened to me, I could have ended, oh God knows where.

Q: Yeah.

A: But there was a great deal of luck. I was able – we were able to get out of **Lithuania** when we got out, and we were lucky enough to come to this country when we did. I had a good marriage, and ending up on this island, in this house, is not bad.

Q: Not bad at all, not bad at all. Well, Mrs. **Danga**(ph), **Poina**(ph) **Danguolè Gabis**, thank you very much for sharing your story with us today.

A: Oh, you're most welcome. I hope this talk will be of some use to somebody.

Q: I am sure that it will, and we very much appreciate it. And with that I will say, this concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mrs. **Danguolè Gabis**, on December 10th, 2015, in **West Tisbury**, **Massachusetts**, on **Martha's Vineyard**. Thank you.

[break]

Q: Okay, the – so Mrs. **Danga**(ph), please tell me, who is in this photograph?

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: In English, please.

A: We are – I am here the oldest one, and there's my brother, **Romutus**(ph).

Q: Okay, **Romwildus**(ph).

A: **Romwildus**(ph), we called him **Romutus**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: And my little baby sister, **Gerda**(ph).

Q: Got it. And this was taken in which year?

A: The thir – 1938.

Q: Thirty-seven, I think it was.

A: 1937, **Jaimalas**(ph).

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Q: Okay, thank you. In **Jaimalas**(ph). So Mrs. **Danga**(ph), tell me, who – what is this, this –

A: It is a picture of my father, but I really don't remember him in this uniform. The only thing that I could say, it's probably when he was very young in **Lithuania [indecipherable]** he wore this uniform.

Q: And the title is, a guest –

A: "**A Guest at the –**

Q: Shooters.

A: – **at the Shooter's Banquet**."

Q: And it's written by your daughter.

A: And it is written by our – by my daughter, **Rita**.

Q: Okay. All right, can you tell me what is this photograph of, in the book?

A: This is a photograph of my mother. It was taken somewhere in **Lithuania**, and sent to us here – to **United States**. That was –

Q: Okay, after sh –

A: – after she came back from **Siberia** –

Q: Okay.

A: – to **Lithuania**, and we – we were able to get in touch with her, she sent us this picture, and my sister has – my daughter has it.

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Q: Okay, thank you. Okay, Mrs. **Danga**(ph), do you know who this is a photograph of?

A: I don't remember that picture.

Q: You don't remember. But it is of your father?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Conclusion of Interview