INTERVIEW WITH EUGENIA GRUDZINSKA
July 13, 1991
(Szczecin, Poland)

My name is Eugenia Grudzinska. I was born in Riga on December 23, 1912. My mother was Polish. My father was a Russian, an officer in the Czar's army. He later left the service and, because he was a business school graduate, he worked as an accountant. My maiden name is Yevkieyev. It is difficult to pronounce because it is Russian. I was first married in 1937, to a Polish officer, Lieutenant Adam Wisniewski, who was killed in Katyn. We lived twelve kilometers from the Soviet border. When on September 17 Soviet troops crossed the border at three o'clock in the morning, by five o'clock in the morning my husband had been arrested as an officer. I stayed at home. The next day they brought my husband home to get his coat. I was not home at that time. I went to the Russian headquarters, because I knew they had brought him to the house, and asked to see him. They told me he was not there. The third or fourth time that I was there, an elderly man went out after me. I didn't know their ranks and what rank he was, and he told me. I was twenty four at the time, he said "Child, you make a life for yourself and do not wait for him, because he will never again come back." That was all he said, but he told me not to come anymore unless I wanted to be arrested. That was a tiny town, half of it were Jews and the other half were Tartars. The Tartars helped us escape from there. There were only five officers' families, and six families of non-commissioned officers. The Tartars took care of us and helped us escape. The town was called Kleck. It was twelve kilometers from the Soviet border, twenty kilometers past Nieswies. Nieswies was a beautiful little town. Minckiewicz mentions it in his writings. After escaping from Kleck, I came to Zambrow, where I had been raised for the most part. Because my mother and I had left Russia in 1921, my father was not allowed to leave because he was a Soviet, a Russian, citizen, and my mother and I went to Poland for a year, thinking that after a year communism would be over in Russia and we could go back there, because we had a house and some property there. But we never came back and we never saw father again. Mother lived in Zambrow with us four children, whom she raised with the help of my grandparents. I had two sisters and one brother. The Tartars took me almost to my mother's door from Kleck. I came back at four in the afternoon. At three o'clock that night, someone knocked at the window and said "Pani Yevkieyev, your daughter must run away." The Soviets were already there. They had already found out from the NKVD that an officer's wife had returned and they would come arrest me in the morning. So at three in the morning I put my ski clothes back on, put my backpack on, and escaped on foot thirty kilometers through the forest to Ostrow Mazowiecka. I had to cross the Soviet-German

border, but it was not watched that closely, there were guides there. It took me two days to get there because I needed a guide to take me across the border. So those thirty kilometers were split up into two days. I stopped in a village. I knew the local villages, and it was not hard for me to get to Ostrow Mazowiecka. My elder sister lived there. Later I went to Warsaw, where my other sister lived. I lived with her. As an officer's wife, I immediately was aware that an organization was at work... I met a friend of my husband's on the street. He ran up to me and told me his new surname that was on his Kennkarte. That was Captain Woyniak, while the name on the card was Malinowski. He let me know right away not use his real name. I became involved in the organization through this Captain Woyniak. In the organization, you knew two or three people, no more. It was a system of threes. But I did know Pani Knolkownacka, General Knolkownacki's wife, from Poznan. She was the soul of the organization that I belonged to, which was a division of the ZWZ. I do not even know who exactly was in charge there. Some major swore me in. That was 1941. So I was working for them for more than a year before I took the oath. They had to be certain of people, after all. I was a courier. I carried various things given to me at my rendezvous. I had two rendezvous: one was on Sniadeckich Street, at a tailor's. Downstairs at the tailor's there were German offices. So when I came down with the things, I just had to walk past those offices, where there were guards and so on; my legs always shook then and I was always afraid of that. The other rendezvous was at a different tailor's, at Pani Dmochowskie. You remember Pani Dmochowska. Pani Dmochowska lived here in Szczecin. And these were the two people from the organization that I knew well. I also knew a commander, a student named Marysia Lasocka. I was sworn in by the major and her. Later it turned out that her sister and she were Jewish, and they were arrested along with the rest of us. They arrested fifty-three of us women onn the nineteenth of January, 1942. It was night, and it was twenty degrees below (zero). They drove up to my house at two o'clock. Poles did not have cars. Private cars were not even allowed, so any car driving at night was known to be the Gestapo. That night, my brother-in-law came from Ostrow Mazowiecka. He knew that I worked for the organization. He never asked me about it, but he knew. Also, one was not allowed to have a radio, but I would tell him news and information that had to come from the radio. Suddenly we heard a car coming. I said to him "I wonder where it will stop." It passed my house and stopped at the corner. About five minutes later, we heard them banging on the door of the building. I was on the third floor. The building had four floors. We heard the superintendent go down and open the door. They were coming up the stairs, German voices. They stopped in front of our door. When they knocked, I was literally at the door in a second, and I opened it, because I was afraid that they would shoot. Six of them came in. Four were in civilian clothes and two were in military uniforms, Gestapo. They began searching the apartment, they told my brother-in-law to put his hands up.

It was a small apartment, two rooms and a kitchen, because I lived with my sister . My sister was not there. They saw that my brother-in-law was not on the list and they left him. They were taking people from a list. When they were checking their list, I realized that it was all people from my organization, because I saw the name of a Professor Zygler [ph - 104], a botanist. Sometimes there would be secret study groups of high school students at my home. That professor was from the organization and he held those underground classes in my apartment. Two or three days earlier, he had brought me a hundred copies of the curriculum for schooling for 1941-1942 from London, with the seal of the London government on it. I had put them behind the door. I had a little shelf covered by a cloth, and I had put those hundred copies there. When the German opened the door and stood in the doorway, he covered up the shelf, and they did not find the curricula . Those stayed behind. My friend, whom they came for the same night, was patching up a map of all of the meeting places of our organizations. She was patching it with some cloth because it had been torn. She put it between a blanket and a bedspread on her bed. When they lifted up the blanket, they lifted the bedspread with it, so they did not find that map either. Wonderful accidents. They took the whole family there, two sons, her, her husband. Only she and her sons came back. Her husband did not come back. There were fifty-three women arrested in our organization and forty-nine came back. There were two hundred and seventy men arrested that night and not a single one came back. Almost all of them were shot as hostages. Some were taken to Auschwitz, the stronger ones, and they worked there for some time, but they had death sentences and they were executed there, in Auschwitz. Many people from our organization died in Auschwitz. It turned out later that a person who had our list betrayed us. His name was Adam Smuga. He was a lawyer, thirty years old, an only child. He was a very wealthy person, but he allowed himself to be bought. He did not live long, however. The Germans would refer(?) him, so they did not protect him at all after they got what the wanted. And we had contacts with the outside world. The so-called "grypsy," secret messages and letters in the prison, went out through our commanders in Pawiak, and we let our people outside know. . . He was arrested along with the other men and then released. They told the men in the prison he had been executed, that they took him to Szucha Boulevard and shot him. I was interrogated three times on Szucha Boulevard. Adam Smuga was shot by the underground organization, which sentenced him for treason. They checked very carefully, and they found out. I was in Pawiak for five months. On May 30, the Germans organized a transport to Ravensbruck. It was called a Sonderntransport. There were on 3 hundred and twenty (?) of us and more were added in Lublin, so together there were a hundred and fifty. And on May 30, 1942, they brought us to Ravensbruck, where I was given the number 11,332 . Elf tausend drei hundert zwei und dreisig. I did not know German, but I had to learn it, because I had to identify myself as "haftling elf tausend drei

hundert zwei und dreisig . "I was in Ravensbruck until November 1943 . My work detail there was called "Ausen." They took us out to work, to the fields . We gathered potatoes, carrots, rutabagas, pori [ph - 1 6 0] . It was good work in one respect as we always brought something back to the camp with us. We learned to hide it so that it would not be found when the auz jerka [ph - 16 2]. The searches were somewhat haphazard, anyway. We were in columns of thirty or forty people, and there were always an auz jerka, an SS-man, and a dog. An SS-man with a pistol, a dog, and an auz jerka (?) . The auz jerka was the guard that watched over us. I was then taken to a factory for airplane parts and ammunition, Neu-Brandenburg. There were 6,OOO of us there, in Neu-Brandenburg . 3,000 worked during the day and 3, 000 at night. The next week, those who had been working nights worked days and vice versa. I stayed there until the end. There was at least a dozen different nationalities in Ravensbruck and Neu-Brandenburg. I am sure that every school-book has that information. There were German women, because they were imprisoned too. For example, I met a general's wife in Ravensbruck who was there for buying bacon fat illegally. She got three months. Her husband was at the front . So they treated their own that way also. I was in Neu-Brandenburg until the end. On April 28, the camp was evacuated. The SS-men guarded us one or two more days. They marched us all in a tight column. All of the concentration camps were heading f or Lubeck . We did not know what they wanted to do in Lubeck, but the camps never got that far. The Soviet front was moving so quickly that they abandoned us and ran away. They all had civilian clothing under their uniforms and they left us. I walked back to Poland. It took me three weeks and I covered 360 kilometers. There were fifteen of us returning together and we were all very weakened. Pani Helena Jurgelewicz, the wife of President Moscicki's aide-de-camp, and herself a veterinarian, was there with her daughter, Krystyna. Also Marysia Kaleczko [ph - 194], a young girl, Lirka [ph - 194] Zielinska, a young girl, Iza Marcowna, who had converted to Catholicism. So I was in Pawiak for five months, not to mention the fact that I was interrogated three times on Szucha Boulevard, where one sat in a box. One could not move because there was an SS-man behind watching. Often one would sit for twelve or fourteen hours before the interrogation. I was interrogated three times. But just life in the cell... the cell was built for ten prisoners. There were twenty-five of us . We lay down to sleep next to each other so that if one of us wanted to turn over, she had to nudge the woman next to her and they would both turn over at the same time. There were only three beds, which folded out of the wall. During the day we had to fold them up, so we could only sit on the floor . But the nights were the worst. The liquidation of the ghetto had begun then . The SS-men who watched us - Birkel [ph 211], who was later killed on the street by the resistance, Friegert [ph - 213], who hanged himself, Wirupp [ph - 215], whose last name I do not know. We called him Wirup (?) or Egg

Watchman because he would cut open eggs in packages looking for

notes hidden inside them. We joked that he was scrupulously investigating whether Polish chickens lay secret messages or not. After all, it was ridiculous to think that someone could hide anything in an egg . At night the SS men drank an enormous amount. Looking back, I am convinced that they were using narcotics as well. They were completely unconscious people. They make us do roll-calls in the middle of the night, count us all again, take us with their dogs outside as if they were going to shoot us, then bring us back . We lived in constant fear there in Pawiak. They told us that we would be sent to a camp but did not name the camp. I knew only that they sent people to Auschwitz. I only found out about Ravensbruck while at Pawiak. We did not know we would go there. Let me return to what they would do. They would bring Jews to the outside of our cell, outside of the women's prison, and shoot at them. We were on the first floor, so we could hear the crying groans of those people, the gnashing of their teeth as they died. While it was happening, there was a great silence among us . Many of us were praying, and there was just a great silence. We were afraid to look out because they put spotlights on the prison just to see whether we were looking out or not. And then they would shoot. When they left in the morning to sleep, we would look out. There was so much blood that a white foam formed on it. A foam just like... it is not easy for me to say, but blood flowed in gutters. The dead lay there and the Jewish police would come and pick them up. There was a Jewish orphanage across from us. We would see how the Germans came and took the children and the people taking care of them away. They would shoot them either against our wall or on the opposite side. They literally did it so that we could see. They were cruel, sadists. And the commandant was Birkel, who was shot by the underground in Warsaw. That was soon after we left, I think less than a year later. Getting onto the transport, we thanked God that we were leaving that hell. We did not know what awaited us: they were liquidating the ghetto. With my own eyes I saw how they stood an old Jew under our windows and put a can on his head and shot at the can. The croaking of those Germans, that laughter... they finally shot him. Or, for example, they told him to run away. They took a woman who was in clogs. When she started to run, we could hear her steps and then her scream. She did not get far, they shot her. But sometimes they would let them get away. Once we saw them take two young boys and put them against the opposite wall. They put empty cans on their heads and fired at them. The boys were crying very hard. They were twelve or thirteen. They let those boys run away. They did not shoot them. It depended on their mood. The Germans were cruel to the Jews in the ghetto, cruel . As far as the ghetto goes, a streetcar went through it. The ghetto was in the middle of Warsaw. The ghetto was in a Jewish neighborhood, but many Aryan streets were included in it. If one wanted to get to the other

side of town, one had to ride the street-car through. Two Germans stood in every street-car. But the Poles would always find a way... they would even distract the guard. When he looked the other way, one threw food out. I always took bread along with some kind of fat. A piece of bacon, a piece of sausage... whatever there was. It was very hard during the occupation. For example, I could not eat margarine. I had some kind of allergy. I always threw that margarine to the ghetto with bread. Often I would return with the bread and margarine, if I did not get the chance to throw it out. Some of the Germans watched people, but some would become bored and then one could throw it. Especially to the children. Children stood all along the entire street-car track, begging for help. I belonged to an organization, but I did not know if there were any contacts with German organizations. But I know that there were. I know that arms were brought. I worked in a small cafe, Kruszynka, on Marszakowska Street. In order to be allowed to serve Germans, a restaurant had to have a permit. The owner was General Dugoszewski's sister. She may have been divorced, in any case I did not know her husband. But she did not try to get that permit. There was a sign there that said that Germans were not admitted. So Germans did not come to our cafe. But many people did come. Mainly there were lawyers who had escaped from the Poznan province to the General Government. They had a little club there. They would come and meet. Doctors would meet there. I more than once heard them planning how they would send shipments to the ghetto, mostly food. Later on, the ghetto was tightly sealed, but for a long time one could enter and exit the ghetto freely, as long as one had a pass. The owner of the cafe applied for such a pass, posing as a Jew. She had a Binde, an armband like the Jews had to wear, with a yellow star. But she was Polish, not Jewish. She had brown hair, so she could pass as Jewish. She carried food to the ghetto. This was never discussed openly, because one could end up in front of a firing squad for helping Jews in a second. But a great deal of aid went to the Jews. I feel that we passed... that as a Pole I passed the examination; as a person, as a citizen. Especially because I grew up in a small town, Zambrow, where there were many, many Jews. The town had 7,000 inhabitants and 3,000 were Jewish. I had a friend, Maszka Yankec, whose family had a bakery. A beautiful girl. The whole family was eradicated, sent to Treblinka. The whole Yankec family died in Treblinka. Two daughters, two sons, father, mother. Everyone perished. About help for the Jews: every Pole knew the risks. If he wanted to help, he had to do it very carefully, because he was endangering both himself and the person that he was helping. Everyone knew that if someone was throwing sandwiches, he was throwing them to a Jewish child, because it was mostly children. Older people and adults also reached out, but it was mostly children. Of course, I did not look to whom I was throwing the food. I just threw, knowing that someone would be nourished. And there were posters everywhere, proclaiming the death penalty for helping Jews. And there were cases of whole families being shot if they were caught sheltering Jews. Sometimes Poles would take

Jews simply to make money. Jews had dollars, had money. Poorer people would take Jews in for this reason. There were cases where the Pole was very honest and did not betray the Jew, and there were also cases where Poles took the money and informed on the Jew. People acted differently. But I knew many people who helped. And truly, no one ever said "A Jew. Why should we help?" On the contrary. On the contrary. The Germans said from the beginning they would destroy the Jews and then go after the Poles. The Poles knew that the Jews' fate would be theirs also. And they were just as much at risk as the Jews were. There was no [ph - stynty]. It was just that the Jews had to wear armbands with Zionist stars on them. All the Jews were labeled. If a Jew left the ghetto, he usually hid the armband. It was easier to buy things, to move around. Also, he did not know whom he might run into, so he was afraid to wear the star. Poles did not have to wear anything of that sort. No other nationality had to. Only the Jews.