

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT                      Interview w/CELIA YELOW                      page  
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Interviewed (5-1-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854

TIMECODE NOTES:

(Tone)

BS: Wentworth Films, Kovno Ghetto project, interview  
with Celia Yelow, Y-E-W-L-O-W. Sound roll four, camera  
roll seven, at the head.

C: Camera roll seven, marker one.

SB: Celia, why dont you first tell me when and where  
you were born.

CY: I was born in Lithuania in a little town, the name  
was Slavtus (SP?), in Lithuanian Slavistein (SP?).

SB: Tell me what you remember of your childhood. Tell  
me when you were born and what your town was like.

CY: It was a nice little town - village, town, call it  
whatever you like. But there were a lot of Jews, it was  
quiet, it was nice. I had a happy home, there were five  
children, I had a nice life in the house.

SB: Tell me about school and growing up and getting

married.

CY: I start in Lithuania, the school. You know Jewish people dont eat pork, so the children start to smear our face, the lips with pork, so my father says this isnt good. So he send me to another town where they have a Jewish school and the name was Annickshein (SP?)

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SB: So you went to school there in that town?

CY: Hm? Yeah. And then I went, I was a seanist, a scientist, how you say it? And I went Hofsherei (SP?) to teach how to work hard and not to have enough to eat. I should be ready to go to Israel, but then I fell in love with a boy and I got married there.

SB: When the war began, when things started to change, what do you remember of that?

CY: At first, nothing. I didnt realize what it will be, and if somebody said theyll go to kill us or what, we didnt believe it. We thought they dont know what theyre talking about. But in a couple of days we find out. For instance, when I went for bread, you had to have a card. When the Germans came in and they didnt give me a card because Im Jewish. Then they took my husband, the Lithuanian army took my husband, they, to the army, because they thought that theyll fight. But he came right back. And then we had to go to the ghetto. The 15th of August. I dont remember exactly the event of the ghetto, I was already pregnant then.

SB: Tell me a little more about going to the ghetto. Do you remember how you got there?

CY: I dont remember exactly. I dont even remember how we carried a little bit of clothes, or what to sleep. I

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dont remember. But we stayed in one room with more people. I was in ghetto with my husband three days and then they took him to work. They took then 15, 500 I think intelligent people and they never came back. And my husband was there too. And they always used to tell us lies. Like they send them to work, theyll finish the work, theyll be back.

SB: Where did your husband think he was going?

CY: To work. They said they need educated people, the Germans said, to put together a library. They took them right away to the graves. But we didnt know.

SB: When did you figure out that he wasnt coming back?  
Do you remember?

CY: I always hoped, always. I didnt see him dead. What I think a year later, or two year, two years later, I start to think hell never come back.

SB: So, tell me about the place where you lived in the ghetto. Tell me about the people that you lived with.

CY: There was a kitchen with one room, and we had money. And where we lived they were very poor, so we paid them and they gave us the room and they stayed in

the kitchen. So I came with my husband and a cousin in one room. But we stayed all together just three days. Then I stayed with my cousin and I dont remember when,

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but I took the people who took us in, they took them and killed them too. It was a mother, a son, a daughter and a husband.

SB: Did they, you dont remember how they took them, did they just kill them there in the ghetto?

CY: I dont remember, but they didnt kill them in the house. They took then a lot of Jewish people.

SB: What was life like in the house. Did you have enough to eat?

CY: No.

SB: Tell me how you survived.

CY: Even when I am pregnant, we used to pay a Lithuanian who used to watch us in the ghetto. He used to watch us. We paid him, he took us, another couple, Jewish people, he used to took, take us out of ghetto and say that they are taking us to work, but they really took us to, we had clothes or something to trade for food, for bread. So when we came back I had what to eat. Not really. And then when I used to get somehow a loaf of bread, I though Id eat it for a week, but I couldnt fell asleep that I knew there was still bread there. I used to finish the whole loaf. Then the Germans gave us frozen potatoes that used to smell, but we used to eat it.

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SB: And, do you remember going in and out of the gate  
and being searched? Tell me about that.

CY: When they took us to work, on the way back they searched us. If somebody had something, if they found something, what can they find? Bread. So they used to hit them or shoot them. But I never had anything, so I went right through.

SB: Do you remember at the beginning they took away the valuable things, did they take away your jewelry and things?

CY: Sure. They asked us to bring it in electrical appliances. They ask us to bring in a certain place. If not, if they come and see them, theyll kill us. So we did. We took them to where we were supposed to.

SB: Okay. We have to reload.

TH: Tell them about how you sewed your jewelry in the lining of your clothes.

(Cuts out)

BS: Camera roll eight, slate two.

CY: If I could say it in Jewish it would be even better.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

C: Marker two.

SB: Lets go back and talk about when the war actually started, what you saw, what you heard.

CY: When we lived in Schants (SP?), the army was there. So we thought well run from Kovno. First, the food in the little towns was better. So my two brothers and myself and my husband, we ran from Kovno. And I had Stowaway (?) with me, so we beared this Stowaway (?) and we went to his parents. But when we had to go through a village, the Christians, Lithuanians, ran out of, how you calls Hick?

TH: (Cant make out what she says)

CY: And they were going to kill us. We didnt go to there village, so we went around and around and we came to my husbands parents, but before we came it took us a day and a night. So, we were sleeping in the forest,



and then we saw everywhere in the forest, everywhere,  
its fire. We didnt have where to go. Its good we  
were next to a river, so we walked by the end of the  
river and we walked to where my husband was. And then  
they came there, it was trouble. My husbands family  
lived next to a synagogue. First of all they came in  
and took my husband and two brothers to work, but they  
came right away back. Then they burned the synagogue.  
And there was another synagogue and they burned the  
other synagogue, and they told us that we didnt live

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there. We have to go back hone to Kovno, so we left. My  
two brothers went to where I was born.

SB: Who burned the synagogue?

CY: The Lithuanians, the Germans, who knows. We just  
saw the fire. And even on the way when we walked the  
German army came in. And I dont know how you call

them, he walked, the German army was walking. But one was on a horse, and he asked us if what we are, are we Jews. We said, Yes. So with his horse he was riding around and around, and then he said to himself in German, Later. We have time. And he let us go.

SB: So, then the ghetto got formed and your husband went where he thought hed help build the library.

CY: Yeah, the 15th of August and he never came back.

SB: And in those early months in the ghetto, can you tell me other things that happened?

CY: I dont remember exactly.

SB: Okay. Lets go to October 28th, that was a couple of months later. Tell me what happened and how you knew to go to the big field, Democracy Place.

CY: On roupas (?). They used to drive on the street and call us we should all go out of the house and we should

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all go to a special place. It was like a field where you play. All the Jews were to go there. So we went. I was pregnant. I went with my cousin and a friend who was a boyfriend of my cousin, he took us both. We went one on one side, the right side, and other on the left side. It was cold and I couldnt stay anymore on my legs. In one side, it was going faster, so I said, Lets go to the left side, its faster. But the Germans didnt let us and they pushed us in the right side, and the right side was for the ghetto. On the left side was already to kill them. It was 10,000, over 10,000 people.

SB: What time of day did you go there? What was the weather like?

CY: Cold, winter, it was very cold. And we came back, this was in the morning, we came back it was already in the dark.

SB: Do you remember actually passing by the man who made the selection?

CY: Yeah, but I wouldnt recognize him.

SB: But tell me about it.

CY: He was just standing like this, you know, with a, a couple people right, a couple people left. And he wasn't the only one. There were a lot of Germans and

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Lithuanians who were extras so we didn't run away.

SB: And which people went to the good side and which people went to the bad side?

CY: I don't know if it was a difference. It was how their mind work, I don't know. Because I was pregnant, what could I do in the ghetto? Maybe it was from somewhere that they, that this is not my day. I don't know. I am wondering how I am alive and then I see a Lithuanian who went through everything and we say to ourselves, How come we are still normal? Because it's

hard to describe when every minute from your day, every second, you wait somebody should tell Out and shot you. I was already by myself, and then I gave birth to my little girl all by myself with my cousin, no doctor. But I had a girlfriend, she had a sister-in-law, she came and took the baby from me.

SB: Okay. Then when you had the baby you couldnt work. How did you survive? Did your cousin take care of you?

CY: No. We went to work in the ghetto, we called in Werkstaton (SP?) for the Germans. Clothes, I dont know, even remember, she went to work and I stayed with the baby. But I had money, so if I knew somebody who went through the gate and came back with bread and used to sell it, so I used to buy bread. And then when the baby got older, I had to go to work, so one day my cousin stayed with the baby, another a girlfriend,

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another a girlfriend from the town what I was born.  
Most of the time I paid somebody to take my card and,  
how you say it stampel on my name that I worked that  
day, and I used to pay them.

SB: I think we have to change rolls. We have a minute?

CY: When I tell you, its just a story. But to go  
through these things, you dont know. And even to raise  
a child, this was my bread. It happened.

TH: Breath.

CY: Breath. And to take away. I dont, I still dont  
know how did I go through. And at night, day and night,  
I am with my family there, and how are we together (?  
Unclear) Every minute of the day, even when I go over,  
when I wear something, I was with them (Previous sen-  
tences unclear.)

SB: We have to put another roll of film.

TH: You should tell her about the watch8 (cuts out)

(Tone)

BS: Camera roll #9 is up, sound roll 5.

C: Three marker.

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SB: Celia, I want to go back a little more to that day  
in Democracy Square. I want you to describe for me more  
what it was like.

CY: Where?

SB: In the square when they had the big selection. And  
were people afraid?

CY: Some were screaming or crying, but the most were  
quiet. We didnt rebel. They lied to us a lot, and no  
matter what we saw or which we knew, still we couldnt  
believe that people can do what they did to us.

SB: And, did you, you noticed that one side was moving  
faster than the other?

CY: Yeah.

SB: Tell me about it.

CY: I dont know why what one side was moving faster,  
and where I was, where we were staying was moving slow.  
And I couldnt stay anymore. I was pregnant, it was  
cold, and it was too much for us, so I said, Lets go  
on the other side. And we tried to go on the other  
side where they were moving faster, but a German or a  
Lithuanian pushed us back. But you would go through the  
ghetto the next day and hear the crying from the houses  
because it was some families were together not anymore,

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but some lost families, some the most, so they were  
crying. Nobody, nobody can, I was in the Museum, its  
okay. But for me, nothing because its hard in a museum  
or a book or to tell, its hard to describe what we  
went through.



SB: Where did those people go, those people on the bad side, where did those people go?

CY: They took them to the fort.

SB: How do you know?

CY: Because this is what we heard. And they shot, the graves was ready. See they used to come in the ghetto say, We heard theyre digging graves again. So we knew already for what it is the graves. I used to say, Dont tell me, I dont want to hear. When Ill be there, then Ill know its me. Right now I dont want to know. So we used to tell the jokes, you know, our mind to take away. There wasnt a day, a day didnt went though when they didnt shot somebody or by the gate. Or people used to work out where the planes were coming.

TH: Airport.

CY: Airport. So, one plane came over a lot of Jewish people, over the Jewish people, and killed them. Every day it was something, every day, every minute. I had my

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child there. She was my bread. I dont know if I would live too if I wouldnt have her. And I always used to look at her and see how the blood from the veins are running and I used to think, This theyll stop? I couldnt believe it. And then they took the children from insance (?) from the camp, I came in with my child and she got scared, and I said, Dont cry my child, dont cry. Im with you. Ill be with you. And when I came into the bus, some German took a stick with a handle and the handle put over my neck and he start to pull me, so I went with my chilled, with my child. And he run in, he took the child and threw her away from me, he pushed me out, and this is why I am alive, I didnt go with my child. Some of mothers, most of the mothers did. And I am always, when I see a stick like this, I always remember. And I dont know who he was or why he did it, I dont know. I always think of that, I am always wondering, who was he.

SB: That day was much later. Lets go back a little bit to life in the ghetto before then. In the years after

the Great Action and before the Kinder Action, did you ever have good times in the ghetto?

CY: How can you? How can you have good times? You were just waiting. First of all, you thought where can I get a little piece of bread, Im hungry. And then, some people who I know used to come in and they were swollen from hunger. We were just waiting, waiting to be killed. What still, I dont know how to explain it, we

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have, we had a feeling that it cannot be. Maybe it will still be all right, you know.

SB: What about working? What sort of work did you do?

CY: I didnt work a lot. Once, where they, they from the killed chicken, how do you say the feathers?

TH: Pluck the feathers.

CY: Pluck the feathers, and I came back with lice. And once in the woods, and we saw there it was a tree cutting off, and it was left there a little piece, and under the piece was written, We are Jews from France. Please, Juden, Please Jews, take care, how you say it, Nokoma?

TH: Revenge.

CY: Revenge.

SB: Tell me that whole story again, how you came on that stump in the woods.

CY: They took us with a dog (?) to the woods to work there to cut wood for them and to send it to Germany. So we saw a piece of wood, a piece of tree, what it was cut. On the top was written, Jews, take revenge. We are Jews from France. And it was written with blood. I think we saw it in Kovno. Did we? I dont

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remember.

SB: What did you do with your little daughter. Did you ever have a good time with her in the ghetto?

CY: Well, I was never out with her, just in the house. We were just waiting, thats all, waiting all to be killed or to the war should be over. Thats all.

TH: Tell how shed react to men.

SB: How did your daughter react to men?

CY: Oh, shed, wed a friend, me and my cousin, he took us from the 10,000 and hew used to come to me sometimes to, if I have something, and he used to play with her, she used to tremble because she never saw a man.

SB: We have to put up another roll of film.

BS: Camera roll 10, slate 4 is up.

SB: So, tell me about the incident where you went to scrub the floors. Why did you go there?

CY: This was a (?) because it was by the guards, and they had bread. So I used to go there, me and a couple of women, they took me in there, and we used to get bread there, I used to get bread for my friends there,

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too. But one Lithuanian came, a guard, and I think he was a little bit of drunk, and he told me he was in Wilkomere (SP?), its another town. They took from Kovno to shoot the Jews in Wilkomere, so he said, Some girls were so beautiful, and so young. And he starts to cry. He said they used to give them whiskey to make them drunk, they should be able to do it.

SB: What did you say to him?

CY: I was afraid. My nature is not rebellious, quiet. And I never say anything, I was afraid.

SB: How long did he talk with you?

CY: Not too long, because theyre dont supposed to talk to Jews. What he told, and this I remember he told me, what he told me, and he cried. Not a young Lithuanian, he was maybe 40 years old in this age.

SB: And you think he was one of the ones who did the killing?

CY: He told me in Wolkomere he did. He told me. He and the rest of them.

SB: Tell me this whole story, Celia, as if you havent told it to me before.

CY: I used to work, to wash the floors by the guards

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from Lithuania. There were our guards, the Jews

guards, and one Lithuanian start to talk to me and he told me that he was in Wilkomere when they shot there the Jewish people. When he called some of them so young or so beautiful he started to cry, so I asked him how he could do it, he said that They gave us whiskey that they should be able to do it. And they did.

SB: Now I want you to tell me again about that day in March, later, in 1994, when the buses came, or the trucks came.

CY: Buses for the children? Buses. They asked that we should bring out all the children and the mothers with the children used to go in the bus and I went with my child, and she started cry, see, she got scared. And I always have this on my mind. I lied to her. I said, Rena, Renala, dont cry. I am with you, Ill be with you. Dont cry. So she stopped crying, and then from outside, a guard called me, so I didnt go. Then he took a stick from around my neck and started to pull me, so I started to go with my child. He said, Leave the child away. I didnt, so he run in and hit with the child and threw her I dont know where and he pulled me out. Thats why Im alive then, because the rest of the mothers went with the children and they were all killed. And some cried, Let me out, someone, trough the door, let me out! You know, they got crazy.

SB: Did you know what was happening that day?



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CY: Sure.

SB: How did you know?

CY: Because there was a mine (?). What did they children? And then we heard what they did in the other ghettos. And I remember, one was, he had a little boy, he was standing by the barrack, he was looking, I don't remember his name, and he was looking how they took his son (?), he was stolen, he fell on the ground, he fainted. At night, at night, at night and by day I know everything. I can (?)8 Aronofska, Aronofska was his name

SB: Tell me about the ghetto police. Were the Jewish police in the ghetto good or were they not good?

CY: I never had anything bad to talk about them and if they did something wrong, you know, you cant get crazy. You wont believe how you lose your mind. Someone strong, they cant take it, or some, just let them leave if they did something. (?)

SB: Tell me about your friend Yannina. Tell me about how you ended up leaving.

CY: When they took us out, all of us, from the Sanserlager (?), we went 4 or 5 in a row, there were a lot of people. The guards with the, how do you call it?

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TH: Guns.

CY: With the guns from one to another and you couldnt go though. But meanwhile, on the whole time what I was

working I told them they were taking us to the IXth Fort to shot us, so I thought Ill try to run away, because let them shot me in the back. Then they (?) everybody, you know, I should fall first in the grave and be still alive. Then the army, the German army, pulled back and there was a big dust and there was no8

TH: Order, organization.

CY: Yeah. You know, so I saw that my girlfriend Yannina run out from the, so I thought I would wait until I had a chance and on the side there was the8

TH: Ditches.

CY: The ditch, so I fell into there and was waiting until they left and I thought Ill go somewhere, you know, maybe someone will take me in. It was already 4 oclock, I dont remember, late, so I thought I would sleep over and then Ill go to look for somebody. So I heard two Lithuanians talking that they are looking for Jews, Jedews, so I got scared they would find me, and I took off my yellow mogondovit (?) from the front and the back and walked over this, it was not a street, it

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was a road, and saw a house, So I thought Id go there,  
maybe theyd help me, but they had dogs so I got  
scared. There was like a little, its wet, how you cal  
it, around with little trees8

TH: A swamp.

CY; Yeah, a little swamp. So I hid in there and staid  
overnight and the next day I went to Kovno. I was  
wondering if Jews could be recognized. Nobody recog-  
nized me. So first, I went to one girl from Lithuania,  
I know her from school, so I rang the bell and another  
lady from the building came out and she asked me what  
Im looking for. I told her so she said theyd left for  
home. So then I thought Id go to another lady, I used  
to work with her. I went there, she took me in, and  
she said I am very afraid because we are very close,  
the neighbors, like a row home, like I told you before,  
one room with one kitchen. And she said, You go in my  
bed and hold your face to the wall or make believe you  
are asleep, my children shouldnt recognize that you

are Jewish and Ill go to my mother. She has a bigger apartment, maybe shell be able to take you. So she went to her mother, its about half an hour walking. And she came back and she said shed heard that in this neighborhood thered be an ablavah (SP?). An ablavah means that they for a couple of blocks they dont let out people, they dont let in people, and they look for Jews. So she couldnt do it. So she talked with her

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Interviewed (5-1-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854

TIMECODE NOTES:

husband, and across the street there was8

(Cassette rolls out)

CY: 8so I used to see them how he takes his out little boys and take them to the German soldiers for bread. The other time I saw him doing, I dont know (?) but he didnt. After three and a half weeks, they said that somebody told them that in Kovno they saw Jews in the

garden and then where they meet, I can go there. So, I go down I also saw (?) and they want to know whats going on with the Russians, and they ask me, how do they treat the other Jews, and he said wait until after the war. So I told him to go out again. The next day I went to Kovno, I saw some people who came back, and then I saw my friends husbands boyfriend and he was my second husband. And the Lithuanian family that moved into the apartment before the war, she was very good to me. They want to take me on the farm, and the Germans came in, they had a farm, so I didnt want to go without my brothers, and she said I can not take too many, just you, so I didnt go, but she was a nice lady.

SB: Lets cut for minute.

(Tone)

BS: This is Wentworth Films interview continued with

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TIMECODE NOTES:

Celia Yelow, Kovno Ghetto project, sound roll 6,  
camera roll 11.

C: Five marker.

CY: This would look better if you would hold it on my face. No matter how bad it is, I make a joke. If not I would not be alive. But thanks to her husband and family, nothing would be worth. I lost interest in everything, I live just within death (?)

SB: Tell me about the hospital burning.

CY: We had a hospital in the ghetto. I dont remember when it was, but on Yom Kippur they burned the hospital with the doctors with the mothers with the children, everybody. Everybody who was in Kovno in the ghetto knows it. We saw the fire, and this was Yom Kippur. They knew the day was for us the best.

TH: Tell about your friend who had the baby in the hospital.

CY: Its better that I dont think. I never talked, I never mentioned nothing. My cousins, I had here uncles, aunts, cousins, my cousin said you know, you dont tell

nothing. Now I start to tell everybody who listens,  
especially not Jewish people. I dont think even a lot  
of American Jews who want to hear and want to know.  
Thats my feeling.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: Did you have a friend in the hospital with a baby?

CY: Yes. Yes, I knew her, I knew her husband they had a  
little boy. You know, for so many years, every day was  
something new. One, his name was Macke. I dont remem-  
ber if he shot a Jew, a German, or he wanted to shot  
and wanted to, how do you call it, go out.

TH: The gate

CY: Yeah. And they caught him. And they hanged him, and  
they asked all the Jews to come and see it how he was  
hanged. His name was Macke. When I see here the trucks



Mack, always remember.

SB: Tell me the story of marching out of the ghetto when you thought you were going to the IXth Fort and you saw Yannina get away.

CY: Yeah, I wanted to go out but I couldnt decide.

SB: Start in the ghetto. Start with they made us line up in fives and march and we thought we were going to the IXth Fort.

CY: Yeah. They took us, it wasnt from the ghetto, it was from the camp in Chantz. They took us out and we were walking and we thought they would take us to the IXth Fort to kill us. And I thought to myself I would

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TIMECODE NOTES:

not like to be killed with everybody, and tried to run away and if they see me and kill me in the back, I will

not see it. Then I saw my girlfriend Yannina run out, and so I thought to myself, If she can, shes plain blind, Ill do it too. So I did, and I was in the8 in the ditch and I was waiting until the rest had passed me and Ill stay overnight in the ditch or in the woods and then Ill go back in Kovno. So two Lithuanians was walking in the woods looking for Jews, and they was talking to me, to themselves if theyll find somebody, you know, a Jew. So I thought that this is not a place for me and I took off my star from front and back, and I walked over the road and I thought I saw from far away a house, I thought Id ask because they see already the Russians come here and the Germans arent here anymore, so I hoped theyd let me in, but a dog start to bark so I got scared. There was a little8

TH: Gazebo

CY: Anyway, it was wet. A little swamp, so I went into the swamp under the little trees and stayed there overnight, and then I went back to Kovno. I was so surprised nobody recognized me, because Jewish people you could recognize. And I went to a friend, I thought maybe she would try to help me, anyway she wasnt there. I rang the bell anyway, she wasnt there. She went to her parents because there was more to eat where I was born. So went another family and she took me in with her husband and she had two boys and she said I

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TIMECODE NOTES:

dont know if I can keep you here because there are a  
lot8

SB: This part weve got. Lets go to, did you see the  
ghetto after it was liquidated. Tell me about that.

CY: I went with my second husband, he wasnt then my  
husband, with my friend. The bridge wasnt there from  
Kovno in Slobodka, we had to go with a boat, a little  
boat, and he went to his house, and he thought maybe he  
can find his wife. There was a dead woman, and he  
pulled out the clothes because the top was burnt and  
maybe hed recognize her, but he didnt. And there was  
families from the ghetto burned there because friends  
of mine, a mother and two sons and my girlfriends  
mother, they made a placement in the wall there, and  
they died from the smoke. A lot of people burned. They  
burned in there. And if somebody were to run out, they  
shot him. But I was there. I was there.

SB: Tell me how you thought if Yannina whos big and tall and half blind can get away, then so can I.

CY: Yeah. I saw her running out of the, where we were working, so I thought, if she can, if shed doing it, Ill do it too. And I saw the ditch, and right away I came down (?). But they took her in to the camps in Germany and she came back and I saw her in Annapolis, and she went to Israel, now shes passed away.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: Okay, lets cut for a second.

(Cut)

SB: You saw her get away and you thought I can try to get away too. Just that little bit.

CY: Yeah.

C: Six marker.

CY: I saw my girlfriend Yannina run away, she was tall and blond, and she couldnt see, so I thought, If she can do it, Ill do it too. And I did.

SB: Okay. Cut Jim.

(Cut)

C: Seven marker.

CY: When I thought Ill go out, I went out, run away. We thought they were taking us to kill is, so I wasnt sure if I should do it, but then I saw my girlfriend Yannina. She was tall, she was blond, and she couldnt see and she did it. So I thought, If she can did it, Ill be able to. And I did. And Im here.

SB: Okay. Now we do one more8      End of Interview

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