

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Rita Kerner Hilton**

**August 12, 1994**

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## **PREFACE**

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**RITA KERNER HILTON**  
**August 12, 1994**

Q: I need you to start off by telling me your name, where you were born, what year you were born in, and your name as it was then?

A: All right. My name is Rita Kerner Hilton. I was born in Warsaw in 1926, July 22, 1926. I lived in Warsaw until I was six years old, seven years old, and then we moved to my mother's hometown Pomortsy. This is near Lodz, exiled city. My grandfather was a practicing dentist there and since my mother was a dentist, they decided to practice together. That's where I lived until the war broke out and the Ghettos and so on.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your life growing up?

A: When I was a small girl, my parents were doing very well financially. My father was an entrepreneur. My mother wasn't working at that time, and we always had a maid. I had a nanny when I was small. When we moved into Pomortsy, my grandmother was running the house, but she always had sleep-in help. Since my mother worked in the office, it was in the same apartment, I had a babysitter, or whoever it was, a part-time governess who'd come in after school hours and do homework with me and read with me, take me out to the park. So, I had kind of a pampered existence. I went to sleep-away camp. I had a bicycle which was, you know, they were expensive. So, I did have a very loving, a very pampered existence at that time.

Q: Were you particularly religious?

A: No. My grandfather strongly believed in reformed Judaism, which did not exist in Poland as such. They never kept a kosher home. We did observe holidays. We observed Passover, and he used to go to the synagogue on high holidays, sometimes would take me, but it was different. He strongly felt that if there would be a reformed Judaism then he could probably follow it. He could not follow the orthodox, the rabbis teachings, and argue with some of them about it.

Q: How integrated were you in the larger community? Were most of your friends Jewish? Did you go to a public school?

A: Well, I went to a public school, which was hard to get in, but this was the best -- I'm talking about primary school. We lived in a so-called new section of town, not the Jewish section, a new section of town. There were maybe about few Jewish kids there, mostly from the prominent families, doctors, lawyers and stuff like this, dentists. And when I first came, I remember one of those days a kid called me a dirty Jew. I was a big girl, I was in first grade, and I gave a smack to the right and a smack to the left, and I never had any problem in that school. When the time came to go to high school, there were three high schools in town. A girls' school, a boys' school and a German school. This town was

very much German. There were a lot settled by the Germans. They were German textile markets. This was a textile factory town. And they were having every year there were less Jewish kids accepted there. You had to pass an exam, and you had to be the top of the top of the top to get into that school. If you couldn't get in, you had to commute to Lodz, which was a 45 minute ride by street car. You had to go to private school then which was costly. Well, I got into that school. And again the first few days someone said something about being a Jew, but the principal of the school, she was very anti-semitic, but she was very fair, and she did not stand for any discrimination. And again, I had no problem. I had a bunch of friends, but little by little, I mean, there was one girl, later on, she was in camp with me, Alena, and we used to fight like cats and dogs, but at the same time we were the only Jewish kids in the same level, Jewish girls on that level. The year before they accepted I think three or four or five. Our year they accepted three, the following year they accepted two. The boys had a harder time in school. There were a couple boys who were sons of prominent doctor and they took his penis and dipped it in ink, and also there was a doctor upstairs, a friend of my parents, they had a younger kid. He started going to the same school that I did, but they taunted him and he started losing clumps of hair from nervousness, and they had to place him in Jewish schools. The Jewish schools were state schools, but the principals, the teachers, the kids were Jewish, and there were two schools. One was the better one, and the other one wasn't so good. But still, in order to get to the high school, if you came from the Polish school, your chances of getting into the high school were much better than if you came from the Jewish school. You know, separated, but equal. And I had, as I said, had not too much problems.

Q: Were there social and cultural activities?

A: At one time I know my mother used to go to all those fancy charity balls, a lot of them. And I think closer to the war, there were a couple Jewish charity balls. I think she still used to go to the Red Cross ball and so on. But there were less social contact. My mother had a friend, a school friend, who was of a German decent, a very, very prominent family. They owned big factories, and she married a Polish boy. They were patients for years and years and years. They used to socialize, and then closer to the war, that dried out. We didn't have those contacts as such.

Q: So, let's talk a little bit about how things started to change. Were you aware of what was going on in Germany?

A: Oh, yes. My aunt lived in Germany. They came to the States before the war. They knew it was coming on. Also, there was a group of Polish people who lived in Germany, never had their German passports. They were never citizens, and in 1937, they all sent them out and we used to collect money for them. We used to give them meals and so on, because they were thrown out from Germany without anything. So, we were aware very much of what was going on. But no one believed it was going to happen, what happened, because during the first World War, the Germans were the better friends than the Russians.

People did not like Russians in this part of Poland. So, we were aware, but we never thought they would destroy us all.

Q: What happened when the Germans occupied your town?

A: One of the first actions they put a bunch of restrictions. We couldn't use the street cars. We couldn't use the cafe downstairs where everybody used to sit. No Jews were allowed there. We couldn't go to the park. Schools were closed. I don't know when they told us to wear the -- before the stars, I think we had to wear the yellow armbands. There were scenes downstairs, I see through the window that they would grab a Jew with a \_\_\_\_\_ and cut the \_\_\_\_\_ and cut the beard. And usually it was young kids doing it. The Hitler Youth were like a bunch of little puppies jumping on. This was the beginning. Then they started -- see we knew we would not be able to stay in the apartment. This was a fancy section of town, and it was a very large apartment. What has happened was a crazy situation and part of the apartment someone sublet it, it was a subleased to people who owned the cafe downstairs. They were German Nationals. And they requested that section. So, we managed to get some furniture out because we were evacuated not by the Germans, but by this owner of the restaurant, the cafe. So, my mother got out some of her extra, one extra chair and a foot drill and some equipment and we got some furniture from that part of the apartment out, and we have hidden it. Some Pole took it for us. And we did manage to get some valuables out, which eventually we left with the Poles. We never saw it again. But at that time we -- and we kind of waited, when they are going to kick us out. And sure enough, the order came in 24 hours we had to leave beddings for 12 beds, all the china, all the furniture, all the equipment in the office. Everything had to be left. We were allowed only to take our personal clothing. That's when we moved. That Pole he promised us it would be out of town, a little suburban area, very quiet. Nothing will happen to us, and then he -- the Jews were not allowed to have money, "X" amount of German marks, no gold, no silver, no diamonds, and when they started talking about forming the Ghetto in \_\_\_\_\_ he persuaded my grandfather that he's going to save for safekeeping, he'll take all his valuables. And Grandfather had all his money in a gold money belt. His total life savings were in those gold coins. American dollars, British sterling pounds, everything in gold. So, he left it with the Pole, and after the Ghetto was formed, we couldn't get out, but we sent someone to pick it up, and he denied that he had ever had it. We never saw that stuff again.

Q: Did that surprise you?

A: At that time, yes. At that time, he was so -- seemed like my father knew him and we knew him. We stayed with him. We paid rent, but we stayed with him for a couple of months. There was also a situation where we wanted to go to Warsaw. My mother decided to smuggle herself, smugglers and go to Warsaw. She had some fabrics she felt she'll take it to Warsaw and sell it maybe live on it for a while. Our relatives in Warsaw wanted us to move there. They felt that this was not German, this was the protector at this part of Poland at that time. So, she went. She had a fur coat, and covered in fabric and

went and was stopped somewhere and all the smuggled goods were taken away. We didn't know what happened, but they let them out. This was a put up. They just wanted to get the goods. So, a few days later she came home, luckily for us.

Q: Now, I'd like to get a sense of the mood when the Germans came in. Were people fearful? Were people being abused?

A: No. The fear was when we were all running to Lodz before the Germans came. I don't think people were so fearful. It's hard to say how they felt. We all didn't know what would happen. By 11th of November, this is a Polish holiday, and just before they arrested all the prominent people in town, not only Jews, they arrested Poles, they arrested anyone, teachers, lawyers, bankers, whoever had any prominence so they couldn't start any uprising. They wouldn't stir the population against the Germans. And we never saw them again. Some of the Poles were let out. Some Poles were let out, but --

Q: You don't know what happened?

A: No. And then, as I said, it was winter, I think it was March, maybe February, when the Ghetto was formed, the \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto.

Q: 1940?

A: Yes. And we didn't have a place to go. There was my grandmother's sister. She had a three or four bedroom apartment. By that time, there were two other families living in part of that apartment and we wound up in a little room. Some other relatives were there. It was just bedlam. Finally, we found out that there was a little house that belonged to a pharmacist, a Polish pharmacist, and they told he has to get out of his apartment. So, we shared that apartment with a few other families, and that's where Mom opened up the office, reopened her office. This was an open Ghetto. There were no wires, no barbed wires, just check points. Jewish police were watching it. The Poles and the Germans would come into the Ghetto. If they didn't know you, you could get out. I had a friend who would go out, but no one knew him in town. But I couldn't get out because they knew me, and I could never step my foot out, outside. The Ghetto was on two sides of that little section. There was a main street going through with the street cars, so we had certain hours we could walk through, walk across the main street. You could walk across in the morning. You could cross in the afternoon. Once you went on the one side, you couldn't go back until the hour came that you could do it. They formed a factory. They started having German army coats made, and money was coming in. There were various people who were in charge of the Ghetto, and there was one so-called revolution after another one. One group would kick them out and get other ones, with the help of the Germans. Personally, our family, my mother was having a lot of patients. There were no Polish dentists in town, so her patients would come in.

Q: Polish people?

A: Polish people. We had access to food. We had access to a lot of things. She was making money, and she was helping the whole family. She had aunts and uncles and she was supporting everybody at that time. I worked with my grandfather in an outpatient clinic.

Q: This was a dental clinic?

A: No. Grandfather before he became a dentist, he was something you called a feltcher (ph). It's almost like a medic. My grandfather was doing it. My grandfather was doing it. So, he was very well educated in medicine basically. Never became a doctor. And there was a need for an outpatient clinic, so this was free of charge. He opened it up under the hospital of the Jewish government, and I worked with him. The afternoons I had tutors, and my mother was very anxious for me to finish my -- somehow not to lose my years of education, so in the afternoon I had a tutor and was doing the high school program as much as we could, but at least I had somewhat. I wasn't left completely wild.

Q: Tell me about the organization of the Ghetto. Who was preventing you from coming and going?

A: There was a so-called Jewish \_\_\_\_\_, originally there was one lawyer in charge of it. There was a bunch of people who took over, and there were all kinds of unsavory things. Unsavory in terms of there were rations coming in, the food was coming in, and I think they were selling it in the Black Market. There was another group denounced them. Eventually they were arrested and some of them were hanged later in Lodz Ghetto. There was a Jewish police, but they were strictly order police. I don't think they wore hats. They just wore arm bands. They were watching all the end streets of the Ghetto and the crossing streets. We had a whole little government which was running with the understanding of the Germans and they were dealing with the Germans. The food and everything else was going through that group.

Q: This group was corrupt?

A: The first one, yes. I mean, I wouldn't say the first one. That one lawyer was not, but the group which took over, they were corrupt, very corrupt.

Q: How did people get chosen for these duties?

A: I don't know. I think they just got a group of people together and went to the Germans and what they did, I don't know. This third group they were a couple of brothers and someone else, and they denounced the second group as corrupt, because I guess they got wind of what was going on.

Q: Were there any women in positions of responsibility?

A: I don't think so. Not at that time, no.

Q: Do you remember how you all felt about these Jewish police taking orders from the German.

A: Well, they were not really taking orders from the Germans. They had to do a job and there were friends among them. I mean, they were not in any way abusing people or killing people, or hitting people. They were just standing there and wouldn't let you go. The Germans and the Poles could come into Ghetto, and they told you not to go. This is the border, this is the line, you can't cross the line, period.

Q: Did they have any other responsibilities like organizational schools?

A: No, in \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto, there was absolutely nothing, no schools. The only thing we had organized, they organized a hospital. It was an old factory, and we organized it as a hospital. We had a bunch of fundraisers, which were like reviews, and people volunteered to entertain and perform and we would all go to the shows and that would raise money for the hospital. But that was the extent of this cultural events.

Q: Now, you said your mother worked and she had outside patients. Did you have enough to eat?

A: Oh yes. My family, at that time, we had too much to eat, because we had access to everything at much lower prices than the real Black Market. Those items were on the Black Market, but we were going directly from the Poles to us as I guess going to some middle man in the Ghetto. So, we did have enough to eat. Grandma again, had a little girl who helped run this place, and as a result my mother was supporting that family, and the tutor's family, and she had two aunts and one uncle. She was supporting them, giving them money so they could buy their food.

Q: Were times hard for other people in the Ghetto, or was this Ghetto not too severe?

A: No, it wasn't too severed. But it was, like those two women who were teaching me, there were two sisters that lived with their mother, and they had absolutely no way of getting any money. They were tutoring me and they were tutoring my other friends, so that was their main way of making money. My mother gave orders that when they came in the afternoon, we served a little snack. I didn't need a snack, but by serving some little sandwiches or something the tutor could eat and she didn't have to eat home. So, there were ways of helping people.

Q: Was your sense for other people, was there food rationing?

A: There was rationing. There was a Black Market. There was rationing, but again it was not so bad like in Lodz. I mean, people survived. No one starved to death. The Jewish



administration, I think they had some kind of a welfare department because Mom was taking in any patient who couldn't pay, Jewish patient, would get a slip from the department and they would come in and she treated them free. She'd never take any money. I mean people had money, but that was something else. But if they didn't, they were all treated for free.

Q: Were most people in the Ghetto working, older people or not?

A: I don't think so. I don't think so. That Ghetto lasted about two years. People still had things. People were selling things. They were selling linens. They were selling, if they had any jewelry, they were selling, so I don't think at that time, and look, I was a young girl, and I was concerned with working and meeting boys later and so on, and doing some school work, so maybe I did not delve into that too deeply.

Q: So, you were still doing all of those things?

A: I was still doing all of those things until the Ghetto was closed.

Q: Now, how at this point you had really lost touch with all of your non-Jewish friends?

A: All right, there was an interesting encounter I had. In high school, we had one girl who was of German decent, and as before they would taunt Jewish girls, the year before the war, they started taunting her. We would not go to the -- they had catholic classes in school. The priest would come in and teach them catholic, you know, the religion. So, we were excused for the hour and the three of us, there was another girl and we used to sit in the cafeteria and just sit and kill an hour. They used to send once a week a Jewish teacher to teach all of the Jewish girls, the Jewish religion. So, the kids would taunt her, and I was one of the few people who were friendly with her. And I met her one day in the Ghetto, she worked in the Ghetto, and I was shocked because she hugged me and kissed me on the street. Her family declared themselves Tolstoy, you know, the German Nationalist. And she gave me a big greeting, and I was very much surprised. But you see, I took her part and defended her against the Polish girls before the war. But that was the only contact I had with her. I mentioned that woman who was my mother's friend, she married a Pole. When the war broke out they were in the textile business like everybody else in town, and Mom decided to invest some money in some wool clothes. Because we figured that during the war the factories will be closed, then that will be worth more money, but she left the fabric -- I mean I don't know how many bolts of fabric she bought, she left it with that family, with him and his family. When it came the time that she wanted to sell it, he was the only one who came with the money. She sent him a message and within a few days, and this was a nice profit, because naturally that thing increased in value and we got it. We got the money. So, he was one of the few. He was good and he was honest and he didn't look to take the stuff and not to deliver.

Q: So, it sounds like in the Ghetto you were able to carry on somewhat of a normal

existence?

A: Basically.

Q: It didn't change things, but you were still able to eat?

A: In my family.

Q: And there weren't too many rough restrictions?

A: Well, no. We had every once in a while the Germans would come in. There were restrictions where you couldn't have certain metals and precious metals and then they started raids, and it was just wild. They would come in from all sides, line up, the ones with the brown shirts and the red armbands, they were lined up at arms lengths, they even took the boy scouts, the Hitler Youth, they lined up and they would go from apartment to apartment from room to room and looking for furs and looking for metals and naturally silver. But even cooper and pewter, whatever metals they could melt. There were several incidents like this. They were also at one time, they wanted to evacuate Jewish youngsters. They were looking -- my mother got hold of -- I mean she knew about it a few days before, and I was hidden and some Jewish woman came with the Germans and said there is a young girl. I said I'm in the hospital, I was in the hospital.

Q: What were they going to do?

A: They took them away. We do not know what happened to them.

Q: Were Jews allowed to keep businesses or anything like that?

A: Local businesses. There was a \_\_\_\_\_ restaurant and shoemakers and things like this, but no business as such. Once they established the factory, they were making money. They were paying them money, the operators. That brought some income to the Ghetto under \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: I want to back track for a second because I forgot to ask you about how before the Germans arrived in your town, your community starting to prepare for that possibility?

A: I don't know. I really don't know what way they did and whether they didn't. There were a lot of people like the doctor upstairs. There were Polish, in the Polish army officers, there were Jewish officers, and they were drafted and they went with the Army. Most of them, they wound up in Italy or many of them went up in \_\_\_\_\_. We don't know who killed them. I think the Germans, but the Germans were blaming the Russians, and the Russians were blaming the Germans. But this was most of the Polish army was destroyed there, the officers.

Q: You had mentioned that there was sort of an organizing for this. The masks --

A: Oh, the masks because they were afraid to throw down the gas bombs. We were afraid of the gas bombs. There were a few raids in town, and we used to sit when there was a raid, we used to sit I don't know what you call it -- in Poland they had the drive in like it was a drive in under to go to the yard. So, they had this one section and it was supposedly the safest place to be in case of an attack or bomb falling down. There were some dog fights around. We saw a German plane being shot down. The Polish army was a joke. We never realized that. We thought, oh they are so strong. They used to have a song about the march of the Reds. He wouldn't give anything. He wouldn't give a buck, and when we started running away from the Germans we were following the Polish army. They were with the little scrawny horses, with little cots pulling the small arms, absolutely disorganized bunch of nothing. They were like 18th century and here was the smite of German army. So, they were overrun in no time.

Q: So what were these masks?

A: They were afraid of gas. They were supposed to be prevent us from being poisoned by gas.

Q: Did you use them?

A: One time we were sitting down, there was a raid, and everybody was "Oh, they threw a bomb." They were masks like surgeons wear. The whole thing was a joke, but we didn't realize it.

Q: Anything else you all did in preparation for this?

A: No, that's all.

Q: What were the circumstances that you had to leave?

A: They announced that the Ghetto would be liquidated, and we had like two days to get ready.

Q: This was when?

A: May of '42. In fact, the 15th or 16th of May because my friend, Alena had a birthday that date. They announced -- first of all there was a group of men who will be working in those factories, the coat factories. They will stay for a while. They selected a group of people who would stay in the Ghetto and clean it up. And they needed medical person also. There was a doctor and he was old and he was a bachelor, and he had a sister who was a dentist, and they volunteered to stay. Our family was ordered to go to the hospital, because there were a lot of patients. The population was told to bring all the infirm, all

the sick ones, all the very old ones to the hospital. So, on a given day, and we were allowed to just take what we had on our backs and those bundles. We wore a few layers of clothes and we went to the hospital. On the given day, when we got to the hospital, we were told that there is an old age home somewhere so we carried the patients, whoever was left, and this place was filled to the rafters because they brought everybody who was in any way infirm there. That first day, they marched the whole population to that stadium, which was actually at the other end of town. And we have been in a hospital that night, so we haven't seen what happened, but we were told what happened. As they approached the stadium there was an area which was like fenced off which was before you entered actually the stadium. They started separating the parents, the old ones, and they started taking the children away. All the children under ten years old. I was told that they threw a baby over the fence and said we don't need such \_\_\_\_\_. Smashed child's, baby's head on a fence. They took them all to the railroad station. They grabbed a bunch of boys, young fellows and they took them to the railroad station. That night, they took all the women who were left to Lodz. The following day they came to the hospital, and the group which came were the same boys and they were friends of ours. They were my friends. I knew them. They told us that they were putting people into those cattle cars and then they took the women to Lodz by street cars and just the men are left in the stadium. They were the ones who carried the patients to the lorries, carts really, and they announced who couldn't walk should go on a lorry. And my grandmother felt that she couldn't walk all the way down. So, we had kind of a touchy moment because we walked through town. I think this was Sunday, because a lot of people were there and some of them would make the sign of a cross when they recognized us, and the whole personnel was walking. There was one woman who was hiding a kid in her backpack and she was walking. She wouldn't go on the cart, and when we reached shortly before we reached the stadium, you had to turn left at the stadium and the station was straight ahead and all the carts with the patients went straight, and the cart with the boys went straight and then we kind of froze for a minute, and the cart with my grandmother and other people went leftward to the stadium. So, they were with us. That night and a man told us again about these awful, awful scenes which took place -- I think that out of population of 8,000 finally 3,000, 3,500 wound up in large Ghetto. That night they took us to Lodz by street cars. The street cars stopped running about midnight, and that's when they were taking us all to large Ghetto. That second day, were just men and group from hospital.

Q: And the children who hadn't been evacuated?

A: Well, I don't think there were too many children at that time.

Q: Because of that earlier --?

A: That day before, they took them all away.

Q: You had mentioned that earlier in the Ghetto --?

A: There were some teenagers, but not too many. I think they sent them to some work camps, but not too many. We arrived at Ghetto late at night and they put us in some place, just empty rooms. We were told that the gypsies were evacuated from that area before and that's just like a holding area. And people were crying and crying about their lost children and their grandchildren. It was just very, very sad about the old people, and some other people wanted to know about what happened to the sick and the infirm. They left them in the hospital, and what happened to them? And that same morning some friends of our starting coming in looking for us, and one couple took care of my mother and me, and one person took my grandmother, someone took my grandfather. We stayed with those people. They shared a couple of days they shared their food with us. They could hardly afford it. Then we got a room for the four of us and we started our existence. I wouldn't call it living, in the large Ghetto.

Q: One thing that strikes me about all of this is your mother must have been pretty strong?

A: She was unbelievable. She held the family together. She had tremendous resources. Later on, here, she was very unsure of herself and very vague and afraid, and even my husband who knew her younger, younger age, he couldn't understand how absolutely brave and resourceful and fighting for life.

Q: Was that unusual for a woman?

A: To be a dentist?

Q: Not to be a dentist, but to really be taking care of everyone?

A: Well, she had to. There was no one else. She went to school when she was 18 years old. When she finished high school she went to Warsaw to study dentistry. There were no dorms, she lived on her own. She rented a room and lived on her own. She had to. Her father paid for it, but still, she had to be resourceful.

Q: So, now you're in Lodz.

A: We're in Lodz.

Q: Conditions, I'm sure, are a little bit different?

A: Conditions are horrid. We had this one room, which was our bedroom, our living room, our kitchen, our bathroom. The first few nights, Mom and I slept on a straw mattress on the floor, and mice came in and started running on our faces, so we had to give this up. So, we shared one bed and Grandma had a cot, and Grandfather had a bed. We all worked. \_\_\_\_\_, who was the head of Lodz Ghetto, didn't like dentists, so she worked as a nurse in one of the factories. I worked in a brassiere factory. Grandfather was working also like a male nurse in one of the factories. Grandma got a job, old ladies

were sorting rags and making bowls out of those colored rags, and eventually some younger women were knitting rugs for the Germans. The problem was that the rags were full of lice and they were sorting them on wire tables. So, she was bringing the lice home. When they give us rations, you have to pick up the rations, the first day because very often they would run out of the things. I think there were 750 to 900 calories a day what we were getting at that time. And just before the winter they decided to give us rations for the whole winter. Our wood and coal and turnips and potatoes and cabbage and beets. So, we had to go and pick it up at night. Mom and I would stand in line. The only way to pick this up was to put it on a sack and put it on your shoulders and carry it. You wouldn't let anyone carry it, because they would disappear. We had four people, so we sometimes had to do it in four installments, four nights in a row to pick up that stuff. On the one bed we had the coal and the wood, and on the other bed we had all the potatoes and cabbage and we had the inventory. We knew how many months it was supposed to last, and every couple of nights we would check which potatoes were getting rotten. And this is the potatoes we ate because we knew it had to last for the whole winter. We also got bread, a loaf of bread. So, again, we cut up the bread in sections and little slices so we had for breakfast a piece and for lunch a piece and for dinner a piece and so we were not -- we were always hungry, but some people would eat the bread on the first day or the second day and they were starving the rest of the week. And what else we did, we all got some kind of a -- we didn't make anything warm to drink in the morning but you could buy hot water or coffee, so Grandma was going later to work so she volunteered. Then she started tripping on the street and falling down. She would come with a bloody face, whether she was weak or whether she had pressure too long, we don't know. So, we gave that up. During the day we all got soup. If you worked, you got the soup. And you had to work because you would get the money, the German money. The \_\_\_\_\_, they were named after Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ who was the absolute tyrant in the Ghetto. And then at night we made a little something to eat, from whatever we had, whatever rations we had. If we had any vegetables we made it a little bit thick with any starches or whatever they give us. This was the existence. Cold miserable and we all started getting sick. I was getting abscesses on my face and sties in my eyes. Grandfather fell on ice and broke his arm, and he started staying in bed. Grandmother had those dizzy spells, and we just tried to exist, and this was two years.

Q: Did you have much contact with people outside of your family?

A: Oh yes. At work, you work. I had a boyfriend, and we used to walk the streets because he had no place to go, and I had no place to go, so it was cold and we used to walk the streets and talk.

Q: Were there curfews?

A: I think there were curfews. I'm sure there were. We didn't walk at night. We walked on a Saturday. It was a day off, so we walked. Towards the very end of the Ghetto, I got a job in the fields, in the vegetable fields. There were two kinds of police in the large Ghetto.

There was this regular order police. They watched the exits. They watch order and stuff like this. And there was so-called \_\_\_\_\_ commando. The head of \_\_\_\_\_ commando was someone called Mark Kleeger (ph). Those bunch of thugs, they would get orders from Germans to deliver diamonds or deliver or find gold among the Jews, but they were nasty. They would come into someone's house looking for this stuff, and naturally they figure out the person would hide the stuff in sugar or flour. So, instead of taking a plate or a bowl, they would just dump everything out on the floor looking for the valuables. They were in charge of the fields where they distributed the vegetables. I mean, so if you knew someone and we knew someone and they were there and they put the finger on the scale a little bit or lifted the scale you could get a little bit more. They had special rations. They ate in special places. They would buy their groceries in a special store like all the others of \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: These were Jewish police?

A: That was Jewish police. And as I said, he had those fields out near the Jewish cemetery. He established vegetable fields. We had people working there. And I was getting sick and through connections and through people I got the job in those fields. It was a hard labor. So, first of all you got two soups a day instead of one. I had to walk two or three miles to that place, but the fresh air. I mean there was nothing much to do, the fresh air and the sun started drying up my face, and then we were working when we were weeding, we would take the weeds home. They were a source of green vegetable. When we were thinning out radishes, we would eat raw radishes. That they couldn't catch us, but when we were doing something with the weeds, weeding the weeds, we used to eat the raw bean and put the greens back into the ground so they couldn't figure out who was eating them. We weren't really stealing, we were just hungry so we'd eat a bean. But that helped me later on to survive the rest of it, because all of a sudden my health improved so much. And because I was getting two soups a day, I didn't have to eat so much at home. I was getting the extra soup. I would bring it home at night so we had it. And my grandfather was getting weaker and weaker. He couldn't eat. This was really awful, so we kept on saving his bread. And his wish was to live so long that we can pick up his rations. This was his inheritance because he said he lost all his gold, he can't leave us anything else. What we did he died the day before the rations came, and we didn't report it until the following day, we picked it up and then I reported the death, so we had this extra little food and an extra loaf of bread, which later I left it in Auschwitz because we're still hoarding and we're still afraid to let go and eat everything a once. But the existence in Lodz Ghetto was awful. They also had the criminal police, \_\_\_\_\_, this was German police. They had their headquarters in a little church, and they would call people in and say what do you have? Our landlord, he was the head of fences before the war. A real, very unsavory character, but he had a heart of gold. And he must have had money. They beat him to death. They let him out, he died a day later. But he was like -- his face was like liver. He never told them what he had. They called my mother in. They said we heard you are a rich dentist from \_\_\_\_\_. What do you have? And she said, "Well, I have a couple of gold chains, I have a little diamond." And they said, bring it in. So, she

brought it in and they let her go. So, they were satisfied. If she would have said she had nothing, they would have tortured her. This between the \_\_\_\_\_ and the Jews under commando, this was pretty tight situation over there. And then they started evacuations. They were evacuating constantly people. One of the worst actions was when they took the children out. Orders came that they have to take the children, they're going to take them to better places. There will be fresh air and farms and the people put signs on it and they mobilized all the Jewish police including all the people who worked for the health department, including my mother, and they had to go and collect the children. The children were being taken voluntarily by the parents, taken down, because they couldn't hide them. The moment the family would hide a child, the rations would be taken away, so not only the child didn't have the rations, but the family wouldn't have the rations. Our next door neighbors had hidden a child and they struggled. Unfortunately she died later, but it was -- and then they were taking the old people. They would make you line up on the street and get out and just select the old people and the children. Now, one of the worst actions was around the Jewish holidays, this was '44, I believe. And we lived on the corner, and the lady the one who was our so-called landlady, she was the wife of the guy who was killed. Before the war she was in Argentina. So, we started lining up on one street and she called everybody up and she said forget it. This is not our street. Our address is the next street. There were two entrances there. She said, all of you go back home and hide. Just sit quiet, don't open the window, don't stand next to windows. At that time she had hidden some children and my grandparents. We didn't know where they were, somewhere. They had all kinds of nooks and crannies in that building, and we had all hidden quietly, and at noon they rang the whistles and they stopped the action. So, they were ready to call that second street, where we were, they called it off, so we were saved. If she would have -- we walked out and somebody said to us, someone who knew us and said, where are your parents, and my mother said, hidden. He said, that's silly, they'll find them. They'll kill them. And he was not sure about mom, but when we went back, like I said, that action was closed. I mean stopped, and that's it.

Q: Were you all sort of fatalistic about this? Was it terrifying to you?

A: It was terrifying. You didn't know what's going to happen. Some friends of my mother's he was high official, she had her parents, and they went down when the street went down, and he told that he'll be able to release them because he was a very, very high position, and he could never do anything about it. They took him. They started having lists and first I knew I was not on the list. One of my grandmother's sister was on the list, and we tried to get her out, and my friend told her to go, because there was no -- you couldn't support them. You couldn't do anything with them. Once they were on the list, the rations were cancelled. So, who could afford to feed them. So, they took her, and my grandmother had one brother and two sisters in large Ghetto. One of the sister-in-laws died, two children were evacuated, one uncle was evacuated, the girl finally \_\_\_\_\_, and she died there. The other aunt, they took them away and we never heard of them again. The woman, the last one's husband was either taken away or died, and she was the last one who was evacuated before our family was gone. So, they all



were gone. I mean, there were relatives in other towns, but we never knew what happened to them, but those I knew until '43 what happened to them.

Q: Now, I want to know a little bit more to the organization of this Ghetto. I know there were Jewish police.

A: Well, the organization was the head of the large Ghetto was \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: Did you have any contact with him?

A: No, he slapped my mother's face once, because he thought she was peddling something on the street and he was going in his carriage and there was a peddler and she ran into our building and my mother was working in the building and he ran after her and slapped her face. At one time I wanted to get a petition, when I had those abscesses, for some different job. I never got into him. I never had any contact with him. He had his own clique. His brother, we called Prince Joseph, after Napoleon's brother. They all had good apartments. They had special rations. They all wore high boots like the Germans. They all rode in those carriages with the horses, and he thought he was a king. The money was --the only money we could use in Ghetto were \_\_\_\_\_ pictures on it. We called it \_\_\_\_\_. That was the only way you could buy anything. He liked the doctors, he didn't like the dentists, so the dentists were person non grata.

Q: Your mother didn't practice dentistry at all in the large Ghetto?

A: Oh yes.

Q: All right, we'll get to that. I'll let you finish.

A: If someone displeased him, he would just send them out, either send them out on transport or if someone did something which was according to his rules not right, maybe abuses, they were assigned to the feces brigade. And this was the most horrid thing you ever saw. They would collect, there were cesspools, so they would collect the feces from the cesspool in wagons in special tanks. But those people were pulling those things, and they had to empty them somewhere in the suburbs of the Ghetto. I remember there was a young couple. I don't know what he did, and they punished him. She was a beautiful blonde and she used to pull that thing. They were covered with feces. Naturally a lot of those feces were full of disease, so those people never lasted too long. You probably know the landmark of the Ghetto was everybody carried a little canteen to work because we got our soup in it. So we all carried it. As a matter fact, I got as a birthday present, someone made one that was not made out of tin but made some nice metal so that it didn't have that tinny taste, because the soup would get soured in it. Even those people who pulled those feces wagons, they would walk around with their bowl or their canteens attached to their belts because somehow on their route they would stop and wherever and they would get their soup. So, as filthy and dirty and miserable as they were, they ate on

the road. But those people really, this was like he punished them. This was worse punishment I think than being evacuated on the transports. I also had a hard time with grandfather when he was dying. We had cold water only. We had to pump the water downstairs to bring it up. And they had laundries, public laundries. You sent out your stuff, took three months, two months you got it back. Not that we had valuable things. They gave us things out when we came to the Ghetto. Well, Grandfather was sick towards the end and he had uremia, and he had accidents, and in order to change the bed I had to pick him up and put him on another bed. We'd change the bed and finally when he died -- he wanted to commit suicide. He had some procaine (ph) and his cousin caught him and he was ready to take it, but anyway, he died. In order to bury him, one had to provide two clean sheets for a shroud. We had no clean sheets. So, I went to these friends of my mother's who lived in Lodz before the war, and there were several families there that they all lived in Lodz. And that was the one who lost their parents, and I said, could you lend me two sheets so I can bury Grandfather and we will either buy some on the Black Market later on, or we'll get our bundle and we'll give it back to you. She said, "No, I'm sorry, I don't have it." I was devastated. And finally the people next door who were new acquaintances, the ones who had lost the child, she knocked on the door. She said, "I hear you have a problem. Here are the two sheets." So, this is how we managed to bury him in clean sheets. This was towards the end of the war, and they felt that they are going to survive the war and they're going to have their linens and have everything else. They lost half of their family and they still couldn't understand that those things were not important.

Tape #2

- Q: I was mentioning that as far as I understand it, there was a lot of organization in the large Ghetto. Cultural activities, little religious programs, theater?
- A: I have never attended any of it. I don't know anything much. There was a private library, and I used to go for books. The front was bordering the street which was closed. The main street of Lodz Ghetto had street cars going like in \_\_\_\_\_. No one lived in those buildings. I think they had factories, most of them. There was barbed wire. This was guarded by the Jewish policeman watching that no one should sneak out and so on. That library, the private lending library was on that street, but I know we used to go through the back and stand in line and borrow books. That's the only thing which I had in terms of cultural events. As I said, I was there for two years, and we had to take care of the old people. We had to bring the rations, and bring the food and do the fire and bring the water, and bring the slops down. Everything was on my mother's and my back, and one time she had an infection in her finger, so she couldn't grab. She had an infection in her palm and she couldn't carry things. She would go with me to pick up the rations just to guard me and I was carrying it. I worked, and as I said, Saturdays I would go out, and I met this guy. I started going out with him on Saturdays. We would just walk, because he was taking care of his mother and sister-in-law and a child, and he was a policeman, but he was not doing anything how should I say, he didn't beat people. He was watching, I think he was a sergeant, but they call it in German " \_\_\_\_\_ " that means people who kept the order. They were not the criminals and they were not the \_\_\_\_\_ commander. Those were the thugs. They are the ones who are the messy guys.
- Q: When you would take walks, what would you see?
- A: People very often, you saw people lying on the ground. They found bodies on the street. The children, they used to sell \_\_\_\_\_, and there were children, there was a little chant the little children would sell \_\_\_\_\_, and three for one mark. This was almost like a Ghetto song, those little children selling. Children were working. My mother was working in a factory where children were working. I don't know what jobs they had, sorting something putting something together. They were little children. And I remember once she told a story about a little boy and he said he saw a goose, but he said it in Jewish and he says I saw a gants, not something whole a gants, he meant a goose and he started flapping with his wing and trying to say what the goose was. And he saw a gants, and my mother said the eyes would dig because he saw an animal. Even the little children, the ones who were finally eventually were evacuated, but at one time they had little factories for them. Even they had to work to get a little soup. Life was -- there were wives who fought with husbands about food. The husbands would threaten the wives or steal. People would steal the food from each other. People would sell the bread for cigarettes and then they were starving. It was so difficult to live. Now, I was a young girl and I didn't have any clothing, and we used every piece of scrap of whatever we could do something to make something. When we first came in,

they gave us some stuff, some linens, some pots and pans, because they had from other liquidated Ghettos, they would get the stuff in and when people were brought in, that was the organization. They would distribute some of the stuff. I remember we got this big grey shawl with fringes on it, full of holes. And I ripped the shawl, I took out the fringes and pieced the whole thing together. I think I made three hats for us, for mother, for grandmother and for me, because it was cold and some mittens. We grabbed things out of the Ghetto, \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto. Among other things there was a piece of fabric. I'll always remember it was an orange piece of fabric and I needed something. And it was not enough for a dress. I had a friend who was working with me and she was a dressmaker and she said find some wool. So we found -- I found some on the Black Market, some yarn, and she made me knit parts of the sleeves and the yoke and the turtleneck, and some trim on the skirt, she made like pockets, and I had a beautiful dress, I mean made out of very small piece of fabric and those scraps. And the Polish peasant women never wore coats, even working women, they wear those big plaid throws, I mean like big squares. They were square. So, I was with Mom, we bought this plaid thing and made a jacket for me, because you had to I needed some clothes. I was outgrowing what I had, and I needed something. We managed as I say, things from scraps. Every little scrap of wool, every piece of scrap of something, you pieced it. You bought pieces of wool and made a sweater. You're talking about people in Ghetto how short sighted they were. When I was working for that factory, the corset factory, we would get this was for the German population, and Germans would send in cut out pieces of brassieres, I mean they were all cut, and all the fittings and the little hooks and buttons, whatever, slides for the brassieres or if we did corsets there were stays and eyelets, and we had to count everything and package it in small loads so we would distribute it to the assembly line. I worked in the warehouse where we would distribute. We even measured thread. We gave them certain amount of thread so no one could steal anything. The guy who was in charge of the factory was a manufacturer before the war, and he felt that the factory has to be run in the correct order. There were times we had absolutely nothing to do. No shipment came. There was very little and the assembly line was working very slowly and they would come in and they needed a dozen buttons, a dozen stays and we would just give them to the assembly line, but the biggest work was when the shipments would come in. We had to count, like I say, every button and repackage it. So, the foreman of the factory used to say, "Whatever you're doing, just make believe you're working." So, we would have a book in the drawer and we'd knit under the table and on the table we would have button or stays open up a package and make believe we were counting or whatever. This guy would come in, you would have to hide from him because he did not believe, he could not bring himself to say, "Look girls, there is nothing to do." As long as the Germans don't come in and they don't catch you with it, he was petrified. When the time came for me to get transferred to the fields, I needed his release, and he wouldn't release. With all the connections I had to get to those fields, he didn't want to lose one of his workers. Finally, someone from our hometown, who was also director of a more important factory, he was a director of the uniforms, the coats for the German Army, he finally approached him and said, "There's a young girl here. She's sick. She needs some fresh air. This dust in the factory is killing her." I couldn't breath, I was having attacks of

asthma. "Why don't you release her?" Finally, I got the release from him, but when I approached him he wouldn't do it. There were many people like this. They were so self important. They felt so important, and they were nobodies nothings. All of a sudden they became heads of factory or whatever. And Ghetto was one huge factory, starting from electronic equipment, uniforms, which was the most important things, boots, supplies for the Army, going down to the brassieres, hats, artificial flowers, brooms. And even those rag rugs, braided rugs which were made out of scraps. They would take torn sheets which they would get from various cities when the other towns or cities were liquidated like in \_\_\_\_\_. That group saw that the good stuff went to Germany or for the German settlers. The junk came back to Lodz Ghetto. Some of the stuff was torn, they were rags. They would dye them different colors and make braided rugs out of them. So, everybody was working and everybody produced something, and we produced and the Ghetto was getting food. There was no money.

Q: How were these people selected to be in positions of authority whether it was the police or the factory?

A: I don't know, connections, basically.

Q: Were there ever women in positions of authority?

A: I think so. I think so, I don't know how many, mostly a men's society. The guy Kleeger, the one who was the head of the \_\_\_\_\_ commando, he had a brother who's the most extremely decent guy, and she was a friend of my mother's from before the war, and he was in charge -- this is a specialty of empty containers. You see, if they brought containers to Ghetto, let's say they brought brown sugar or they brought flour or something, that department would scrape out the things and there was still food in it and they had to return to those things back to the Germans to refill it. So, he was in charge of the empty containers. This was -- he had a high position, but he felt that this was a position which in any way he's not jeopardizing anyone's life and anyone's position. He wanted to survive, and he survived and his wife, but this was his job, and one day I told you when the \_\_\_\_\_ commander, his brother's hoodlums were coming into the building, one day he was passing our apartment building and he saw the guys were coming in to check, and he just walked in. My grandparents were home. He walked in and just sat down and talked to them. He was waiting for those guys to come and he wanted to chase them on their way. He felt they shouldn't anyway, he never said anything later, and they left the building and he later told my mother that he came in because my grandparents said "What was Simon doing here? He just came to visit us in the middle of the day?" He came, he wanted to prevent any scenes with my grandparents. As I said, he was the most decent guy in the world. His brother survived, I think, either brother or nephew. He was hiding. Those people survived that lived in Israel, and we saw them. There were a lot of decent people.

Q: There was also corruption?

A: I think there was corruption. There had to be corruption. There had to be corruption. You see, in large Ghetto I was such a low level of living that I really don't know what was going on, but we know -- the whole administration and when I read this book about Lodz Ghetto, one time he had theaters here and orphanages, he had schools, he was making the famous speech, give me your children, he felt \_\_\_\_\_ justified in sending out the children because maybe he can save some people. When finally it came to his evacuation, they gave him a special passenger car. He didn't go in a cattle car, and he expected that they were going to take him on an inspection of camp and he's going to help them in Auschwitz. And there are three theories what happened to him. One was that some people from Lodz Ghetto killed him when he arrived. Some of them he was gassed or some German killed him. So, we don't really know what happened to him. Now, once they evacuated us, the evacuation --see what happened, they were having more and more lists and more and more evacuations and they would grab people on the streets. I was afraid to go anyplace. And I had some money coming to me and some vegetables coming to me because the vegetables all of a sudden were ripening, and I was afraid to go by myself to the place that I was working. And this friend of mine, the policeman, he said he'll take me, because at least we hope they won't grab me on the street when I'm being escorted. At that time, we knew something was going to happen, so we made this big out of some fabric back packs and packed all our valuables and some food. That was sitting ready to be taken in case they evacuate us. We never knew in the last few weeks of August, this was the beginning of August '44. He was late, and that in a way helped me and Mom be together, because by the time he arrived, they took us by that time they just blew the whistles everybody out. That's it. So, we went down, and downstairs he was there. He just came. If he would have been 15 20 minutes before I would have left and I would have never been with my family. I would have gone with him. So, he helped us to go to the train station and that's where they put us in the cattle cars. There were about 80 people in the cattle car and one bucket, one slop bucket. I don't even know if there was anything to drink. We all had something to eat, I mean whatever we grabbed. As I said, we had an extra bread which we never allowed ourselves to eat the whole bread. We're saving it because what happens tomorrow. We were so conditioned to it that you have to save something for tomorrow. And Grandma was embarrassed to go in the bucket. She couldn't -- and we tried to cover her with the coat and so on. People were dying on the train. This was one night when I --

Q: I'm sorry to interrupt you but did you have any idea where people were being sent?

A: No, there were all kinds of rumors but no one knew.

Q: Had you heard about this before?

A: We didn't hear of Auschwitz. We heard about bad things happening, but the only time that I knew something was happening when those boys told us that the people were taken to cattle cars, the old people and the children, and those boys were never heard of again.

Back track, one of my friends was hung in Lodz Ghetto. He was found, he was trying to escape from camp. And this was a boy I saw him when I was 15, I gave him my photograph, and then somebody told me that he was hung, and they found my photograph with him. Since that time, I was going up the ladder. I had boyfriends who were much older than him, and I became obsessed to get that photograph back, because I felt if that boy felt that way that he had my photograph, it was taken when I was 12 or 13, before the war. I finally tracked that photograph down and had it, and I told you that the people from \_\_\_\_\_ Ghetto some of them were hung. The ones who were in charge of the Ghetto at one time, which I mention it in my book. So, when we got -- what were we talking about?

Q: The cattle cars, going to Auschwitz.

A: Yes, the cattle cars, going to Auschwitz. We arrived at Auschwitz, and it was dark in the cattle cars. All of the sudden the light was kind of blinding. They lined us all up in fives. We had my grandmother with us. They told us to leave this stuff whatever we had. I just had like a little lunch bag, and I had my photographs there, and I had some money there, and a couple of rings and things like this. Mother, I think had probably instruments. If anything, aside from anything else she had was instruments. She had a red cross arm band, because in Ghetto everybody was identified by something. They had caps and they had bands, and they had different hats with different i.d.'s and so on. \_\_\_\_\_ was big on uniforms but couldn't afford uniforms, so he was giving people hats. As we were approaching \_\_\_\_\_, there were a lot of Polish couple, like trustees working there, the ramp, and I didn't realize until later what this Pole did. He saved our lives. What he did, is pushed me into the line first and separated me from my mother and my grandmother and put some people in between. Then he put my mother in, again, put some people in between, and then put my grandmother. He knew where she was going. He wasn't sure where my mother was going. He knew where I am going. And the family was together. Very often they's say let me go with that loved one and they would oblige. So, naturally they send me in and then he asked my mother where she is going, and she saw the sign and she said I am going to work. The sign was \_\_\_\_\_, so she said I'm going to work. He looked at her, clapped her on her behind and let her go. And naturally, they send Grandmother to the left, and my mother had nightmares because it was so confusing that we didn't have a chance to look what happened to her. It was so fast, and so unbelievably confusing, and I think that the Pole by separating us, knew what he was doing and he saved us, the two of us.

Q: Was there a general hysteria?

A: No.

Q: People just weren't --?

A: There's a by word of Auschwitz "shnell (ph)" Everything they did you had to do fast,

fast, fast. You had no time to regroup, you had no time think, you had no time to do anything. Get off the trains, line up, fast. That's all you could hear "Shnell, shnell," When they finally regrouped us on the other side of the table, again they formed us in fives. There were groups of prisoner girls, and they started driving us, practically driving us, fast, running, and while we were running, we encountered a group of subhumans, to us at that time they were subhumans, they wore tops of men's pajamas, but they were not the regular prison garb. They all had their hair shaved. They had the wooden lace shoes on. Their doppers (ph) were plastic or fabric or whatever, or no, they were wood sabits (ph) like Dutch shoes, because it was muddy around. There were sent in another direction, and they started yelling give me your bread, give me something, they'll take it away it from you. Give it to us, and they were supervised by the Germans, but basically they were smacking them, and we were shocked seeing that group, and naturally wouldn't give them the bread. I mean, God forbid, we had to hide the bread for us. We'll need it. And finally they brought us into an area where the baths were. This was a real legitimate bath, a processing area. By that time it was getting dark, and they warned us to turn in all the gold and all the diamonds and all the valuables that we have because they'll be taken away. And rumors were going that they were going to do very personal inspections. Well, Mom had a bridge with two diamonds in. She had it made in such a way that she could take it out. The diamonds were taken out of the things and she had it in her mouth. This was like a final ration in case we need anything. And I was very upset. I got panicky and I said I don't want to give these Germans absolutely nothing. Let's bury them. And I also had a couple of rings, old rings. And in the dark, my mother says "Are you sure?" And I said Mom, I don't want you to give it to them and they are going to look in your mouth and they will find it and they will get, and I don't want them to have it. And there we put into the ground, ground it with our heels, and got rid of the diamonds and got rid of the gold. There were a couple of other things they took, but this, it's like a feeling, like great we didn't give it to them. Anyway, they took us to this shed --.

Q: What happened to the diamonds?

A: She ground them into the ground.

Q: Was that the end of the story with the diamonds?

A: Yes, but we wouldn't give it to the Germans. That was fun --, when I think about it now, this was fun, because they didn't get it. Maybe somebody eventually found it, maybe not. I don't care. They were sewed in a little plastic thing -- well, we didn't have plastic. Anyway, they took us to the shed. We had to get undressed, get the clothes off. They took everything away from us and they sent us to the sauna and lucky for me, I don't know why, they didn't cut my hair. They did shave our hair and they give us tattoos. It was very late at night by that time. They were getting a lot of transports. Rumor was that they wanted us to -- eventually would have gassed us, but they were so busy, the crematorium was so busy that they felt maybe they can do something with us, the able bodied people. And, they gave us some clothes. I wound up with a skirt, my mother wound up with a



mini, so we switched and the wooden shoes. Then the last act was they painted a stripe, a red stripe down our backs and that broke me up. Talking about panic, and we walked naked in front of the guys, in front of the Germans and in front of Polish copos. Somehow, I took this whole thing without shedding a tear, but when they painted that stripe on my back, I started crying. Again, one of the Poles walked over to me, hugged me and said, "Don't worry, you'll survive. You'll be okay." I mean, I spoke Polish at that time fluently, and I was a pretty girl at that time, and he felt sorry for me so he said, "Don't worry, you'll make it, just don't cry." So, they sent us out, by now it's late at night. They didn't have a barrack for us. They'll send us to the latrine. I don't know if you know what the latrine in Auschwitz looked. They were concrete benches with holes that could accommodate 500 people at once. There were benches on both sides and then in the middle there was a long bench from back to back there were holes with a pit underneath. And that's how we were using as toilets. Well, that's where we spent the night, in the toilets. Well, I don't have to repeat Auschwitz stories. We stood up from 5:00 in the morning or 6:00 in the morning and then they put us in the barracks and we had 14 people, 12 to 14 people to one six by six or seven by seven bed. They gave us a can of whatever they gave us was in a metal can, no spoon, no nothing, and five people had to eat out of it, so everybody's watching how many swallows you did of that. And one of the first nights there, once we got into the barrack, they were burning, the crematorium was going night and day.

Q: You knew what it was?

A: We didn't. But someone woke up and those barracks, like you see in the Museum how they look, they had little windows on top and someone must have woken up and saw this red glow in the sky and someone started crying all of a sudden 1,000 women started crying and people who were in charge of it, group of Hungarian girls, they started yelling to be quiet because the Germans would come in and so forth. We still didn't know what happened. We knew something bad had happened, but we didn't know about the crematoriums, what's happening.

Q: You didn't know what the crematoriums were? How many people were in your barrack?

A: About a thousand.

Q: From all over?

A: This was probably mostly Polish group run by the Hungarians. The girls who were in charge had short skirts and they for some reason they all like polka dotted blouses and they had their hair. They cut my hair some more. They didn't like my having hair, so they shaved it a little -- they didn't shave it, but they cut it completely. And Mom developed, we were afraid, because she developed from the wooden shoes a wound on her ankle and that was festering, and two weeks later they had the selection, luckily they put us through a shower again, and the paper bandage fell off, so when they selected her, they didn't see

her with the bandage. As much as that was festering and messy, they didn't do anything.

Q: Was your day fairly controlled?

A: Extremely. We had to get up, I don't know, 5:00 or 6:00. It was cold in the morning. You stood on that \_\_\_\_\_ for hours. They counted, and counted first from the barrack, then they counted from the section, then they counted -- they had to count the whole camp through and had to tally. If someone died, they had to tally. If someone died, they had to tally. If they couldn't find someone, they were looking for them.

Q: This is the whole camp, not just your barrack?

A: No, no, they started with counting the barrack, then there was a whole section, then they had to have it to one person, and if they couldn't find her they were looking for them. Somebody was maybe hiding. Maybe someone died, maybe someone couldn't get up. It started over and over and over. And the morning was cold. Then they would give us five minutes in the bathroom. Sometimes they put us in one of the other barracks was like a washroom. I don't know how many spigots, but again, it was fast, fast, fast. There was no toilet paper, there was nothing. You couldn't wash, you couldn't do anything. If you managed to put your hand under the spigot and get a little water, they gave us something in the morning, I don't know if they gave us bread at night or in the morning -- no, I think we used to get the bread at night and save a piece to have it for the morning, and they gave us some soup during the day and some kind of a liquid during the day, in the morning. Once we were standing in the \_\_\_\_\_, and one of the girls, whatever she had she had some kind of a jacket with patch pockets, and I said, "Gee, that would be nice to have for bread." And she ripped out the pocket and said, "Here." She knew my mother from her town, because we would save the piece of bread to have it for the morning, and you were afraid to put it down. You slept on top of the bread so God forbid someone shouldn't steal it from you. So, that pocket was a great thing to put the piece of bread. I mean, you know, such little things can mean so much to you. Anyway, luckily for us we only stayed only two weeks there. This was hell.

Q: Did you work?

A: No. Yes, I offered -- I couldn't sleep. Mom was doing something, checking some things. You know they asked who was a medical thing, so she would go down, and they made us sit in those beds and you couldn't lay down. You just had to sit. Fourteen people in one of those platforms. Well, I couldn't sleep at night with all the noise and at night they had the slop bucket at the door and somebody had to go, they had to go to the slop bucket and when the slop bucket was full, had to be taken to the latrine. Well, I volunteered. And one of the escort from one of the other girls, from one of the workers, but they felt themselves above carrying a slop bucket, and at least I could get some fresh air. Walk, when the bucket was full, I could go walk out.

Q: Did you see anything strange when you'd walk out at night?

A: Nothing, it was just dead. Nothing was seen, no one was walking, except as I said, figures taking the slop bucket. That's about all. No one was allowed to go to the bathroom. But, I was waiting for that occasion.

Q: It just sounds sort of eerie.

A: It was very hot in the afternoon. This was still August. So during the day, it got hot, and in our camp they would send us out again for another count, and by that time it was hot, and we stood there for hours until they tallied. It was a way of torture. They were just cruel and people were fainting and people were dying in the lines and you were not allowed to help them. You had to leave them the way they were. If someone passed out, they passed out. That's it.

Q: You went out a night, did you see the crematorium flames or smell them?

A: There was a smell and there was dust, but we didn't -- there was some white stuff floating, but we didn't know what it was. The first night the glow was unbelievable. And we were afraid, I don't know, we were afraid to do anything. You were not allowed to. Once I was in the bathroom, maybe I wasn't moving fast enough, there was this famous \_\_\_\_\_ Erma \_\_\_\_\_, she later came to Bergen-Belsen, blonde, gorgeous cool and she had this big whip and she smacked me with a whip. Because as I said, the whole ward was fast, whatever you did. You had to line up fast, you had to go to the bathroom fast. They gave you five minutes in the bathroom. Five minutes maybe not even five minutes to get some water to wash up, wash up, maybe you could wet your face maybe take a sip of water and wet your hands. That's about all. Conditions were awful.

Q: How were the other guards, the copos, your block elders?

A: I don't know. It's hard to say. They lived very nicely, especially the block elders. They had little rooms with quilts and they had little stoves. And one with the block elder she would help and then they had a whole bunch of lesser girls and -- our group was Hungarian so there was a communication gap. Some of them spoke German, some of us spoke German and some of us didn't. I didn't speak too well German, but I understood. So, you were afraid of them.

Q: Were they nasty?

A: Sometimes, like I said with the hair. They couldn't stand the fact that I had hair. I mean I didn't. I had short hair, but they couldn't stand that. They didn't have a razor, so they clipped it and said that's to prevent lice. Because they saw some workers working on the roof, again Polish workers. I talked to them once. I don't know how I managed to say something, and I said I could use a stick, and he said fine, tomorrow we'll work on the

roof and I'll make you a stick for the soup. It's like a tongue depressor and he dropped that stick for me, so I could dig into the soup. They didn't like it. So, the following day, they called me down to the bottom of the thing and said, "We have to cut the hair." So, they cut some more. I had no choice. Because except for the block elders and their assistants the rest of them had shaved heads. How they got there, how they became them, I don't know. There was a woman who came along, she was a dentist from Poland, and she kind of asked my mother and said, you know, I can get you a job and so on and she was hinting that my mother has anything she should give it to her and she could arrange for her to get a job as a dentist. At that time we didn't have anything, and my mother was upset. She said, if I had the diamond, I could have given her the diamond. I could have gotten a job. Lucky for us, we didn't have the diamonds and they sent us out to Bergen-Belsen.

Q: Why don't you tell me how that came about?

A: About two weeks after we were in Auschwitz, they lined up, had another selection. They took us to the showers, gave us some clothes, and they took away our clothes. I mean if I had a little -- I had a little skirt and a tank top, they took the skirt away. The tank top was so short, I had a ribbon in the tank top and I had to tie it between my legs otherwise my whole behind was showing. And they ran us out, and again they had a selection and they were supposed to send us out. Then something happened, the trains were not there, and they put us in some temporary barrack. The following day, they ran another selection. They gave us a bath, and they put us on the train. This was the time I really don't know if Auschwitz had two stations or not because this is the only time and I went back to Auschwitz, I remember, we went through the main camp of Auschwitz, because we were in \_\_\_\_\_ and this was, I saw the red buildings, the permanent buildings. I saw the band playing. So, I had a feeling they had some other station in Auschwitz proper which they loaded us. They unloaded the cars somewhere else, and they put us there. They put us in cattle cars again. They give us a piece a bread and a piece of cheese. There was one water bucket with water, and there was one slop bucket, and they put us on the trains. I think we were there either two nights or three nights, and one night they stopped somewhere and they brought a fresh bucket of water, and assigned someone to distribute the water. Brought a little cup and we were supposed to have a sip. One woman got so frenzied, she grabbed her shoe and dipped it in there and drank from the shoe. When they give us the clothes, by that time, I've got those laced up shoes with wooden soles. One was white and one was black, and I had this men's shirt, long flannel thing, blue satin, significant later, I'll tell you about that story. We stayed, and as I said the train was on and off and on and off. At night it would stop. I remember once we were next side there were real cattle making cattle noises. This was an absolute nightmare. Later on when I had my typhous fever, all I had I kept on saying, take the train out of my head, get the train out of my head. That's all I could hear is that. It took me years before I wanted to take a train anyplace, because even when I was in Europe and we traveled later, I was very reluctant to take a train. We finally arrived at Bergen-Belsen about maybe the third day. All the passing and stopping we passed, I think, Dresden. We saw someone tried to

climb up. We could see the bombed out cities and we were very happy to see those bombed out cities. I think it must have been the third day. We felt that another night on the train we will completely lose our identity and it was confusing. We were getting confused without food, without drink, and with the total darkness for so long, no knowing where we were going, what we're doing. Anyway, they took us, we came to Bergen-Belsen, and until that time Bergen-Belsen was not a concentration camp. They had various camps of various entities, prisoner of war camp, but there was no camp concentration camp as such. Again, they asked people who can't walk who would like to go by truck, and I think one or two people who were very sick, they went. Otherwise, my mother with the bad leg, she would not go on the truck. She was afraid, because we knew by now, by that time, when you are sick something bad is going to happen to you. We finally got into the main camp. It was a long, long street. The front of the street, the beginning of the street, there was administration places, there was a bath, there was a little crematorium which they could burn two bodies. But this was done for bodies. It was never done to use it for killing people. If people died, they would use it. They gave us a bath and we put our clothes in a little basket, and when we walked out from the other side of the bath, we got the clothes. They marched us down to the end of the street of the town, the very end of the camp, and there was this big tent that could accommodate about 1,000 people. It was clean. We all got a blanket each. On the floor of the tent was wooden shavings, bales of wooden shavings, clean, never used. There as a latrine in the back right under the guards tower, big pits and there was a couple pieces of wood where you could kind of lean against, but you could use it any time you wanted. There was a wooden trough with pipe. We could use the water any time we wanted. They nominated one lady, she was from Germany, she spoke German, as camp director, and her assistant, she was originally from Germany, so they spoke fluently German. They counted us once a day. This camp is located on the \_\_\_\_\_, so it's like heather. At that time there was fields in back of us, later on they build more and more and more but at that time it was just us and the fields. So, we could sit in the sun. We could drink when we wanted, we could go to the toilet when we wanted. Even at night, if you wanted to go to the toilet, -- if the guards heard something going on, he would put the light on, the spot light on, if he heard a movement. So, maybe they eliminated you when you were using the bathroom. When the girls were sitting there, they would just look. After a while, you lose all inhibitions, and if they want to look, let them look. That's what we're going to do. At that time we didn't have any doctors so the first day, the second day, they brought a big chest with some first aid things and some pills, some equipment. Mom became the doctor. There was a head dentist, I don't know his name, but he was until the very end, a very, very decent guy. So, one of the first questions he asked me is "How come your head is shaved?" They couldn't understand that. There were SS but they had no idea about the horrors of Auschwitz or the other camps. They were just half way decent people in the beginning. The food we got was paradise next to Auschwitz. Fairly decent soup, we got some kind of coffee in the morning and a nice piece of bread and at night very often they had something, a piece of cheese or some artificial jam or something and Sundays we'd get red cabbage and there was some meat in it and potatoes with jackets and this was the first few weeks. The next few days they put another tent up. We got a big group of

Hungarian women another tent up. So, about that time there was 3,000 people in that compound, because there were other groups.

Q: All coming from Auschwitz?

A: I think so. I think they were coming from Auschwitz because the other ones were Hungarians. Can I tell you something interesting about -- by that time, we didn't have a doctor and they brought a bunch of women from the Warsaw uprising, gentile women. They were not with us, but they brought one of the doctors to us to work with us and one of the women somehow when there was another nurse and I and my mother and people were coming in with various ailments, there was one lady who was from Germany, had lost her husband and child. She was not Jewish. Her husband was Jewish, and she kind of started becoming administrator to the very end. She was the administrator of the hospital. As a matter of fact, we saw her in the United States. She survived. So, we would sleep -- it was so cold, but we would sleep, this Polish doctor, and Lisa and my mother and I would take one blanket and put it underneath us on the shavings and would cover ourselves with the three other blankets. It was much warmer. And the body heat kept us going. It was getting cold. By that time, I think my mother started looking at some teeth. I mean, checking, also everything on the floor, we had no place to do but, one day we got notified and some people approached Mom and the other women and a few other ones that this is Yom Kippur and the Hungarians are going to have a \_\_\_\_\_ service and we are invited. After dark come in one by one and come in, sneak in. So, one by one, it was very dark, and you know they closed the camp. Except for the towers, there was no one in camp. They would close it up, all the Germans would just disappear at darkness. And we all hide under the blankets. We wrapped ourselves in blankets and quietly walked into the tent. They lined up the shavings in such a way they were like benches. In the very front they made a \_\_\_\_\_ out of the shavings covered with blanket. How they got a candle, I do not know, but they had a tiny little candle. There as a young girl and an elderly woman and they sang the whole \_\_\_\_\_ out of memory. And they sung, and they warned us please do not cry, please do not wail, please do not make a sound. Don't sing, don't do anything, just be quiet, because the Germans would have shot all of us. I tell you, this was one, even the Polish woman, she was sitting there with the tears running down her eyes, this Polish doctor. We all sat, and until today I go to \_\_\_\_\_ services and when I hear the chant, I see that scene because it was eerie. Can you imagine, by that time there must have been 1,500 women there, like ghosts sitting in the gray blankets listening to the service, and then again, they let us out one by one, two by two, please don't say anything. Don't talk when you walk, just sneak into your own tent. This was unbelievable, the faith, and as I said we all took chances by attending that service.

Q: Since you were not particularly religious growing up, how did the part of that service make you feel?

A: Unbelievable because I knew -- let's put it this way. We had a record of one of the

famous cantors home so I have heard I don't think I ever went to \_\_\_\_\_ services, because this was such an Orthodox synagogue, so I couldn't go maybe when I was little kid they took me, Grandfather took me, but I never went. But I always heard this record, because my father liked that cantor and he had this record. And I used to play with the record player, so I was very much aware of that chant, and I knew it. I knew the melody, and I knew that this was something very, very important.

Q: Was there a special sense of solidarity?

A: Solidarity, feeling of something, hope. To do something like this in such circumstances was unbelievable, especially after Auschwitz where we were so controlled and here we could attend this service.

Q: About the camp, were you isolated from all these other groups?

A: Yes. Well, the way the camp was done was like I said, wa one long street and there were various sub camps on various sides. We were aware of several of them, and later on I was aware of more of them. One was called the stern camp and one was called the diamond camp, and those were the people from Holland and Belgium. The rumor --they lived with the families at that time. That's when the children came in. Rumor was that they paid a lot of money to the Germans to bribe them in terms of giving them diamonds and gold and money, so when they evacuated them, they promised that they'll be kept separate and they'll be kept with the families, and they'll not be destroyed. Eventually, they separated them. They sent the parents out and the children were kept and I'll tell you about the children camp a little bit later. They started bringing more and more people to our section, our compound. It's getting crowded. One day the tents blew off. There was a big storm and wind and just the tents collapsed. So, they put us somewhere temporary, and for a so called hospital they build a little tent in a corner and the rest of the people were in the barracks. And that's the first time I saw myself. Those barracks had windows. It was just a temporary measure until they could build some more places for us. I walked one day, and I saw this person walking without hair and wearing this crazy blue striped dress, and I knew that this original model, there's only one. No one else has this copy of that. And I couldn't believe that this was me, and I stood there and I looked at my reflection an I touched my face and I touched my hair. I couldn't believe -- I mean I was like a little baby, like you show a baby a picture and he says that's me. That's the way I was. I couldn't believe that's me. I looked at the dress and said no there's no other one, that's me. I'm the only one. It was a shocking experience to see yourself.

Q: How long had it been since you had seen yourself?

A: This was after Yom Kippur, probably two months or so. It had to be in October because I don't know exactly when Yom Kippur took place, but this was shortly afterward when the tents were blown down. So, then one of the people who one of the tasks was one of my friend Alena who went to school with me, her mother was a pediatrician before the war.

During the war, the beginning of a war, she was run over by a truck, so her face -- she was never a pretty women, but her face was damaged, crooked and stuff like this. Well, she became a doctor, and they sent another one, Doctor Annie. She was a woman born in Russian, went to medical school in Russia, married a French diplomat and she lived in Germany. She was Jewish, but she lived in Germany before Hitler, because he was a French diplomat. She was a socialite. She never practiced medicine, but this was our other doctor. By that time they moved us again. They build some barracks and they built a so-called hospital. We were moved like three times. So, this was when Schnabbles (ph) started coming in. We had one big room where the patients stayed in the bunk, and one corner we had the staff, and by that time they brought more nurses, must have been about six nurses, seven nurses and two doctors, my girlfriend Alena was a nurse. My mother was there. On the one window we had this out patient clinic and in the back was a little tiny room and it was a dental office.

Q: Excuse me, this is completely separate from the barracks?

A: They had access to it. It was part of the camp, but this was a separate little building. That's when we started seeing the two I don't know what you call it, the German -- they were like medial corps men, or something. One was a decent guy, his name was Fisher. And he liked to grab the girls' boobs. So, we gave him a name of Fisher Tapper. Tapper in Jewish is to tap, to grab it, and he liked to grab whenever he could when no one else was looking. The other one was obnoxious. He was a young fellow and we called him the pig, so I don't know his name. And Doctor Schnabbles started coming in. He was an elderly man, according to rumors again, he was a nose and ear man. He was checking what patients and what cases we have. One of the first patients which he started doing something with, was a woman came on the transport, had a compound fracture of her tibia. The skin was broken, the bone was sticking out. It was a horror. They put some kind of a metal frame around it and she had to be operated on. So, he decided -- first of all, it was cool. He never would take off his coat. He did all his surgeries in his coat. He decided to set the leg. Well, he was not very successful. So, the pediatrician opened up her mouth and said, "Doctor, don't you think you should do this and that?" Well, that was the end of her. She was ugly as it is, he didn't like it with the scars and all on her face, but that put her in disfavor. We had two guys were watching, he tried to set the leg. He never did. The woman was crippled. She survived the war, I think, but she was in the hospital with us all the time.



Tape #3

- A: So, the first time he started setting that leg, it never took. Well, Schnabble was looking always for patients, what he could operate on. He was always checking what we have. At that time, our staff consisted of Lisa, who the director of the hospital. We had a scribe because they wanted reports. How many patients were admitted, what they were coming in for, what sicknesses we had and stuff like this. There must have been six or seven nurses, and then we had two orderly ladies. We even had like a little toilet in the back. Those two women had to take the stuff out, but we had like a little outhouse attached to the hospital. I don't remember what we had later, but that one I knew we had.
- Q: How many doctors were there?
- A: At that time, they took the Polish woman away, there was my friend Alena, Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ and Doctor Annie, the Russian woman, who didn't know much about medicine, but she was there.
- Q: How many of the nurses really had any medical training?
- A: Very few. What I had was like a practical nurse whatever I picked up, so did my girlfriend Alena. There were one or two, there was one Dutch, she came and there was another one, a Belgium that really had training or not, but we did what we could do. Let's put it this way. It was more than the other people could do. And then I had a little dental office. We had also all kinds of patients and they were there forever. Some of them died, some of them we let out. Basically, a lot of surgical things. I remember there was one young girl who claimed she could never get up and we tried to get her up, and we could never get her up. Sometimes we climbed up and to get her out of the bed to straighten out that mess, and never knew what was wrong with her. One day she just died, so evidently there was something wrong with her. There was another young girl she had a groin abscess which was draining for weeks and months. I mean the woman with the leg, I remember once I wanted to wash my famous dress, I mean we had nothing. So, if you wanted to wash a dress you borrowed something from a patient and wore that for a day and washed the dress and the patient was lying naked. Conditions were pretty horrid, but as I said, they were still feeding us. We got the bread in the morning, and we, the personnel didn't have to stay \_\_\_\_\_ and it was getting cold. We also had a young girl who was a mental patient, whether she was manic-depressant, I don't know. One day, Schnabble came in and decided to do some kind of a surgery, and we didn't have electricity so they brought carbide lights. She got frantic. Something was going on in the other room and the lights. This was a scene like \_\_\_\_\_. She went wild. We started chasing her. She was running and she was jumping over the patients. She was climbing the beds and they were the two, three story beds. And people, in that frenzy they are extremely strong, and they are extremely violent and they are very agile. Well, we finally got her and had some shots for her and put a straight jacket on her and got her some shots. She was petrified of Schnabble. One of the tents was still up and I spent with

her about two or three days in the tent. My mother was petrified that she's going to kill me, but she kept calm. I mean, you could talk to her a little bit, you couldn't get the story out of her. After that outburst, that place where we give her the injection, that festered and eventually she died. She had an infection. When we knew Schnabble was coming, we used to put the straight jacket on her, because she was so petrified. When he walked in, we all had to stand at attention. We couldn't move. The only person who ever moved was one of the little orderlies. She was a little woman, blonde nose, no teeth. She was a young woman, bow legged, and she wanted to show him that she was working, so she would sweep the floor, including his feet. It was a riot, and he used to say, "The only one who works here is this one, the little one. She's the only one who's working." As I said, she would sweep over his books, and he liked her. He never did anything in any way to stop her. Well, one of the first opportunities he had to send Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ out, they were sending out the transports. The transports, at that time, were going in and out, whether this was to a labor camp or something, so he sent her out, because he couldn't stand her, because she tried to correct him.

Q: Alena's mother?

A: Alena's mother. So, they went out. They did survive the war. I think they wound up in \_\_\_\_\_ and went back to Poland. Her mother died in Lodz or \_\_\_\_\_, and she survived and she was an artist, and she lived in Paris. I was in touch with her, and then she died of cancer. So, she was a young woman. But they survived the war. By that time, Mom had got some kind of ear infection, and I remember she was in such pain. She got some medication and she was cold. So, someone had a pair of prison underpants, stripes. I remember she put it on her head because this was the only warm thing she could put on her head. She was sitting in the bunk, lying on the bunk with the underpants on her head like a hat. At that time, somehow, Lisa, this was the administrator, and the other one that was the scribe, somehow they were trying to do a little \_\_\_\_\_, and get my mother out, because they needed a dentist and they were bringing this man dentist, he was Dutch, from another camp. I think at that time, Binko (ph) came around, I don't know what happened, but there was a lot of whispering going on and a lot of talking back and forth, but whether the German dentist --whatever happened, Mom got better and went back to practice.

Q: Tell me about Binko?

A: Well, she was a dentist.

Q: What was her full name?

A: Haddasa Binko (ph). She was a dentist. She came in couldn't find a job, was looking for a job. How she became the head doctor, don't ask me. She must have talked to the right people, Germans probably, and they appointed her the head doctor. That little barrack was getting too small for us so again they built another one. By that time we had a

separate room for the staff. I think we were doing the outpatient in the same room. I finally beg hospital beds a small little room which was my mother's office. In the back, at that time, they brought in a group of women from Slovakia. I don't know if they were Jewish or not, with children. They had little children with them, and they built like an annex to our hospital, at the end of our hospital they were getting more firewood to warm up the place. They were getting some special soups, and they had some little possessions with them. They had pillows, they had some tea. Every once in a while we could get when the transport came in, they would bring us a box of junk, medical supplies and all kinds of odds and ends. I was in charge of all the medical supplies. Whenever I got any vitamins I would take it to the children, because I felt that this was very important for the mothers, so I became very friendly with them. Anything with baby powder, whatever they found and the Germans wouldn't use I started packages and so on. A little cough medicine for children, pediatrics, so I would take it to those women. Later on they helped me. Anyway, it was getting cold, it was getting very, very nasty. The weather was getting nasty. One day a young woman came with pain -- and you see by that time we had a couple of other doctors, I think. We tried to avoid telling Schnabble what was wrong with the patient. We didn't have the means to diagnose. We had no blood tests. We had no x-rays, it was just feel and think.

Q: Were people coming in for all kinds of conditions?

A: Everything, and I can tell you, describe the conditions. There was one thing, dental condition, which I think it's called \_\_\_\_\_, where pieces of gums and lips would rot, decompose, and they would come in sometimes with a whole mouth missing, lips missing. I remember once three sisters came. One was completely gone. The other one had quite an advanced case. The third one had just started, and every once in a while we got vitamins. I mean we got all kinds of crazy things, which were odds and ends from various shipments, because the rest of the supplies -- oh yes, they used to give us once in a while paper bandages, and peroxide and some vitamins maybe and some aspirins. We did get some stuff, but it was little odds and ends like vitamin C. You had to use \_\_\_\_\_, the one who got the shot of vitamin C was the one who had the least advanced case of that cancer of the mouth, because we felt one or two shots may prevent that thing to spread further and maybe we could save. The oldest one, there was no way of saving. She was, for all practical -- maybe here in the United States with heavy doses of vitamins and heavy doses of medication, maybe one could save her, maybe, maybe not. But certainly you couldn't save her. This was what we had to do. There was another thing which later came up, much later. A patient would come in with a little blister and the blister would get bigger and bigger and bigger. Unless that blister was opened and drained very often half of the body was covered with the blister. What did this? I don't know, because I'll tell you later about the British doctors who were there and we used to tell them what to do with it, because they had no idea what to do with it.

Q: How did you figure it out?

A: We found that when they came with the blister and when we pierced the blister and drained it, and had some dressing we put it on, maybe some antiseptic powder, whatever we had we tried, somehow we could close the blister if it wasn't too advanced case of it.

Q: Did you have enough supplies?

A: No, I'll tell you about that later. Anyway, that one time this was one of the most horrid stories I ever saw. A young woman came in and the suspicion was that she had appendix inflamed. It just happened that Schnabble walked in and he heard what was going on. What do you have. See, we had to give them reports, and at one time this one medical guy used to stay the doctors have to stay at the stairs. When he comes in in the morning to pick up the reports, he doesn't want to get off the bicycle. You had to hand him that while he was on the run. He was awful, screaming, yelling. Anyway, Schnabble came in and found out that girl is complaining about appendix. He decided he is going to operate. Felt her around, I think he put rubber gloves on or whether his leather gloves, again, he wearing his coat. We set up the surgery in the dental office. He ordered his help, the Russian boys should bring some wood, so they brought some wood. It was raining. It was sleeting, so I started a fire in that little wooden stove. He assigned my mother to the anesthesia. She was his favorite anesthetist. The anesthesia consisted of a little mask, a little cage that goes and you drip ether drop by drop from the bottle. No other support, nothing. Annie was helping him, two guys were standing there, and I think he had one other girl, a nurse to assist, and I was the dirty nurse at that time. He opened her up, couldn't find her appendix. He saw something and he said, well, I don't know that looks suspicious, he was ready to cut this out. This was the bladder. It looks like a fish bladder. He poked around. He decided he can't find the appendix. He took all the intestines out. And the conditions are not sterile exactly. I mean the fire which was going there, it's full of soot and he can't find it. Put everything back together, took everything out again. He still can't find her appendix. At that time he barked to one of the guys, go bring Alenluf (ph). Alenluf was a Greek doctor, I don't know if he was the main compound or where he was, but he was in the men's camp, and I understand he was a very known surgeon. Well, a guy went on the bicycle and Doctor Alenluf was running after him. In the meantime, we kind of kept covered and kept the ether slow, not to have her in a deep sleep. I grab Alenluf's coat and put a pair of rubber gloves on him. That's what I manage because by now he's very impatient. Alenluf looked in and found the appendix which was not infected at all, and closed her up. She developed peritonitis. For three days that woman was in a coma screaming and he was coming in. He sent morphine. He sent painkillers. He also sent diet soup for her and white bread, but she couldn't eat anything. It lasted three days, and she died. But this was a horror. And you can't say anything, and he's pulling out all of her intestines out on the table and back into the cavity and back on the table and back in the cavity. It was a horror. And you have to stand there with a poker face and don't say a word, nothing. You can't react. And even this Doctor Alenluf, very gingerly worked and did whatever he had to do, and he didn't say you did wrong, nothing. He just did his job and that's it. This was one of the worst things which I witnessed. Now the funny thing happened with those slovak women. We had a bunch of

syringes and we had various -- like I said, you asked about supplies, we would write that we need so and so many bandages and so many aspirins, we need so much -- they would cut it down in half, but they would bring us stuff. And we had some pain killers and we had something if someone had an attack of something. We also had babies. There were babies born. We had one woman once who knocked on the door in the middle of the night and said she's in labor, and our administrator went over, Doctor Annie went over to the tower and said, look we have a woman in labor. None of us is a midwife. So, they came in. The two guys, and they went from barrack to barrack and they found a midwife and the baby was delivered. I think Schnabble showed up so he called him Joseph Von Jordan, because there was a ditch over there and he said this is River Jordan. And the following day he sent a few diapers and something, there were a few of them, but the baby eventually died because the conditions were so bad that those infants could not survive. But, they didn't take away the babies. They didn't kill the babies. They didn't do any harm to them.

Q: There were a number of babies in the camp?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they family camps?

A: That was later that we got into. At that time there were just a few newborn, we had a few of them and those slovak women who had their children with them. Anyway, one day I needed my syringes to be sterilized and walked through and the Slovaks had a fire going, and I said, "Would you let me do the syringes here?" She said, "Oh, you're so busy. Why don't you let me do it. I'll watch it for you, and I'll do it." I said "Fine." I came back. She burnt every one of them. Now, this could be considered sabotage. I mean you know you had to really be so careful because here you are burning eight syringes. I was beside myself. I was afraid that Schnabble would come in and want to do something, give them an injection, whatever if he said something we had to do it. Well, I didn't know what to do. Finally I got this guy Fisher on the side and he was from Northern Poland originally, and we were afraid to speak in front of him because we were afraid he understand Polish and I told him. I told him what happened. I said, look I was busy and I took it to them and they burned it and they didn't pay attention. He started bringing, the same day he came in the afternoon, he brought one syringe. Whether he stole them, how he got them within a week I had the whole set of syringes back and he never denounced me. He never said anything to Schnabble, nothing. So, even in those conditions there were people who were a little compassionate. By that time things were getting bad, more transports. I believe this was the time they brought the commandant from Auschwitz and he was cruel.

Q: What was his name?

A: I think Horss. And \_\_\_\_\_ that she's the head and she was blonde and some others. I mean this nasty crew from Auschwitz came.

Q: Do you know about what time, what year that was?

A: This was in '44, had to be around winter of '44, because it was getting cold when we lived in Auschwitz, when we had those surgeries. Also, when they were bringing the soups to the hospital, there were a bunch of wild women running around and trying to take the soups, the kettles, so we had to with sticks and stand guard, to escort the people who brought the soup, because they would just eat them and run with them. We needed them for the patients. The camp was getting bigger and bigger, and one day they said they were going to move all of our patients, and the whole camp first, on the other side of main street. This was originally a prisoner of war camp, and they had some permanent buildings which were hospital buildings, and they moved first the camp and then they moved the hospital. Our group was assigned to main building number one. It had an operating room. It had a dental office. It had some wards. We had like an outpatient room. So, the first order of business was that the operating room had white tile floors and walls. So, the first thing they did, they removed all the tiles, the ceramic tiles, because the commandant wanted that for his bathroom. I believe we had electricity. I can't even remember. They must have had electricity because my mother had this sterilizer that was an electric sterilizer or she had spirit or something to sterilize the instruments. The dental office was so beautifully equipped that when the Red Cross would come in an examine the camp, that's where they would take them, because there was all the equipment you wanted to have. No x-rays, but everything else. There was enough novocain that we were afraid if we used up the novocain, the war would never end. Then there must have been a room for the nurses, and then there was room where the doctors lived and Mom took me with her and I shared a bed with her because they wouldn't give me a bed. I was a nurse and they wouldn't give me a bed.

Q: So, all along you were living in the hospital?

A: Right, right. And that room was Doctor Annie and a couple of other doctors, Lisa was the administrator, Theresa who was the scribe, then they sent in another dentist, the Russian dentist, Larissa. One day, the commandant children governor who was a Seventh Day Adventist, was German, they were arrested. She came down with typhus. This was much later, so she was put in with the doctors in that room. That was his orders that she should be kept in that room. We had one surgical ward where people had all kinds of wounds, surgical wounds. Sometimes we had to cut something, and we were getting very little supplies, and I took it upon myself -- because I was working always with Doctor Annie in the outpatient clinic. I very seldom worked the wards. I did very well with the outpatients in whatever had to be done. Whenever we got supplies I used to go in to change the dressings and you almost needed a gas mask for it. This was stinky, festering thing and we didn't have enough bandages. We didn't get them enough. We couldn't change them every day. Maybe once a week, once in ten days they would bring us the supplies and there was some peroxide and maybe some ointment, maybe some powder to dust on the wounds, and I used to get so many blessings when I used to change the dressings. This

was the main hospital building. The next one was the nicest building. That's where the children were. By that time, they took away or send them out or whatever happened to the parents of the Dutch and Belgium children, so they formed an orphanage there, and the Slovak women lived there with their children, and then the few mothers as long as the babies were alive, they lived there. That's were Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ lived. That place was heated. They gave them some food. They were getting the white soup for the children. They were getting the white bread, and I have a feeling they must have inoculated the children for typhus, because I was not aware of many of them having typhus fever. I know they were inoculating people because at one time Binko and I and another nurse went to one of the subcamps or whatever and those people had passports from Argentina, from Brazil from Australia. Whether they were real passports, whether they were false passports, we don't know because many of them were Polish Jews. But we went out there when the epidemic started and we were inoculating the whole group there. Then there were two other barracks where one was not so bad and then there was one which was worse condition and then there was one number 5 where I think there were 500 people dead and 100 dead every day. They would bring the people -- they would just bring them in blankets and leave them there. I mean, people who were in the different barracks would just bring them in the blankets, and if there was any hope for them, they were separated and put somewhere else, but those were people like in a hospice, they were just dying there. I was very friendly with the head nurse and she had she used to say to me after I had typhus fever come and I'll give you some bread because they didn't eat. She would get and she had a count of 500 so she got 500 pieces of bread according to the count. She said, they're not eating, and you may as well have another piece of bread and get some strength.

Q: The dead people, they just dumped them outside?

A: That I'll tell you. When we first came in there was a little morgue not far from the hospital buildings. A little concrete structure. Well we started taking the people out. Everybody was taking them out. Well, after a while that place would not accommodate the bodies and they didn't have time to take them. It got to a point that it was like a tremendous field of dead bodies, and that's what the British finally saw. Families would walk by and look and who do I know there. If the blanket wasn't soiled, we would save the blankets for other people and if they were soiled we left them there. The pile was growing taller and bigger and bigger and taking more room and they had no -- they could not keep up with removing the bodies. Toward the end when there was this tremendous epidemic, they would give people extra soups, they were giving them all kinds of privileges. They would dig ditches and burn the bodies. They just could not keep up with it. When the British liberated the camp, the camp took the British General, whoever it was, showing the camp, and naturally they avoided that area. So, there was a bunch of noisy girls and he said, never mind, come here, come here. We didn't speak English, but they said you have to see this place. And the British were flabbergasted seeing that, and they made the German officers remove those bodies. They came so beautiful the first day. They came with their hair done, and their uniforms were so nice and clean and they had

to handle those bodies, and the deeper they were going, the more decomposed those bodies were. Believe me, at the end of the day, they looked as raggedy as most of the prisoners. This was horrid. Anyway, the camp was getting bigger. There were transports coming in every few days, and they needed help with the transports. When the transports came in, the able bodies would get a shower and they would place them in camp, but there were some sick people coming in and they were checking who was sick and who is not, so they would need a doctor to ascertain whether the person could be saved. A few were nurses, and I felt so badly, the girls were going out every night one I said, "I'm going. I have to help them. I just can't let them work both nights." So, we went out. By the time we got there, most of the able bodies they were processed. There was this big room with all kinds of bundles. They made the people leave the bundles and there were sick people. Some of them were lame, but we managed to undress them and put their clothes in those little fish net bags and once they went through the thing, the steam would kill the vermin, and they could go on the other side and find their own clothes. There was one woman who was in a coma, and the Germans kept saying, "Throwing her out. She's half dead, she's dead." I kept on shoving her around that place behind some things because I felt by the time I finished, maybe she'll revive. Whether she was in a diabetic coma, what, a fairly young woman well dressed, and every time they saw me, they said "Come on take her out. Let's take her out. Let the guys take her out." So, I was hiding her behind bundles, behind anything. Unfortunately the end of the evening we couldn't do anything but slap her face. I tried to give her some water. Whatever we tried to do it couldn't revive her, so they took her out. That transport was so full of lice. We got so bitten by lice.

Q: Where were most of these transports from?

A: They were from Hungary. I think Poland by that time was clean. They finished with those.

Q: They weren't necessarily coming from Auschwitz?

A: No, no those people were coming with their own clothes and whatever the camp wore. They were not from Auschwitz. They were not from camps. They were wherever they lived in. Anyway, then it was getting almost light and they said all right we're finished with you. We can take you back to the barracks. And we said, "You know, you bathed everybody, you deloused them, and here we are crawling with insects. We are bitten all over the place and why don't you let us have a shower and delouse us, our clothes, otherwise we'll bring the whole stuff back to camp." They said that's a good idea and they even stoked the fires and we had a nice warm shower.

Q: How often did you shower?

A: We never showered. The first time when they brought you to camp. This was the second one. Maybe once they took us out. I don't remember.



Q: So, you never washed?

A: Well, we washed. Maybe once they took us to shower, maybe when we're changing camps, I think they marched us. This was a pleasure, this shower, and they took our clothes and they deloused them. Three weeks later I came with the typhus fever. I came back and I said boy I was bitten and this one doctor was with me and three weeks later, as I said, to the day, I came down with it. At first they didn't know what was wrong with me. So, by this time we didn't have Schnabble. We had a young doctor who was wounded at the Russian front. His arm was injured and he was working in camp. They heard that I might have typhus fever, so he and the dentist came to examine me, because they have never seen typhus before, and they figure out that I have it. By that time, the doctors in the room that I slept with they decided they don't want anyone with the typhus fever, so they kicked me out on the ward. But I had my own bed, and I was lying next to a girl who used to be a patient of mine. She had t.b. but I tried to keep her on calcium. The theory was that calcium was good for t.b. and we had calcium, she would get it. Again, she was a young woman. You tried to help people who were not too far gone. We felt if we could help them, keep them going for a while, maybe they can keep on going. By that time, the epidemic started. The typhus epidemic. It was by the end of the war, this must have been February or March and by the end 90 percent of the people had typhus. My fever was building up about three weeks. It's like with pneumonia. It build up, if the patient can survive the crisis. Well, Mom would warm up water in the sterilizer and wash me and bring water and wet my lips. And those Slovak ladies made me a little pillow. I'll never forget it. This tiny little pillow. They collected some feathers because they thought I was so nice to them, and they brought me this. And I kept on saying "Get the train out of my head, get the train out of my head. I can't stand the train." And when they would bring the turnip soup into the room, it was wretched. I couldn't stand it. Finally one night, I must have reached the crisis, and called this woman next door and said "Get me my mother." So they woke up the night nurses, got my mother and she came running in and there was a doctor and again we had some supplies. We had something to support the heart, just a stimulator heart, and they gave me a shot of it, because I felt I don't know. I think I was dying. Then I got better. In the interim, I just want to bring out the difference between two doctors. I haven't seen those surgeries because I was so sick. This young German doctor performed some surgeries. Again, he wanted to learn. He did them in the operating room under sterile conditions and he always had this Greek doctor with him. Sometimes he would I mean people told me about it. Sometimes he would hesitate what to do and he would look at the Greek doctor and the Greek doctor would say, "Well, don't you think you should do this," but very diplomatically, and he never offered advice until the guy looked at him. He didn't know where he was going. So, they did perform some surgeries on those people.

Q: So there was actually a somewhat serious effort to cure people?

A: I don't know if it was serious to cure people of if this was a way for him to learn. I mean

they never had the chance to -- if he is a very known professor and he is a young doctor and maybe he should learn. And he and his pal, the dentist, used to sit in the dental office most of the day. He also had some massages done. First one masseuse and then the other friend of mine, the one who was the head of that very sick ward. She would come in because he needed physical therapy on his arm. The first time we had the inkling that things were going bad for Germans they were discussing it very quietly. The Russians are so and so many kilometers from Berlin and they were afraid of Russians. My mother overheard a conversation. Whether that was done to let us know, or they just forgot about her working because she ignored them, that's when we knew things were happening. By the time, close to the liberation, there was cholera there. There was a raging epidemic of typhus. There was all kinds of sickness and less supplies and less food. One day this other doctor, I think it was \_\_\_\_\_ called up over lined us up -- we didn't have water, I don't think we had bread. He said times are very bad but you cannot abuse your patients, you have to take care of them. He was trying to give us a pep talk how to take care of our patients. How ridiculous. One day one of the guards -- I somehow suspected whether they were experimenting with our lives. One day a young woman came in and she had a turban, a very tightly wrapped turban around her head and she said she's itching. We took off the turban, her head was so covered with lice, like you see, you have a big ant hill and you kick it apart and you see the ants coming out. I'm talking about big ant hills. I mean, you couldn't see the hair. So, we cut it and put some disinfectant. We had some anti-lice things, burned the hair outside, the whole thing, and I was wondering if by any chance if they did not decide that this is a fast way of doing it. Because they were all inoculated. The Germans were all inoculated. After the war, I think some of them got typhus, when they were handling the bodies, but they were very well isolated and inoculated. Whether they tried this, I don't know because I don't know how anyone could have lived with that mess, and the way the turban was wrapped around her head, it was a young woman. It was -- I've never seen anything like it. I'm telling you you see a ant hill, a big one, and this is what is creepy. So, as I said, toward the end, there were so many sick people. So many people dying, and you couldn't do a thing for them. Yes, there was an effort to save them, every once in a while they had the surgeons that wanted to do something, but I don't think this was so much an effort to save them. I have a feeling that this was an opportunity for the doctors to learn. Schnabble was just learning whatever he wanted to do. I don't know what happened to him. He disappeared.

Q: You mentioned a name "Kramer." Isn't Kramer someone who also came from Auschwitz and replaced Horss?

A: I don't know whether he replaced Horss. I don't know. I think Horss was caught in Bergen-Belsen. I really don't know.

Q: This Kramer then was head of the camp?

A: I know there was someone by the name of Kramer gave us a pep talk. I never seen Horss. I know of him, but I have never seen him.

Q: Before we get to the end, I just want to ask you a couple questions. It sounds like you had contact with people, prisoners from a lot of different surroundings, is that true?

A: Yes.

Q: Not so much from the other camps, but just with transports?

A: The transports were coming in and this woman became the main camp. They would break out the fences between some other camps and that became a huge, huge, huge camp.

Q: So, then a lot of the subcamps got combined?

A: Right. The Dutch and the Belgium camp, that was combined with ours. The Indonesia, no. What happened to the prisoner of wars or whatever, we took over those parts of the building, I don't know what happened to them. I know the Russians were there.

Q: When you were more integrated were the conditions and relationship also integrated or did certain people just stay with their own.

A: I think they stayed more or less within their own barracks. They had to stay \_\_\_\_\_ and they were allowed to come to the hospital, but otherwise, I don't think there were any social activities there at that time.

Q: Did you develop strong relationships with the other people you were working with?

A: Some of them, yes. And there were a lot of strong relationship in terms of there was one of the nurses and she was very friendly with a couple of girls. She lived --she didn't live with us. She lived with a couple of girls. One of them was the head, a block elder, and she lived with them. They were like sisters. That was the thing. People were developing relationships and if they were like sisters, they could help each other. Some of the doctors, there were two, one of them died, so we were friendly later on, my mother and I, and we have seen her after the war and were together in Sweden. We maintained contact with those people because we were together and there were a lot of relationships like this. People would adopt each other. Those were ones who had the easiest way of surviving, because when one was very sick, the other one helped them. We had friends, two sisters, one is now in Brazil, one lives in California, and they were together, and one of them I don't remember which one, she was so sick that the older sister would chew a piece of bread, because the bread was hard and she would chew a piece of bread and shove it in the sister's mouth to make her so she could swallow it, and that's how they made it. So, there were all kinds of pieces of kindness. And when I was so sick that that girl who I used to take care of before, she was the one who basically, because the nurses wouldn't do much for me. They were busy. But she was conscious, she was not very sick. That's

why they placed me there and she kept an eye on me. If I needed anything, the sicker I was getting, she would take a sip of water and put it in my lips or wet something and put it on my lips and she was in a way taking care of me. She didn't do physically anything, she was in bed, but she was kind of keeping an eye -- she was the one who alerted them that I was coming down with the crisis, so she did help me. Mom got typhus later. I mean all the doctors got sick. I mean everybody was sick. The sign was if you spilled your water like we had this French doctor, she had a bed above us, and the sign was that if you started taking water at night to bed and then spill it over head she had typhus. We knew that she had. There were certain symptoms. I could recognize someone with the typhus just looking at them. Later on, the British doctors, they had no idea what's wrong with a patient. I said the trembling, the lip trembling, people didn't even have the spots, there were certain symptoms you could just recognize they had typhus.

Q: Certainly you've read stories and heard stories in camps about people that the need for survival --

A: There was stories about it that there were. I never witnessed it but there were stories about cannibals.

Q: People would steal from each other?

A: Oh, yes. It was known. If someone was unconscious they put a piece of bread in front of them so they would steal it. This was, as I said, the will to survive. But it got so bad that they were walking to camp, they were walking to the hospital and they were just defecating.

Q: This was another interesting thing I read in your testimony. When I read about Bergen-Belsen I guess towards the end it sounded as if, not from your testimony, but from elsewhere, that nobody really took care of anybody?

A: Basically, no.

Q: The authorities of the camp really didn't make any provisions to feed, to clothe, to house?

A: Well, they were housed. There were barracks. Clothes, whatever they came with, and there were some people working. As I said, when the people came in with their own clothes, the good stuff was taken away. They had big warehouses when the war ended. The prisoners broke into those warehouses and everybody was carrying all kinds of clothing. One of the funniest thing this Russian dentist with his boyfriend and my mother didn't know what happened, she was just recuperating from typhus and this guy walked in in a top hat, tuxedo with tails and a white scarf around his neck. He was one of the Russians. They were the first ones to break into the warehouses and he thought he looked very snazzy in that outfit, this was after the war. But the war was a field of dead. There were people dying by the thousands every day and they would just dump them out and

there was no way no matter what the Germans tried to do to bury them, and they would bring crews to the prisoners. They fed them extra, they forced them to work. There was tasks that they could not keep up. I think there were two graves when they finally cleaned out the camp, one I don't know how many thousands of people buried in those graves, mass graves.

Q: What percentage of people do you think came through the hospital at one time or another? You were treating women, correct?

A: Yes. I don't know. I don't know. We had lines every day. As a matter of fact, after we were liberated they took everybody to Bergen, but in the meantime the British helped us clean up some of -- they whitewashed some of the buildings, and I stayed another month or so, maybe another few weeks. No, we liberated the 15th of April, the 8th of May I was still in the old place and they gave us new blankets and we were still admitting people and still taking care of it because the healthy ones they could process and take to Bergen, which was a military camp, and they placed them there. The sick ones, they had a whole procedure they had to -- and they were magnificent. They would take them in and they would bathe them on stretches and they would shower them and they cleaned their heads. And they were basically British soldiers and dress the wounds and place them in hospital barracks. This was a very slow process. In the meantime, people were coming in. They needed help now, and by that time we had some supplies. So, we were admitting some of them and we were treating some of them on an outpatient basis, but at least we had some bandages and supplies. We had some medications. If they had a headache, we could give them aspirin. I mean things like this, and they were still getting sick. They were still getting typhus. That thing was still raging, and the British soldiers were all inoculated and toward the end there was a rumor they were going to evacuate the camp, like they did in Auschwitz. There was a march. There was a group that went on trains, and I think the trains were bombed, and I think some of the Dutch Jews perished that way. Anyway, there was a rumor that the camp is mine and they are going to evacuate the camp and whoever can walk and the rest of the people will go, and the girls came over to me, the nurses that wanted to distribute some of the medicine what you have and the syringes and everything and they said, "Are you going to walk?" I said, "No, I'm not leaving Mom, and she can't walk. I'm staying no matter what happened." Well, that night we had bombs and they bombed this was Lindenberg, the Allies bombed a nearby town and a day or two later we saw all the Germans walking -- the British didn't come in yet, but they were walking with the white arm bands and for some reason I was sent out to either get the soup or get some supplies and I was passing the baths, the sauna and our favorite the guy, the pig, this German, he was burning paper in this sauna, in the furnace. They were very nice. They were still in charge, and they came in and they wore the arm bands, didn't discuss anything, but at the same time the day the British came in there was a cook, a German cook in one of the kitchens, and they were supposed to be working. He said, I have another few bullets and I'm going to shoot all the Jews. He killed a girl, wounded one, and the British were not in, the Germans were half way in and out. By that time we were guarded by Hungarians. The guards were all released, outside guards. And there

was a group of Hungarians and they were guarding the camp with the guns. This was a German, and they felt, they swore that they are going to get themselves some Jews. One of the girls was brought in. She walked out, she said, "We are free. We are liberated." Bang, and she was gone. What has happened, when the British came in the 15th of April the tank went through, waved the flag, everybody say hooray and they went out and we are still prisoners until they finally came in and started checking. Well, it was in the afternoon, they just went in until they could organize themselves. Then they discovered the bodies so they called all the officers and the soldiers and they had to remove the bodies. Some of the girls were nuts. They were distributing the food in metal cans and they were rusting. One of the girls saved the rations which was pretty awful and rotten and become spoiled and she wanted one of the Germans to eat it. And the Germans were guarded by the British because otherwise the mob would have torn them apart. There was a language problem, but this one somehow managed to convey to the British soldier that she doesn't want to do any harm. She just wants that German to eat that food, and he made him eat it. The funny thing is, I went once to see this removal of the bodies. It was a frantic scene. The girls were screaming and yelling and hollering and they wanted to pull on the Germans. I went once to see it, but I just couldn't do it. I also went out, I think one day after they liberated us and I went out -- the gates between the compounds were open. The main street was open. That's where you saw this unbelievable mob of people walking with all kinds of clothing because they broke into the depots and whatever they could wear, the funniest outfits and funny things, and people were milling, looking for friends and that's how I went to the men's place, the men's camp to look for people from my town and people who I knew, and I found this one boy who had a very bad eye infection and got him doctors and got him to a hospital. He lost his eye but he survived. He's alive. He lives in California.

Tape #4

Q: We started talking about liberation. I wondering if the Germans were sensing what was happening and if there treatment of you changed, if you could feel their fear?

A: Well, once the bombing took place nearby, a couple of days before the British came in, and that's where the German headquarters surrendered and therefore the Germans were wearing the white armbands. They were ready for take over and by that time, except the crazy shooters, the ones we were in contact with, they were okay. Even the one that was screaming, he was always quiet. I saw him burn the papers and I don't remember why I went out, either to pick up some supplies because we still could not walk between the compounds on the main street, but for some reason I was sent for something, I think we were sent to the kitchen for soups. By that time they were not delivering and that's why I went with a group of girls, and that's when I saw him burning those papers frantically. They were packing and he didn't even see us.

Q: They weren't trying to convince you how nice they were or anything like that?

A: No, I don't think so. I understand that the dentist somehow got some testimony of various prisoners. They never approached us. This was one person I would have given him a clean bill of health. He was arrested, but then he was released because he really didn't do anything ever.

Q: Do you remember how you felt when the British arrived?

A: Unbelievable feeling of relief. Just went out to see them and we all went out to see them. First the people came in and said the British tank went in. I think I've seen the British tank. They were shooting, so we were afraid to walk around. The Germans were still shooting and the Hungarians were still watching. You couldn't go outside of the camp and after they finally took all the guns from those Germans, then you went out. That's when I went to the main, on the main street and I saw this unbelievable motley crew of people. Some of them were still dying. Some of them were hardly moving. There were bodies around, but whoever could move, they were moving. They were walking, and they were smiling. And unfortunately, there were so many people who died still after the liberation. It was incredible.

Q: How did the British treat you?

A: The liberators treated us very nice. The first day they decided we are starving so they brought soup, and the soup was very rich, and we all ate the soup and all got deathly ill. Our bodies could not absorb this fat, so everybody got sick. We overate that soup. It was a thick, I remember, with a coat of fat on top. They were very anxious to help us. The British would as I aid the British soldiers as such they were beautiful towards the patients. The British officers they were just -- later on they were funny, we had to fight

them, but in the beginning they were just very compassionate it. Then they realized that the food they were giving us we can not take this very rich food, so they started giving us like a diet food for a while until we could adjust. They were giving us those little K rations. They were giving us cigarettes and chewing gum and some lemonade and some cookies and were giving some tins of those cookies. I decided to smoke a cigarette. Mom said, I don't want you to smoke until after the war. The war was still on, so the 8th of May and I was sitting and the cannons and you could hear the war was over and there were announcements and stuff like this. I took a package of those -- I had a whole bunch of those little player cigarettes and I was smoking one after another. She said, I told you not to smoke. She was so sick, she said I told you not to smoke. I said, "Mom, the war is over. I'm smoking." This was like an act of rebellion.

Q: How come you remained in the camp for a while after the British liberated you?

A: They needed some people to be still there because as I said, the transfer of the patients was such a slow one they needed us. It took them a while, maybe a week, ten days, two weeks. I don't know. And she was so sick, so I stayed. I couldn't move her. By the time we got to Bergen, they didn't have any more room, so there was this huge officers' casino and they converted this to a hospital. This was the end of everybody in Bergen. And they had this huge ballroom, it held about 170 beds. The place was gorgeous. It was a round building. They called it the round house. Out of the ballroom, there was a magnificent terrace. And Rhododendron blooming around, it was just gorgeous. There were a couple rooms where they had the casino, but they removed all the tables and they patients there. I think the paper I gave you was signed by this doctor who became the head of this thing. At that time our staff consisted of British doctors. They were volunteers, second or third year medical students.

Q: Your hospital was transferred to the town of Bergen?

A: Well, there were a lot of buildings to the hospital, but this was the very, very end of it, because they were transferring people all the time, but this was the very end. There must have been about 250, 300 patients at that time.

Q: Did they burn down or do anything with the old quarters?

A: I'll tell you that. So, we had rooms there. Mom started working a little bit there was a dental office there, but she had swollen legs. She was just working a few hours a day. They had the most beautifully equipped kitchen I have ever seen. I don't know if many fancy restaurants here have kitchens, fully electric, they could cook a few hundred eggs at the same time. They had frying pans they could turn upside down by touching a button. It was just unbelievable. There were naturally, a couple of elderly Germans running that kitchen for us. They claimed that they never knew anything about it. As I started telling you there was the British doctor who was the head. A few British nurses, we had British volunteer students at that time. A bunch of us, a few French nuns came from France and



they brought in a bunch of German nurses, and there was one ward with people with t.b., diarrhea, as sick as they come. The British assigned our girls to that room, and the room that had 170 beds they were basically convalescing, and they gave the German nurses this. And we went on strike. The rationale was that since some of the very sick people cannot don't know what's going on and the Germans may harm them and we will be much more compassionate to them. Our argument was that we all went through typhus. We are all very weak, and there's no reason for us to be exposed at this point to t.b. and diarrhea and we should be assigned the convalescent, which was a much lighter load and let the Germans work there. So, we went on strike. We had a translator girl who spoke English and finally got through his head that this was the right thing to do. But he was very much afraid what will happen. We said we will supervise. We'll check, and the nurses were busting because they were all registered nurses. We were all a motley crew. We didn't have uniforms, I mean, like a butcher's apron. We had nothing, and we were watching what they were doing. Another thing I was very happy to do, they would send the women from the town from Bergen to clean the hospital and we had this was the ballroom, it had a gorgeous parquet floor and we made them wash the floor twice a day. They would come in the morning to clean, and they would come in the afternoon to clean, and God forbid that they left a dry spot. Wash it, the German word was \_\_\_\_\_. I couldn't speak German very well, but this was a funny feeling, you know, I was in charge. So, little by little our big ward would empty because they were getting better and getting out. The British, I started telling you about the British soldiers even before when they had this blister disease. Once, I remember one of the young fellows came and he was getting ready, he found a patient with a blister thing and he was getting ready for a serious surgery. I took him on the side, I said you are the doctor, I'm not, but we have had such experience with it, you don't have to do serious surgery, just make sure you lance it and drain it and then if you have -- they didn't have antibiotics but I think sulfur or whatever they had, something to dress the wound and she'll be okay, because she didn't have tremendous blisters. He did it. They were still students. A lot of them got sick. They left and we had a group of Belgium medical students, volunteers and they were not treated by the British very well. They used to mooch the cigarettes from us because we used to have all the cigarettes from the British. We were getting those packets every day. Somehow they resented that. Those guys, I think they were older, and they were just very good, trying to help the people and take care of them. The British burned Bergen-Belsen as they emptied it. They left one building standing and I don't know when there was a ceremony and we were invited, taken in by trucks. I think there is a picture at the Holocaust Museum of that ceremony. This was when they raised the words of General Glen Hughes who was the Second British Army. He said that now they can raise the British flag because this awful place doesn't exist any more and the ceremony was that they threw flame throwers burned the last barrack. Whether the administration building still stands, I don't know, but this was the last thing and they raised the British flag over it because they never raise a British flag over a place as horrid as Bergen-Belsen.

Q: Did they burn it just for the horror of it, or did because they wanted to burn off the disease?

A: They wanted to burn off the disease. They were burning them as soon as they were empty. They were afraid. I mean the whole German population.

Q: So, your life started becoming a bit more normal?

A: Right. We were there until July and they had a movie and the survivors could go to the movies during the day. The British soldiers it was there for the British soldiers at night, but I was working during the day, so I was invited by the Belgs -- the Belgs could go at night, so they would invite me to go to the movies. I was a young girl.

Q: Do you remember what the first movie is you saw?

A: I think with Esther Williams. A funny thing happened. One day they said they are going to hand someone, some Nazi somewhere nearby. Let's go, let's go see it. So, I said to Mom, I'm going. Where are you going? I don't know, to Ludenberg. So one of the girls said oh we have a truck. There was one woman and three or four of us that went. There was no hanging. We couldn't get a way back. There was no way of getting back. Finally we found there was some camp under the Poles and four or five women invited us. They had some food. They gave us their beds and we stayed with them at night. They gave us food, and the following day we are trying to get in the worst way to go back to Bergen. We are standing on the corner and there is a mob of people looking for transport and we tried to get anything you can. At that time, there was \_\_\_\_\_ who became the head of Bergen. He married Ms. Bimko. He knew my mother. They used to play cards together, whatever. He knew her. There was another guy, a British officer, who used to hang around, used to play bridge with a bunch of people in our hospital and he heard that I disappeared, that I went somewhere and there was no way of calling. There was no way of doing something. And they had a vague idea of where I went with those women, but where did we go, Ludenberg. They were all very concerned and I'm standing on the corner with those few women who is passing by but this British officer. His name was Eric, on a motorcycle. I started hollering, Eric. He said you know the whole world is looking for you. I said, well, we can't get back. No one wants to take us back. We can't communicate. We can't go back. So, he stopped the truck, on after another finally found out where they are going whether they can take us back. He said they'll take us back. So, we get on the truck and there are some soldiers in the back and they are driving and driving and they take us somewhere else and we said "Where are you taking us?" As I said, we couldn't speak English. Finally they explained to us that at a certain time those soldiers have to be on the base otherwise they'll be AWOL, which I didn't know what the word means, but they explained that they had to be back. Once they will be taken back to their posts, then we'll be taken to Bergen. This was one of the high drinx after the war, what I did. Trying to be normal, being almost a normal teenager. I was 19, but still being a normal, all of a sudden an act of rebellion, get out do something adventurous, naughty.

Q: Free?

A: Free, that's exactly what it was.

Q: How did you get to Sweden? Why did you decided to go there?

A: Well, what has happened at that time, Swedish government invited "x" amount of people to go and they needed doctors and nurses and dentists to go along to take care of the patients, so we signed up. They took us to \_\_\_\_\_, and that was also funny. They had to clean us out, so they had two tents, one for the men and for one for the women and this friend of ours was a doctor got very friendly on the train going to \_\_\_\_\_ and he came through and he said, "You know, the women were washing me." And they made the German men, wash the women. They wanted to punish the Germans in a way, I don't know. They didn't try to punish us. We just decided the hell with it. They're not meant to us. I mean, this was the thing, don't get shocked. Don't get shocked, they're not men. They're Germans, they're not even human beings. Let them wash us and that's all, because they really had to scrub us and they took us on a boat at night. They gave us army coats and we sat on the deck at night, wool blankets or something else. It was very lovely. They fed us. They put us first in a place called \_\_\_\_\_. It was a school, and they kept us in quarantine. They boys were hanging through the windows looking for us, looking for girls, making dates the moment they let us out. There were all kinds of dates, and then they took us to another camp in \_\_\_\_\_. They started assigning people to work, so we were assigned to Northern Sweden. This is, you see, talking about groups against groups. Even in camps they were fighting. After the liberation, there were incidents between the Poles and the Jews. In Sweden, the camp that we were assigned to, my mother knew a man who really liked her and he said, oh I know a dentist, we need a dentist here and there were 200 Jews and 400 Poles in the camp. They requested Mom by name. We didn't want to go to Northern Sweden, but we had to go because they were requesting her not just a dentist, they wanted her. By that time, there was a nurse, so I was signed up as her assistant. We got there and the Jews were going. What has happened? They were fighting. There was such incidents, such fighting, such name calling, that they took the Jews out and took them to another camp. The Poles were so nasty and so anti-semitic. So even there, after that happened, they were charming to us, I mean I was a Miss, but the Jews could not live in that camp with the Poles. So, even then, and this is July August in '45, they still didn't have enough.

Q: You decided to go onto Sweden rather than go back to Poland?

A: We definitely didn't want to go to Poland. I had an aunt here who left Germany before the war. We wrote to her the first letter, turned out she got it. We gave it to some British soldier to send it out, but she couldn't write to us in Germany. The moment we got to Sweden, the first we went and put an application to the United States, so our order was very long. We registered before even contacting, establishing contact with the family, and I found a crazy thing happened. My mother had some cousins \_\_\_\_\_ and we

knew one of them in New York. They were in the advertising business. He came to Poland before the war, and we wrote a letter to David Glicksman in New York. Well, David Glicksman changed his name to David Gipson. His brothers didn't, but he changed it. He lived in Manhattan and there must have been some kind of a dead letter office in New York, and after the war they must have been opening those letters and tracing people down. The letter was written in German. He got the letter. My aunt lived in Washington. He called her up. A few days before I had an uncle, my mother had an brother in France who survived, and he contacted the family so we got established a contact and in a few days money was coming in and packages were coming in and telegrams were coming in and May 1946 we came here.

Q: Let me just ask you a few general questions. We just have a couple more minutes. It seems like your early days, your affluence, your family education, all of that really helped you survive the war years?

A: I think so. I think so. The fact that Mom was a dentist so she always either made money or later on we were in the position to be sheltered a little bit more. The fact that I worked with Grandfather during the years in Ghetto, I really was very good at outpatient. I wanted to be a surgeon. I was very interested in medicine, and I was good at it, but when I came here I found out that I had to go back to school for a couple of years and by that time, I didn't have the means to go to medical school, and I really didn't want to go to be a nurse.

Q: When things were really, really difficult during those years, and there was a lot of deprivation, what do you think sustained you?

A: I think the family unit. The fact that we had the grandparents. We had to take care of them. The first few years in Ghetto, we had to take care of the older people, no matter what. I mean we took care of my grandfather and he was such an unusual person. He was a felcher and then he was grown up and then he went to dental school and became a dentist. He was extremely educated, self, well read and self educated extremely wise man, very much a head of his time. He believed in all kinds of inventions. He believed in all modern gadgets. The first modern gadget came in, I think my grandmother had one of the first electrical irons. Things like this, he was very much. He said there are ships waiting in America. Any moment they'll liberate us. They'll come in with food. They'll invent a pill that you won't have to eat anything. You'll just be able to take a pill and it will keep you going for a day. Little did he realize the to eat was very pleasant.

Q: And the family unit sustained you because you lived with your mother?

A: I lived with my mother. As I said, when the times she was sick, I would take care of her, when I was sick, she would take care of me. We watched each other.

Q: Did that sort of help you not to feel so isolated from the world?

A: I think so. I had her. I was very close to her.

Q: When you think back, fifty years ago, your experiences, is there one haunting image? Is there something you think?

A: There is anger. I get angry. I watch something and I said how dare they do that to us. How dare they made us subhumans. I mean we're human beings and what audacity to treat us the way they treated us. What nerve they had to kill us. I mean it's such it doesn't mean if I meet a German I'm nasty to them, but I have a deep burning anger of why they did it. What human being has a right to do to other human beings. I mean we watch those things and we see those children. What right do people have to do it. But he was such a systematic deliberate and also the question of dehumanizing us. People say why did you subject yourself. They did it little by little. Layers, they took layers, they took our apartment, they took the house, they took the privileges. They kicked us out from the house. They put us in the Ghetto. From the good conditions we wound up poor and no way of taking a bath and no way to shower yourself, living in that one room and gradually worse and worse and worse. It wasn't like they took someone from a very fancy house and put them in camp. Those people didn't survive, for the most part. They broke down immediately. They did it deliberately and gradually. One step at a time, one humiliation. The fact when we got to Auschwitz and they undressed us and we had to march in front of men. And the women, there were religious women, elderly women, young girls, and I was a young girl. I never undressed myself in front of any one. Here I had to march naked in front of a bunch of men. This is all humiliation. This is all making people subhuman. This is slowly and slowly and slowly so you had no we didn't have the strength to fight them. There was no way of fighting them. I mean sure there was uprising in Warsaw Ghetto, but there was no movement in Lodz Ghetto like this and \_\_\_\_\_ saw to it. There was no such thing as revolution and I get angry. I get very angry. That's why I'm doing this, why I'm speaking to people. I want to leave the history. I want that to be part of my history.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say?

A: No, do you have any questions.

Q: There was no thought of resistance or rebellion at \_\_\_\_\_?

A: No. We were busy. We were busy and then the sickness. It was overwhelming, just like a flood. There was no dike, you could put your finger in and you couldn't do anything. You tried to do something, but there was nothing. We had no means to help the people. If they survived, they survived. If they didn't survive, you couldn't do anything. Some cousin, my mother's cousin I found in one of the barracks, tried to get her something. The fever took over, the typhus took over and she died. I mean, you were helpless.

Q: But you must have felt you helped people.

A: Oh, you tried. As I said the question was if someone wasn't very sick we could help them. If we had the means, if we had the dressing, we had the pill we could give it them, maybe they'll survive.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.