

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Zina Schulz Baum  
July 5, 1994  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Zina Schulz Baum, conducted by Randy Goldman on July 5, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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**ZINA SCHULZ BAUM**  
**July 5, 1994**

01:00:50

Q: Will you just begin please by telling me your name?

A: My name is Gardbein, Zina Gardbein. I was born in Poland – Maków<sup>1</sup> in 1928, May 1st.

Q: If you'll tell me a little bit about your life before the war?

A: Before the war? We had a very nice life. I was very young. My mother was very, very good person, my father too. He made a nice living. We weren't rich, but we weren't poor either. In Poland, if you had enough to eat, you were rich. So, we had enough food.

Q: What kind of work did he do?

A: My father had people working, making shoes. People worked for us. We had about five or six people working for us.

Q: Now, were you neighbors Jewish? Did you go to a Jewish school, a public school?

A: I went to a public school, but a public school in Poland were Jews separate and Poles separate.

Q: Even before the war?

A: Before the war. And they used to throw stones at us – and we were small kids – the Polish children.

Q: Was this all before the war?

A: All before the war, yes.

Q: So you were aware of a lot of antisemitism?

A: That's right. I knew it because they didn't like each other. They didn't like us, so we didn't like them. I think we could like everybody that likes us.

Q: Did you have friends or neighbors that were Gentile when you were young?

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<sup>1</sup> Maków Mazowiecki

A: Yes, yes we had. My father had people working for us and they were Gentiles, and we got along fantastically, but when the war started, they started robbing us. There were no friendships.

Q: So your neighbor or good friends changed on you?

A: They changed completely. They weren't the same.

Q: Do you remember how you all felt about this?

A: How I felt? Terrible. My father, they took him to the Polish Army. My mother was left with five children and we didn't have to eat much, and I remember a German man came to our house and he said in German "vielleicht meine Frau und Kinder, sie leiden auch,"<sup>2</sup> like their children suffered too. He told my mother you're so young and you're beautiful. Leave here, take your children and go, but my mother had a mother that she had red eyes and she was old and she wouldn't leave her mother. She had a sister one sister she was the most beautiful girl in the whole city but blonde hair. She was only 18 years old and one sister had two children and my mother wouldn't leave her sister. So, they didn't leave so she sent away her sister, the 18 year old with white blonde hair but me and my brother – my brother is in Israel now, he's younger, four years, than me and a sister two years younger – she sent us away to the Russian side, so the border we couldn't go through so at night we went through because it was already closed, the border. We had a very hard time getting through there. We came to Lomza. It was in Poland, a place where my mother left. She was wearing a green scarf and she was crying. I said, "Mommy don't cry. We're going to see each other. It's not going to take long." Who knew for the rest of my life I'd never see her again? We left and my aunt brought us there. She brought us to Lomza. My father wasn't there. My father was in the army and he came back home so I was praying that my mother's going to come. Then my father came alone and my aunt gave us away in an orphanage and she left to bring my mother, to bring the whole family here and she gave us to an orphanage, and I was crying every single day. Every single day, "Where's my mommy? I don't have my mommy. I want my mommy." I was young.

Q: How old were you?

A: I was at that time about ten years old and my brother was little. He was about four years younger than me and my sister was two years younger than me and we're all in an orphanage in Lomza and we were crying.

01:07:00

I was crying the most because when I was young I used to go up to mother like this holding her by her dress. I was very attached to my mother. So, what happened, my

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<sup>2</sup> "Maybe my wife and children are suffering, too" (German)

father came by himself, for my aunt was there and she never came back.

Q: Did you find out what happened?

A: She wanted to pass the border but they wouldn't let her, a few times. My father was afraid to leave us and I was crying so much when I saw just my father. I said, "No it can't be that my father came alone." My father a few times he went again to bring my mother but he couldn't pass the border. That, we were separated. We were separated and the war started again. We went from Lomza to Lakhva with my father.

Q: You never found out any more?

A: Yes, I found out. It was one man that my father thought – Zalewski<sup>3</sup> was his name – that he is the biggest antisemite, the other people, he thought they were nice. And he helped my mother. He helped the brother put her in a ghetto and they brought her food and they were helping her. It's the only person that we thought was the biggest antisemite – he was helping my mother. We went to Lakhva to a small town and I went to the Russian school there. I was very good in school, and my father was so proud of me. "The war is going to finish and we're going to see your mother and everybody is going to come together." My father wrote to Stalin a letter that he should let my mother come and if the war wouldn't have started my mother would have come with the children. All the family would come. But the war started and the Germans came, and we again are in trouble, run away from the Germans. So, when the Germans came it started being a lot of trouble.

Q: What year is this do you remember?

A: What year he Germans came? I think it's '41 or '42. I can't remember the dates, but I know when it started the ghetto, it was in September because the ghetto started and my father was – they made him in the committee, then we started listening and hearing. I wanted to run off from the ghetto. So we had people that were police in the ghetto – Jewish people, young guys. So I started running out of the ghetto to steal bread – because I was a tomboy – to bring some bread, not steal, bring some bread to the house. We should have something to eat. I just didn't eat by myself and I brought bread when I ran out of the ghetto. I gave to lots of people. I say, "If I'm going to be hungry and if I'm going to die, if they're going to die, if I'm going to live, I want them to live too. Why should I live and they should die?" So, I gave to everybody a piece to that, and a piece to that, and then one time I wanted to run out and a policeman – like a Jewish policeman, he was for us good and he wasn't for the Germans – he said, "You know somebody is going to catch you and they're going to kill you." One time it happened that before the ghetto start, a German man with a blind eye came and he said, "Does Jews live here?" and I said "no." And he went in and Jews were living there and he came out and he was beating me so much. He was beating me like he wanted to kill me. Then he was gone, so I run away

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<sup>3</sup> Stanislaw Zalewski

and I came to a neighbor of ours under the bed I was laying and when he came he said, "Where is the maid? Ich will sie totschiagen."<sup>4</sup> He would have killed me. Because for them to say a lie is the worst thing that you could do. That's before the ghetto started. I was so beaten I couldn't see. I couldn't walk for weeks. That much he beat me. And then I started with the ghetto.

Q: Let me just stop you for a second. I want to hear a little bit about how the ghetto came into being, I mean if you remember what life was like in Lakhva and how long you were there before you were confined.

A: In Lakhva, the people were very nice. They were very good. Like when we came the Russians were still there. So, the neighbors, they brought butter milk and that brought bread. That became, we were like strangers there, and everybody brought something else. Me, my father and my sister when we came, and my brother and my sister and my father. They were so friendly. It really was very, very nice. I had a friend. She's still in New York next door, like the next house, and we became very close friends.

Q: Were most of the people you associated with in Lakhva Jewish or everybody?

A: Mostly Jewish, in Belorus also, but the Belorus people weren't as bad as – they became bad when the Germans came, but they weren't as bad. Like my mother's sister had beautiful things. She was young. I gave it away to somebody and when I came back after the war she wouldn't give me nothing back. They were takers. They didn't like Jews. Nobody did.

01:14:00

Q: Did you go to school in Lakhva?

A: Yes. I went to the Russian school.

Q: How long were you in Lakhva before the ghetto was formed?

A: I can't remember. The ghetto was formed in 1942 probably.

Q: I can give you that date but I'm trying to figure out how long you were there. Was it weeks, was it months?

A: It was a few months, not too long, a few months, and then they started the ghetto.

Q: The ghetto I believe was formed in 1942?

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<sup>4</sup> "I want to kill her" (German)

A: I think it was 1942. I can't remember that, like my memory got completely – especially that time, I have no memory of that. I can't remember the dates at all.

Q: So, you were in Lakhva several months before the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto before the Germans came, several months, yes.

Q: Weren't the Germans there for a while before the ghetto?

A: Yes. The Germans came. I was in Lakhva maybe more than a year, maybe a year and half or two before – I think maybe a year and half. I can't remember how long when the Germans came. I don't even remember which year they came. I can't remember, but my memory slipped completely about that.

Q: So, when the Germans came to Lakhva, did they form the ghetto immediately?

A: Not long after, a few months.

Q: What was the ghetto like?

A: A few families were in one house, they lived in one house, like three or four families. We had like – we made, it wasn't beds, it was like they made they put like wood on the top and on the bottom something like that to sleep and there were a few families living together in the ghetto, and then we started hearing that they are going to kill the Jews. When they're going to kill the Jews then somebody came and they said to my father that, "I think it's going to happen in the next few days." So, when they started talking about burning everything, like all the things we have, we should burn. Nobody should have it. Not the Belorus, not the Germans, should get nothing that we have. We started putting gasoline when we knew that the next day we're going to get killed. So we saw everybody what they were standing. I went out, I remember, very early in the morning and I saw the Germans pulling up with guns, with all kinds of things, they were holding like this, you know, everything, and they were pointing at the ghetto. My father was running out of the house and I didn't know what he said. "You wait here. Don't go anyplace. We have to be together now." And they started burning. It wasn't just my father, it was lots of people. I really can't remember their names, but Lopatyn<sup>5</sup> was one of these. His name should be forgotten really. I remember even how he looked, and then there was other people too. They burned everything. They started burning and there was smoke, and I saw there was a bridge not far from us and I saw friends of mine sitting with the feet holding like this, and they were taking them to a cemetery to shoot them.

01:18:00

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<sup>5</sup> Dov Lopatyn (1900-1944), head of Lakhva Judenrat and former Zionist leader.

And my father said like that “let's run.” Before we were running, I was near water. The water was death, they called the water death like “smierc” in Polish. And I saw the Germans. They were fighting with the Jews with knives and with ax and there as one man a Rev-Zionist<sup>6</sup>, the same party as Begin, and he was holding an ax on a German over the head in the water, and the German killed him right away and they went to a doctor. And I saw this, and I was standing with my father and my brother and my sister with their hands like this. My father said, “Don't go away. We have to be with each other. Maybe we'll run away.” So, it was burning and here I saw something that I took so much revenge, I said to myself, “I'm going to die anyway in a few minutes. It's going to now.” You didn't think you're going to survive, you're going to live. Who's going to live? Nobody thought they were going to live, but at least before I die I'm going to have revenge, and I saw that Rochczyn<sup>7</sup> – a man, he was belonging to the party like Begin and he gave with the ax over the head. So, a man, a doctor was there. He was from Warsaw himself, he came like we came, in the wartime, running away from the Germans. So, they told him like that, “We're going to save all your family if you're going to save that German.” He says, “You could kill me too because I don't give a damn anymore because I'm not going save him – he could die.” But Rochczyn right away they shot him. He got killed in the water, but they were fighting with knives, with anything they had, they said, “We're not going to let ourselves just take to the death just like that.” They took only the weak.

Q: What did you do to get your revenge?

A: What I did? I was running with my father. We were running away because we saw people running, we run too. It was open, the ghetto, they opened the doors there. We started running, and there was gardens there, beautiful gardens that people made when I took up, I was my mouth was so wet like I thought I was going to die right away, so I got a pickle there, I bent down and I got a pickle, and all the four of us together, and I took that pickle in my mouth and I was holding for ten kilometers were running. It was a place – Prypec, they called. Then I found my friend there with a bullet in it and the blood was going. Fanny Eisen.

Q: Your friend from next door in the ghetto?

A: Yes, she's in New York now. I took off my shirt and I bandaged her. We didn't know what we were doing. We run again and we left her there, because there was lots of people there, lots of – we saw so many people there running away from the ghetto.

Q: Was she with her family also?

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<sup>6</sup> Union of Zionists Revisionists; militant political Zionists movement founded and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky.

<sup>7</sup> Itzak Rochczyn (1915-1942), Jewish resistance fighter.



A: She was running away by herself, but you know we didn't even know what we were doing because we were like crazy people. My father, we were running right, one after the other. My father said "come" and my sister got winded when we were running, and I thought she was running after us because there were woods and trees, and I thought she was running after me, and I looked in the back and I didn't see my sister anymore. I saw my brother and my father. I said "Where is my sister?" So, she was there, so I said to the people that were running with us –, a whole bunch of people, many people – I said, "If you're not going to go after my sister, I'm going to scream so loud that all the Germans are going to come and kill us too, because I don't want to leave her, I'm not going to see my sister." Everybody was running back because they were afraid that I'm going to scream, and I was a very tomboy. I used to bring food to the ghetto and I used to do such things that a child that age would never do, now especially. The kids, we had to be grown up before we grew up so we run back and we didn't find my sister anymore and I was crying for months. We run away, lying in the woods at night.

01:23:00

It was the time of the Jewish holidays and it was cold at night and I didn't have nothing, a little dress, and I threw away my shoes so I had bare feet. Everybody had nothing to wear and it was cold and we couldn't make a fire at night because the Germans would come and see us. So, quite a few people were running away from there. We run, we run, we didn't know where we were running. We went into a White-Russian house to take a piece of bread because we didn't have nothing to eat. I still had my pickle.

Q: You were living in the woods?

A: In the woods. All these years, till the war is finished, we were living in the woods.

Q: Can I go back a little bit. When the ghetto was formed, how long do you remember, not dates, but how long you were there until you burned the ghetto down and left? Do you have a sense, was it months?

A: Just a few months, not long.

Q: Did you have pretty much what you needed? Was there enough food?

A: There was nothing, there was nothing. It was just a piece of bread we got like a small piece of bread a day. No, people were hungry. That's why I ran out of the ghetto to bring something but they didn't let me after.

Q: Was it initially fairly easy for you to get out?

A: Well, I was little, so I just went out. I took out, we had to wear a star in the front and the back and I took off the star and I went out. I thought, "If I'm going to do that they're

going to kill me.” And I knew they would.

Q: Was there school? Were there any activities?

A: Nothing, no school nothing. No.

Q: Were people getting sick?

A: Yes, I had typhus. I got typhus and I told my father, “Papa you go because I'm not going to live anyway. So, at least you and my brother is going to be alive.” But he wouldn't leave me. But after, we got separated.

Q: Let me just before we get to that, now your father was on the Jewish council in the ghetto, is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember how that happened, what he did?

A: They were just having meetings and I think the meetings were discreet that they were afraid to talk about it, what they talked. That's why they burned. When he said, when they went to burn the ghettos, they said, “Wait, don't go nowhere.”

Q: How did your father get selected to be on the Jewish council?

A: I think because he was very smart, because he had a mouth to talk. I think he could have even been a president, but not in Poland he didn't have a chance to be anything.

Q: How many people were on the council? Was it men and women?

A: Men.

01:26:00

Q: How many?

A: I can't remember now. It was lots. I think five, six, seven people.

Q: Do you know if your dad had any special responsibilities or roles as a member of the council?

A: I don't think anybody – any – too many responsibilities. They only had the responsibility – like everybody used to get a piece of bread. They brought in bread to the ghetto like a piece, a few ounces of bread they should give everybody you know like they used to

come to bring the bread, to take the bread in the committee, like they had to give something like a few ounces of bread a day. That's all.

Q: So they were involved in distributing?

A: Something like that, yes.

Q: Was there a Jewish police group?

A: Yes, there was a Jewish police group, yes. They keep the ghetto, they keep the people that they shouldn't run out. They shouldn't do anything that they should get killed. They protected the people.

Q: So, the council and the police –

A: Worked together.

Q: They worked together and they had to answer to the Germans but –

A: They answered to the Germans that they kept that their people shouldn't get killed. That time I think they didn't know that they're going to take all the Jews and kill them. They thought it was going to be a ghetto and soon the war is going to stop. It's not going to be forever. Nobody knew it was going to be so many years.

Q: Do you think they followed all of the German orders or –

A: They followed the orders. If they followed the orders they wouldn't burn the ghetto. They would have gone like sheep and died but I don't think anybody of these people – these people were different kind of people. They heard lots of things and they say, “No, nobody is going to kill us like a sheep, we're not sheep, we're people we are human beings and we're not going to go just like that. Nobody is going to kill us, nobody is going to kill us without a fight. We're going to die anyway but at least we're going to have a fight. We're going to do something about it.”

Q: Were you aware of any political organizations, movements?

A: No, I was too young to be aware of these things.

Q: So, did people have weapons?

A: No, nothing. Only they took ax and knives. They didn't have anything. They didn't have no ammunition at all. If they would have ammunition it would be different. I think half of the Germans would be killed.

Q: Is that why they decided to burn the ghetto?

A: They decided to burn the ghetto for one reason. That they shouldn't see like it was such a smoke that you wouldn't see where a German is – where a Jew is. The Germans they didn't see the people, that's why we were able to run. That's the only reason we were able to tear up, it was like the ghetto was closed with wires, and we were able to open these wires. The first person that opened these wires, died, but then the people started running because it was opened. It was like a wire like you could hurt yourself. It wasn't like electric, but you could hurt yourself.

Q: Do you know how long people had thought about doing this?

A: I don't know how long they talked, but I know the last few days when they said they're going to kill the Jews that they were talking about it.

Q: You don't know if it had been planned for a while?

A: No, I don't think it was planned for a while. They didn't know, when they knew they were going to kill the Jews, they knew a day before, but the Germans thought the Jews were going to go. They couldn't know when they're going to get killed because they're going to kill them anyway like everybody is going to go like a sheep. Every place they went like sheep, so they're going to go here like sheep, too. But the only thing they didn't think was here that these people are different kind of people. These people will not go like sheep.

01:30:00

They won't let themselves get killed like that. They'll fight and they'll do everything they could to make them impossible to do something, to just take the people to the graves.

Q: Why do you think that your community acted so differently?

A: I don't – I think that there were many like a Rev-Zionist. They came from the party that was Begin's not like any other party. These people are very tough. These people wouldn't let themselves, like that Rochczyn. You know I still see him. He had glasses on. I see him how he looks. I'll never forget his face, that beautiful face that – he took an ax. He was taking an ax and giving the German over the head you can't imagine in that moment how as a child I felt that you don't just let yourself get killed, but you kill back. You do something about it. I felt that in a few minutes I'm going to fall down anyway.

01:32:00

They're going to shoot me, because they were shooting, but I didn't care if I'm going to die, because that time you don't care. You haven't got anything to think about that you're going to survive. Nobody does. You think well I'm going to die. At least I'm going to die

knowing that a German got killed even if it's one or two or three that somebody – that they just didn't go like sheeps.

Q: So this was a real spiritual turning point for you?

A: That was something that I felt so good inside even though I knew I'm not going to live. I didn't think that now I'm going to sit now and talk to somebody about it. That I'll be able to tell my story, never.

Q: When it was decided that you were going to burn the ghetto down, and – I don't know – who's idea this was?

A: It was a few people, and I think it has a lot to do with these Zionist people, a lot. These people were tough.

Q: So, there was a strong relationship between the Zionist movement and the council?

A: Oh yes, definitely, for sure.

Q: When it was decided to burn the ghetto down, did you know immediately what you were doing?

A: I think we knew. My father said, “Wait a minute, I need gasoline.” You know like naphtha – we didn't have electricity there like we had very little electricity, so they put the lamps with – just a little bit we had, but it was enough. The old ghetto was burned. There was nothing left of it. Nothing in one house, nothing, because I was there after the war. I came after the war there and there was nothing left at all. But you know, even after the war when we came I was proud to come there. I lived there over a year. They took away my father to the army. I met my father back when they took him away to the Russian army. I lived there for a year for sure and I gave him my brother to the orphanage because I didn't have any money and I went to the orphanage after the war. I took my brother and I went on the train and they told me “do you have a ticket?” I didn't have a piece a bread even to eat and I was very young. I said, “What kind of ticket. I went through a war, and I was sitting in the woods for so many years, do you think I have money to buy a ticket? You can kill me if you want, but I'm not going to give you nothing. I'm going to take my brother and go and if you want to take me off of that train, you'll have to kill me first.” So, they let me through. I took my brother to Pinsk after the war in an orphanage. I only wanted that they dress him up and I should be able to see him again from that orphanages, from the Russians and I'll bring him back home because he didn't have nothing to wear. He didn't have nothing to eat, so I brought him there.

Q: You were a brave little girl?

A: I had to be.

- Q: Let me ask you a bit about what happened when you were in the woods. We started to talk about that earlier. You were there for years. Who else was out there?
- A: There were Russian people there. There were lots of partisans around us. I was living there. I couldn't find my father, but I found him after.
- Q: Let's go back to where you lost your sister, did you ever find her again?
- A: No, after the war I found out that they killed her. They found her and they killed her, the Germans.
- Q: While you were running to the woods, okay. When you went to the woods, did you notice the local people on the way. Were they helpful?
- A: Everyone helped one another, especially the Jewish people.
- Q: What about the farmers or whoever lived along there?
- A: The farmers, if they would see us, they would give us to the Germans. We couldn't let nobody see us.
- Q: So the local people –?
- A: The place where we used to live, there were lots of partisans there, so you know the partisans did something. They took everybody from the house to the partisans, like every man that was let's say somebody had a son, somebody had a husband, so they couldn't go and squeal because they would squeal on their own. So, we were able to live around there to be hidden.
- Q: I'm a little confused. When you say the people where you used to live everybody was partisans, where are you talking about?
- A: When we lived in the woods, they went into these little towns, like in the country houses, and they took – the partisans took from each family a member, two members – like if somebody had two sons – to the partisans.
- Q: As hostages?
- A: Not hostages, they should fight for the Russians.
- Q: They were all willing to do that?
- A: Yes, they were willing to do that. Let's say the mother is not going to squeal, not going to

go to the Germans and say “my son is a partisan.” So, we were around these people, hidden around these people.

Q: So, the Russian partisans were able to pull a lot of the local communities in?

A: Oh, yes. They took a lot of communities in.

Q: Then they were loyal to you because their families were involved?

A: Yes. They used to hide us. They used to keep us. They were afraid like I was by a Ukrainian woman and she used to think of me like her child.

01:39:00

Q: So when you said earlier the local people would have shot you, not all of the local people?

A: No, not all, but these places where we were, these people wouldn't do it because of these men that they took away, they mobilized these people. They say, “you're going to come, you're going to fight for us.” The partisans were around all over. So, they couldn't do it, they wouldn't do it.

Q: Were there many partisan groups?

A: Around us? We saw many, but they saved a lot of Jews too.

Q: Did they all cooperate with each other?

A: Yes. They weren't bad people.

Q: So, there were many partisan groups that worked individually but supported each other?

A: Yes, in the woods. I think they saved so many Jewish people, so many people, like so many children. They did a lot of things for the Jews. They didn't care if you were a Jew or not. They didn't know the difference. They didn't know the difference even, what's a Jew and what's not a Jew. Like one child asked the father, “Am I a Jew too?” He was Jewish like he didn't know.

Q: Were there a lot of other kids there? Were there men, were there women, what was the age range?

A: There were lots of kids, lots.

Q: Who took care of you all?

A: We took care of ourselves.

Q: Were there women who started trying to take care of you because your mother wasn't there?

A: I met a Ukrainian women. She took care of me. Then when time passed by, like maybe two years I didn't see my father and my brother and we found him after.

01:40:00

Q: So, you all got separated?

A: We got separated, yes.

Q: How long were you in the woods before you got separated?

A: Maybe seven months something like that.

Q: Were you still with your friend?

A: I met my friend after. Somebody told me my friend is living not far from me and I went over. I walked with somebody, a man that he was a journalist before the war but he was in the partisans and I asked him, "please, could you take me?" He was a Jewish man. I said, "Could you take me to see, I think I heard that my friend is living in that place, so and so" – I don't remember the name of the place, but it wasn't far. We had to walk maybe an hour, hour and half. He said, "sure, come with me." I went there and the father was sitting there and he said "I'm going to take Feigele (ph). I found out she's alive and I'm going to bring her – she's with people. She's by people." So, I said, "could I come with you?" He says "sure." When I came over there she was full of lice, you know, and you know what we did, we took ashes. We didn't have any soap, and we take the ashes and we put in a piece of cloth by Christian people, like Russian people and we put some cloth and we had warm water, you didn't have water. You had to bring water from outside. We didn't have water in the house. We made her we put her in something to make her a box and took her out from these and then we went back with her and I took her out and I had lice all over my hands. We washed her once and another time with water and then the woman gave us something to dry her. These people didn't have anything to dry her and she got dressed up with something that she had. She didn't have nothing to wear. Then her father took her back and we were sleeping at night and she dreamed her grandmother said that Germans were running after us and they were going to kill us, and I had a dream too and I woke up and I was screaming. I says, "You know they're going to kill us again." The whole nights, all these years I have dreams. I always wake up with dreams that they they're going to kill my family. I have three children now, that they're going to kill my children and I'm going to be alone again. I'm going to have



nobody. So, that time, we both fell asleep and we dreamed that we're running and we're running and they're going to kill us. Somebody's going to kill us. They're running after us. She said, "I have such a dream that they're going to kill us again," and I said, "yes, I have the same dream." We woke up in a sweat. I stayed with her for a few days and I went back where I was, where that Ukrainian woman, she took care of me very much.

Q: Do you think when you look back on this that life was different for girls and for women than it was for the men and the boys?

01:45:00

A: I think so. A woman wasn't – I think by the Russians a woman was more than it was by the Poles or someplace else. But I think that it was a difference, like they thought a woman can do nothing, men could do more. Even no matter how aggressive you were and how much you were able to do so a woman is not much, she can do as much as a man.

Q: You were a tough kid. Did you feel that your responsibilities were the same as the boys your age or that you were treated differently?

A: I didn't think at that time how I was treated. I just felt "I'm going to survive and I'm going to look where my father is." I didn't think about anything. I didn't think how they're going to treat me how they treat me. I knew I had to survive and I'm going to do everything possible to do it.

Q: When you were with the partisans did everybody have certain responsibilities?

A: We had the responsibility to help in the garden. Like I was with the Ukrainian woman, we went – I wanted to milk the cows, I learned how to milk. I went to the fields with the potatoes. It wasn't like now they have tractors. I worked. I helped them. I loved to do it. I loved it.

Q: Were the boys working in the fields also?

A: Yes.

Q: Everybody?

A: Everybody.

Q: So everyone worked together?

A: Together, yes.

01:47:00

Q: Do you know if when they made certain decisions whether the women were included in making decisions or whether it was much the way –?

A: I think the men only, not the women. They told the women what to do. I don't think the women made any decisions all together.

Q: Women filled a very traditional role?

A: Yes. Even the Russians, they thought “A Jew can't even fight. He doesn't even know how to fight. How a Jew could fight.” But, the Jews – they gave them guns and they were fighting.

Q: So, even in the partisan groups, they were very good to the Jews but they wanted to make their own decisions and they didn't include the Jews in these?

A: No, they took the Jews to fight also, but they didn't – I don't think they thought a Jew could fight as much as a non-Jew. I don't believe that they thought that.

Q: So, from the way that these groups were organized, was most of the decision making done by the Soviets?

A: Yes, the Soviets, but I don't think they made a difference between a Jew and a non-Jew. The only thing they thought was that the people by themselves, not in the more like somebody was a lieutenant, or they run away from the army or something, they run away from the Germans, I don't think they thought about the Jew being different. I don't believe feeling even then by Ukrainian women that I was a Jew. She didn't think of me as a Jew. She thought of me as a little girl that's run away from a ghetto and she wants to survive and she wants to help me.

01:49:00

Q: I understand that, what I'm trying to figure out is initially when you joined these people, was there a structure in place where the non-Jews were making the decisions and they were basically hiding you and you were helping them but it was their movement, or was everybody –

A: No, I think the men made the decision mostly, the Soviet men.

Q: The Soviet men, or Soviet and Jewish men?

A: I think there were a lot of Jewish men that they made decisions too. They were lieutenants or like big shots. They made decisions too.

Q: Now, let me ask you a slightly different question. Were you – did you come from a religious family?

A: No, not a religious but non not religious either. We ate kosher in the house – like even now, I'm not going to eat pork. I can't even if I want to.

Q: So when you were in the woods, and you were in the woods for several years?

A: We had to eat whatever they had, but I never ate pork. If I knew in the woods that's Yom Kippur – one time a friend, he is now in Montreal but he went to Toronto to live – he passed by. When he told, “today is Yom Kippur,” he passed by like he didn't have nothing to wear and I saw him and I didn't even believe he's alive. And he passed by and he said to me, “today is Yom Kippur.” I didn't eat. I didn't want to eat anything even though we didn't have much to eat, we were hungry most of the time. We were in the water and that Ukrainian woman said to me that the Germans were on the top.

01:51:00

They were shooting. They surrounded us, the Germans, and we were lying in the water very deep like in the time that was in the woods already, and we're lying. She said to me, “Make with your feet like this because otherwise the feet will fall off. They came off,” she said, “make with your feet, just work with them, just like exercise with them, do something, because otherwise you're going to lose your feet.” Up there they were shooting us with airplanes and around they were shouting, the Germans were running. In the middle of that the partisans came and they started fighting with the Germans. You know they were going like, how could I say it in English – even if I'm so many years, since I was 18 years old in Canada – na shtyki<sup>8</sup>, they were going with big knives like this one on one. They didn't care. They said, “we're going to get killed, we're going to get killed,” and we were lying in the water and all of sudden from nowhere they came and they saved probably our lives at that time.

Q: Were there other holidays that you were aware of?

A: No. I didn't even know which day it was. We didn't have calendars, we didn't have nothing.

Q: So religion wasn't that important to you while you were hiding out?

A: It wasn't not important, I wasn't aware of anything. You don't think about anything. You only think that you have to survive and if you had a piece of bread or if you have something – you know what I was praying. I was sitting down and I was praying, “If I'm

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<sup>8</sup> with bayonets (Russian)

going to be able to live, and if I'm going to survive, am I going to have bread on the table as much as I want to eat. I should be able to eat enough. Is that going to happen? I want to be warm. I don't want to be cold anymore. I should be able to just be in a warm, lie down in a warm oven." Because they had ovens that they were baking and cooking there you know, "and I should like down there just to feel the warmth and just have bread. Am I ever going to have that? Is it ever going to happen to me?"

Q: You had no idea?

A: No.

Tape #2

02:01:00

- Q: I want to hear a little bit more about what your life was like when you were in the woods because now we think you were probably in the woods for three years, right?
- A: A few years, yes. About two years I think I ran away in '42, from '42 to '45. It was quite a few years, yes.
- Q: Was there a typical day?
- A: I think every day we were scared. Every day we were running someplace out. Everyday we were struggling to have something to eat because it was very bad with food. I was like a toothpick, you know. It was such hard times that it's very hard to describe times like that. We were from one place to another. Even that one I was running, if not that I knew that the partisans were around I wouldn't have survived, never. Sometimes they used to give us to eat, they used to give us to eat – but most of the time we sometimes we used to steal a piece of bread because we didn't have any, that woman even. Many times we went to her house when we knew the partisans were around, in the winter, in the house. We went to her garden. She was to me like a mother, couldn't be better.
- Q: When you were out picking vegetables or potatoes, whose garden was it?
- A: Sometimes their gardens.
- Q: Gardens?
- A: Sometimes we used to make a fire, a small fire in the daytime. At night we were afraid. We used to take and bake them inside, with the ashes and bake them and eat them. Sometimes we used to eat raw, especially at night we were afraid to make a fire so we were freezing.
- Q: Were these anybody's gardens?
- A: Everybody's. We used to pass by. Sometimes we used to steal a chicken, burn the feathers and make it. I can't even describe how the used to make it. That woman used to make it.
- Q: You were on the move all the time?
- A: All the time. Moved from one place. Not even three days in one place, sometimes we used to stay a few days in one place, make ourselves go and bring something. We would bring some bread from the partisans and bring some potatoes and bring something we ate,

and we stayed a few days and then we heard the Germans are coming and we run again. We run from one place to another. We never were in one place. We didn't stay too long in one place. We couldn't.

Q: Did you stay with one group of partisans?

A: No, we didn't stay with a group of partisans. We stayed with lots of people. We went from one group to another one.

Q: But they all treated you nice?

A: They treated me nice. They treated us good.

Q: How many were in your group running?

A: The only time I thought, "If I'm going to get killed there, it's not going to be as a Jew, it's going to be as a human being, as a person." I was with these people, and I met the partisans in the woods.

Q: Did that make you feel any better?

A: Yes, even if you get killed, at least you're not going to get killed because you're a Jew. For what? Because you're Jewish. Because you happen to be born a Jew. The only time that I can think of that.

02:05:30

Q: It made a lot more sense to you?

A: It made a lot more sense.

Q: Were you in constant fear?

A: Yes, all the time.

Q: Now, when you were running because you said you were moving quite a bit, how many people would normally be traveling with you?

A: There were lots of Jewish kids that ran away without their parents. They didn't have their parents. They didn't have their mothers, they didn't have the fathers. There were lots. There were about 20 people. Sometimes more, sometimes we met other people on the way. Everybody was in different groups, we met different kinds of groups of people in the woods living there like gypsies. The gypsies were living there. They taught me how to draw cards, how to – even though I never believed in it, because the gypsies were

running from the Germans too. They were living in the woods. And they were very nice, very, very nice people, but they were liars. You could never believe anything, but they were living in the woods.

02:07:00

Lots of times we were with gypsies. Sometimes for weeks. We used to make a tent, like a tent from wood and we used to sleep there. Like if you make from wood something you know like even if an airplane passes by they don't see it because it's only wood. So, we made like that. These people that were together that we met, every time we met somebody else we were never together with the same people. We always go that you're going to be here, I'm going to go someplace else because you are afraid you're going to stay in one place they're going to get to know that somebody is going to tell on you. But when I met my father it was different. At that time was like even before the liberation. I thought I was liberated already—

Q: I want to get to that, but let me ask you a few more questions about your life in the woods. There were some people who were always with you for long periods of time?

A: Yes, children mostly that run away from the home. Lots of kids after the war – I have one friend in Israel that she survived. She was there and another one was in New York, but she's in Israel too. She and her brother and her father were there too.

Q: Were these kids about your own age? Were there many adults taking care of you?

A: About my own age, yes. Sometimes without adults, they were by themselves. They went to the partisans to get some bread, to get something to eat. They used to give us to eat. They used to go to the partisans and they used to ask, because they weren't far away and we knew it, otherwise we wouldn't be able to survive. So, the only place we were able to get to eat, because if you went into a house, to have something to eat and you still some people used to tell they are going to tell on us. Even these people that they weren't – they didn't take these in the, in the partisans. You know, like depends on the district you were. Many district it took these people to the partisans. You know, like their sons and their – yeah?

Q: So you all stuck together, the kids?

A: Yes, but we weren't together at the same time, all the time. We went away and then we met again. We were going because we were afraid. I was especially afraid to stay in one place. I was mostly with that woman, that Ukrainian woman. Wherever she went I was going with her. She was afraid. Her sons were in the partisans and if they would catch her they would kill her.

Q: Did you get involved in any fighting? I know the Germans were trying to clear that area?

A: No. I was too young for these things.

Q: But you were very aware of fighting all around you?

A: Of course, all the time.

Q: Like what?

A: Like we passed by and we saw a church burning. The people, they put wood, they put nails with wood around and we passed by and we heard from fire – people are screaming from a big fire, and we couldn't even go near there. The Germans, they put nails in wood and they closed it up around and they burned these people, a full church of people. It wasn't a church, it was like a house because they didn't believe in churches. They didn't believe in God, the Russians. It used to be a church but then it was something else.

02:11:30

I don't know what. They passed by near there, not far. We were in the woods and there was a like one place in the middle of nowhere and they were burning. We heard them screaming.

Q: Do you have any other really outstanding memories of dodging the gunfire or trying to keep safe from the fighting?

A: Keep safe from the fighting, I don't know. So many memories I have but I don't know where to start. We were always running from something. We were always running from fighting.

Q: How did all of this end, and how did you find your father?

A: I was running in the woods, that was before liberation, maybe a few months. They were running, all of a sudden we come to a place, I see my father and my brother. My father was there working and you know he was repairing shoes for the partisans and that way he was survived and they were sending him to fight. He was fighting, with guns, they were going to little towns where the Germans were and they were fighting. That's why they were able to keep my brother in the partisans with my father. They were there. When I met him, everything changed. After that, liberation was maybe a few months after, was the liberation and I met my father. He survived with the partisans, really.

Q: So when you saw your father and your brother –

02:13:00



A: You can't imagine. I thought they died already, because when we run away from the house and I got typhus and I told my father, "Papa leave me because I'm not going to live, you see I'm so sick." So, my father says, "if I'm going to leave you what is my life going to be all about? I'm not going to be able to live." All of sudden we were separated. I don't even know how. I can't even explain to you how because when you run, everybody runs. You run and all of a sudden there's trees and woods and you don't see each other. You don't see where you go. You get separated. I was going with people. I was running. When you're running you don't look where you're going. I thought my father was after me, just like I thought my sister is behind me when I couldn't find her anymore. My sister, she died. They killed her after. And she said she would have been my sister was running with me, she said "Zina, look the blood on my face." That was only an ear that was wounded and then I run back and I never found her and I thought this happened to my father, the same thing.

Q: So when you saw your father and brother, it must have been like a miracle?

A: It was a miracle. It was such an emotion, I thought to myself, "My God, I'm not alone in this world. I have my father. I have my brother." You know I didn't see him after the war. I got married I was about 15-1/2 years old and I went to Canada and my father went to Israel. I saw him after 22 years, I didn't see my father and I came to see my father. I think he died from a broken heart. A year later I saw him for the first time. I wasn't able to afford, because my husband didn't make a lot of money. I married a man who was 16 years older than me. I didn't have such a great life, a very, very hard life. I went to Israel after 22 years being in Canada, I went to Israel to see my father and a year later he dies from a stroke because I think he lost a wife and three children and he loved my mother very much. He died from a broken heart. That's the only thing I could say, so you could imagine that after the war, after I met my father how it was such an emotion to me. I thought to myself, "I'm alone in the whole world and here I have somebody. I have a brother, I have my father." That was unbelievable. I can't even say what happened to me at that time. I felt I'm just like somebody else, too. A lot of kids run away. They had their father, they had a sister or a brother. Some were alone. They didn't have nobody.

Q: What happened to this Ukrainian woman?

A: I don't know. After I met my father, I left her in a very nice way. We were going away in another side my father was. I stayed with my father already. We said goodbye to each other crying and I never saw her again. I don't know what's happened to her, but I'm sure she survived. I know she had two sons in the Partisans and one died. One got killed. I remember their names and I remember how they looked even. She was really special. I don't know if not for her I would be able to survive. I wouldn't be able to live.

02:17:30

Q: What happened after you reunited with your father and brother?

A: After I was with them, I didn't leave them for a moment. I was afraid that if I'm going to leave them that they're going to disappear and something is going to happen to them. So, even when we're sleeping – we're sleeping one here and on the floor, in the woods, I was afraid I'm going to lose them. I'm not going to be able to find them anymore, so I was afraid to leave for a second. Wherever they were I think I was near. I was afraid to leave them. You know, I was very scared. I was a very scared child. You know that even after the war, and the war finished, we were in a camp with my husband, because I married young in Germany in Hess-Lichtenau<sup>9</sup>, and I went one time out and I saw a movie. It was my life exactly what I went through in the ghetto, in the woods, with everything. I fainted. I fell down on the floor and I fainted and you know for two years I was dizzy. I came to Canada and I was afraid to leave a door closed, because my door was closed I'd leave it open. I thought I was going to faint. I was afraid to be alone in the house. My door was open like anybody could have gone in, if it would be the violence like now, and kill me. I was afraid. I came to Canada with a little baby. I was about 18 years old and I came to Canada.

02:19:30

Q: I'm going to get to that but let me just go back. So, when you were with your father and brother, you stayed close to them and you were still out in the wood fighting for a while?

A: Yes, a little while. The liberation was maybe two weeks after, that's all, so we still had very bad time that time, like we were in the water again, for the second time we were leaving in the water. Under the water, the Germans were around on the airplanes on the top and they were shooting, and we were lying down in the water again, you know like I would have froze up my feet, my arms. Also, my father was talking like that woman. He said, "Do something, do something with your feet. Do something with your arms because they're going to fall off." About three days later, the liberation was after that, but that time I thought for sure now we're going to die because the airplanes were like this, over our heads and the Germans were all around. That time my father was involved with the partisans.

Q: You were hiding in the river?

A: In the water, it wasn't a river. It wasn't a river, it was like –it wasn't quick sand, but it looked like quick sand.

Q: Like a swamp?

A: Like a swamp, yes. It is very hard to describe that even. It's impossible, because nobody could understand it.

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<sup>9</sup> Hessisch-Lichtenau

Q: That you would be hiding in swamps?

A: Dirty, filthy, no food, nothing to eat for days. For days we didn't have a piece of bread. That was after I met my father already, but at least I knew we were together and if we're going to die, it's going to be all of us. At least we're going to be in one place.

Q: Can you describe liberation?

A: Yes, I could describe liberation because I couldn't believe it. They started screaming that, "you're liberated, you're liberated, we are liberated," you know, "the Russians are here, we are liberated," you know. I was screaming, I was yelling, I was jumping, you know, and I was holding my father and my brother like this, like all around and I said "My God, we are liberated. Can you believe that?" My father at that time was maybe 40 years old, 42 or something like that.

Q: You saw the Russian troops coming?

A: Yes, the Russians, they came with their music playing. The Russians always – even when we were in the woods we would hear the Russians. They would always say, "sing and dance because you never know tomorrow what's going to be." They are not afraid of anything.

02:23:00

They're not afraid of nothing, and I told a woman that I wanted to run. She said, "What are you afraid of something? So, if you're going to die, you die one time. You don't die twice." I said, "You know I'm afraid to be in one place all the time."

Q: You're used to running?

A: I'm used to running, that's right, run. I think I was tough – I don't think I'd be able to go through the same thing now. In the mind and I'm thinking now I wouldn't be able to survive, I don't think so.

Q: Well, you did what you had to do?

A: I was terrible.

Q: Did the Russians treat you well upon liberation?

A: Yes, very well, but after they took away my father into the army right away and left me and my brother alone. Like I told you before, they took him to the orphanage, without anything. Without any bread without anything. I didn't have nothing to eat after the war,

nothing.

Q: How long were you with your father and brother after liberation?

A: After liberation, maybe a few weeks. With my brother I was with him all the time, but I gave him to the orphanage because I wanted him to go to school. I wanted him to have something. And I went myself too to school after the war.

Q: Where were you?

A: Lakhva. I came to Lakhva.

Q: Where were you liberated?

A: I came to the Russian side.

Q: I'm sorry – where were you liberated?

A: I was liberated near Mazyr. It's a town near Russia there because we were running. We run away so far that we didn't know where we were running. So, we're liberated around there. Right away we came to that place. It's a big city and they took away my father to the army, and they took my brother and I went to Lakhva to the place – because I knew lots of Jews are there. When I came, I met lots of my friends, lots of people that I was in the woods together who were living in the same house. You see the house the Germans took away and then the Russian people moved in. So, they were Jewish houses, so we moved into the houses. They all lived there. Then I stared – when I was living there I thought to myself, “What am I going to do with my brother? He hasn't got a pair of shoes. He's got bare feet, with nothing on his feet. What am I going to do with him? How is he going to go to school?” At that time four years younger than me. I was about 14 years old, so he was about ten, so “what am I going to do with him?” I have to dress him up at least so I said to my brother, “you know what” – in Pinsk there was a big city, there is an orphanage there and somebody gave me the address. I said, “you know we'll go together. We'll go on the train.” He said to me, “How are you going to go on the train?” I said “You don't worry how I'm going to go. I'm going to go, don't worry.” So I told you when I went on the train, “you could kill me because I don't have a ticket.” So I went and got him into the orphanage. Then my father wrote me that he's coming back from the army. Then, you know what I did? I went and I stealed him from the orphanage. I told him I'm going for a walk with him. When I took him out and we went back on the train the same thing – I didn't have any money so I went without money like that. So, I was standing at that time, when they came to control the tickets, you know, the middle [indecipherable] there is a platform. I went to the platform with him and I stood there. When the ticket control passed by I went back to the train and that's the way I came back from Lakhva from Pinsk. It didn't take long. It took maybe an hour. But there an hour... And I brought him back, and we went to my father to Lodz, to Poland. Then I met my husband there.

Q: You met your first husband there?

A: My first husband, in Lodz.

Q: How long were you in Lodz?

A: Not long. I was in Lodz and then my husband says he wants to go to the German side, to Germany because from Germany we could go to Canada or Israel. We didn't think to go to Canada, but one time when I had my baby and we were standing for milk in a place and they said, "You register for Canada but you're not going to be able to go," they told my husband, "because you have a little baby and that baby's a few months old." And he said, "Let me register and maybe we'll see," because he was a tailor and they needed tailors. Then they called us to the UNRRA<sup>10</sup>. We came to Canada in 1948.

02:28:30

Q: Where did you leave your father and your brother? Where did you leave them behind?

A: In Lodz. My father went before to Germany. He left us behind when I got married because my father didn't want me to get married. My father said to me, "you're too young" and he said to me "you could be a lawyer." I said, "a woman a lawyer?" He said, "What's wrong with women?" You see my father was modern, even in these years. My father thought, "What's wrong with women? You're more smart than any man I know. Why can't you be a lawyer." He wanted me to go because I was very good in school. I went to school and I used to make two grades in one year. So, he told me I have to go to school to study and make something of myself. What I'm going to make I want it to be advocate. He said, "woman, a girl," he said "what's wrong with girls? There's nothing with girls. A girl could be a lawyer, too. They more smart than men are, some women." So, I didn't listen to him and I said, "Papa I'm going to go away if you're not going to let me get married." I fell in love with my husband. He was in a Polish uniform. It was after the army, and he was 16 years older than me, but I didn't know it at that time. If I knew I would get scared.

Q: He was in the Polish army?

A: After the war, he was in the Russian army and then he went into the Polish army.

Q: He was Jewish?

A: Yes.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

Q: So, you left your father and brother in Lodz?

A: No, my father went to Germany before. My father went to Germany and he said that, "You're going to come after." So, we went after. We didn't come to the same place. My father was in Ulm, and I was in Hess-Lichtenau, near Kassel.

Q: But you traveled from Lakhva to Lodz with your father?

A: No. I traveled – yes, from Lakhva to Lodz with my father and brother, yes. Then when we met we didn't separate anymore but then I separated when I got married and my father went before me to Germany and then we came to our organization, through a Zionist organization we came to Germany. He was like in the army, the Zionist organization from the army we came to Germany.

Q: Were you living freely all this time or did you ever live in a camp?

A: In a camp, I was in an UNRRA camp in Germany.

02:31:45

Q: For how long?

A: How long? Until I came to Canada. We came to Germany in 1947. We came to Canada in '48 so it was about a year and a half I think. I had my baby in '47, my son is born in 1947 in Germany.

Q: Until that you were living freely, until you got to Germany?

A: In the camp, yes.

Q: But in Poland you were not in a camp?

A: No, we were in a house living there. Also Jewish houses that the Jewish people used to live. I remember the address.

Q: After the war, your new husband was part of the Polish army?

A: They took him I don't know how it happened but they took him to the Polish army. He was in the Russian army and then they took him to the Polish army. I don't know how, because he was Russian at the time from the war. So, they took him in Russia to the army and then they took him to the Polish army.

Q: Was it at all difficult getting over to Canada?

A: It was difficult, yes. It was very difficult. We thought because with a baby we wouldn't be able to – they wouldn't let us come. My baby was very sick and we came to a place before, I forgot the name of the place in Germany before we came to Canada. We were living all people together in one place. The people that were supposed to go to Canada, and my son got sick and his stomach was loose all the time, all the time. One time I dreamt my husband's father, which I never knew in my life, when I described to my husband he told me that he looked like that, and I dreamed that he gave me a jar of fish and he told me, "Give that to your child a little bit. Then you're going to talk about me, so long live my child," because his name is after him, Jack, you know his name is Jack, Jankel in Jewish.

02:34:00

All of a sudden on the day after a doctor an American doctor came in. I couldn't speak English at all. So, I showed him that the diapers that he goes every minute, so he gave him medication and that doctor helped him. I thought the child was going to die, because he was screaming nights. Everybody was mad at me because the child was screaming, and I was so young at that time. So, he gave him a medication. After that dream, all of sudden the child got well and we came to Canada after that. We came to Canada in 1948, November the 16. I don't remember the liberation day, but I remember when I came to Canada.

Q: Was the adjustment in Canada at all difficult for you?

A: It was very difficult. It was difficult because we didn't have anything. We came and didn't even have a dollar in my pocket. I didn't know how it looked, a dollar. My father had family in the United States, in Troy, New York, so they sent us the first 50 dollars. I didn't even know how American money looked like. I didn't know what to do with that 50 dollars. Then my husband couldn't find a job, and when he found a job they paid him 35 dollars, and 35 dollars – 39 dollars a week and I had a room and I had to pay 35 dollars a month for the room. Then we got – my aunt came and they gave us 700 dollars so I paid key money, 700 dollars to move into an apartment in Montreal just for a broken stove and not a refrigerator, an icebox, and a little table and chairs, I paid 700 dollars key money. We could have bought a house at that time. The money that she gave me, I was happy to move into a house because we lived in a room, don't stay here and don't make electricity and you're burning too much that. Then she made me wash the walls – her walls, like I didn't understand. I thought that was the way it had to be. No matter how tough I was when I had to be, I was very different then.

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I let myself be used by a woman. They couldn't understand. What do I have to do for them. Let them do a little bit for me. We were very much used by these people.

Q: So, when you got to Canada people took advantage of you?

A: A lot of advantage. They took for a stove, for Jewish people, a broken stove with a little table, 700 dollars from us and we didn't have nothing. We came with nothing. Absolutely with nothing and we struggled. All our lives, it was very hard. He wasn't a business man, he was a tailor and he worked very hard for his money and it was a hard life. We had a very hard life.

Q: It must have gotten easier?

A: I think now it's easier a little bit, but we're getting older.

Q: Perhaps you felt that after everything you had been through, at least you were safe?

A: Yes, we live in a free country, and I don't think that born American people or born Canadian people they know what it means freedom. Freedom means all the money in the whole world can't buy that. Nothing. That's the most important thing. Not money, not anything but health and freedom. The only thing I felt, I'm free and I can do whatever I want to do, even if I don't have nothing but I have my freedom. I could go wherever what I want to go. I could do what I want to do and I appreciated it very much.

Q: All those years that you were hiding, fighting, running, did you ever want to just give up?

A: No, never.

Q: Why?

A: I felt I had to take revenge one day for everything that has happened, for all these people that I saw my friends that I loved them so much. I went to school with them together, get killed. I saw them shot, falling down on the floor, and it started in the ghetto. I saw them lying dead. I said no. I have to live and take revenge, and you know what, right now I don't feel like I want revenge. I just want one thing. I don't want this thing to happen again to our people, to any people. But I don't want revenge anymore. At that time, I just felt that I have to take revenge and I have to live just for that.

Q: When you were liberated did you still want revenge?

A: Yes, yes. I wanted to revenge, I wanted to revenge from these Polish people that took away everything from us that they were worse than the Germans. I wanted revenge. I think I lived for it, just to get revenge.

Q: Did you ever get revenge?

A: I don't think so. The only revenge I have that – I don't know. I don't think I had any. I felt



– after I didn't feel that. The only thing I had revenge is when I saw our country that we have a country. That we are people just like anybody else, and Israel was like in 1947, 1946, when I saw that we have a country I said, “Now I have everything that I ever fought for, that we're going to have a country. We're going to be able to be just like anybody else. Even to be respected in other countries, we need our country, and I love that country.” I think that was my revenge, that I knew we were fighting for something. Even I didn't fight for Israel I fought for something that I lived to see, and it's important to me. I think it should be important to all of us that country we have.

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It's the dearest thing that I feel we have, especially now that we're getting peace, and it's going to be peace there, I hope so.

Q: Was there some reason why you didn't immigrate to Israel instead of Canada?

A: I don't know. We wanted to go to Israel, but it came out like that, like we stayed in a place to get some milk for the baby and all of a sudden they arranged it for Canada. It just happened, it just happened but I really wanted to go to Israel. I didn't think of Canada at all.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add that you think we need to know that you need to remember that I haven't asked you about?

02:43:00

A: I don't know. If you ask me I can remember. I don't even know what I want to add because it's very hard for me.

Q: Let me just ask you, prior to the Germans entering Lakhva, did you all have any idea what was happening at all?

A: No, no we didn't. The religious Jews in Lakhva, the rabbis, they said that in Lakhva one rabbi died and he said there's not going to be any blood shedding in Lakhva, never. It's not going to be. We shouldn't fight with the Germans. We shouldn't fight and no matter what happens we have to stay put. But the Zionist people didn't think like that. They didn't believe in that, what the rabbi said. And they didn't listen to the rabbis. If they would have listened to the rabbis all these Lakhva people – a few people are alive. From the old ghetto there were a few thousand people that maybe a hundred people are alive, maybe. I'm not even sure of that, so it wouldn't even be these people alive, if they would have listened to the rabbis.

Q: Did the Zionists have more information?

A: No, they didn't have information, they had guts. They said, "If somebody fights me, I'm not going to put one cheek and let the other one. I'm not going to let it happen. We have to fight back." And they said it to the rabbis and the rabbis were screaming, "No, don't fight." So, they didn't listen. They just said that we have to fight.

Q: Did anybody know what was going on in Europe at the time?

A: Nobody, not the small people. Maybe the big people knew it, but not the small people, not the ordinary people. Nobody knew, nobody. They only knew these people when they fought back, they knew that, "If somebody gives me, if somebody is going to shoot me, I'm not going to let myself. It's not going to happen, because I'm going to fight back, even if I don't have ammunition, I'm going to take eggs, I'm going knives. I'm going to take everything I have with everything I could even I'm going to die just the same, but I'm not going to let myself get killed just like that without a fight."

02:46:00

Q: Why do you think so few communities fought back?

A: I don't know because there was nobody organized it. They had to have somebody organize these things. If they would have had somebody who organized these things, I think people were afraid and they didn't think. They just went like sheep.

Q: Do you think any of this could have been avoided?

A: It couldn't have been avoided, but they could have fought back. They could have prepared themselves if they would know it. I think people should have prepared themselves. Like I was little, and I was happy when I saw that mensch<sup>11</sup>. I was there, saw it, when they were giving the German with an ax. I felt so good inside and when they asked the doctor to help them. They're going to kill my brothers and my sisters and everybody and you're telling me you're going to keep my family safe if I'm going to save you? No, I'm not saving anybody. You could kill me too, so they shot the doctor too. It means that some people had guts. They didn't just want to give up. If they're going to throw away their lives at least they're going to do it for something. They're going to go with a reason, with a fight.

Q: It's just hard to understand why some communities were much, much stronger this way than others?

A: I think because they had somebody like Rochczyn there. If they would have more like these, like now in Israel. How has Israel survived? Because there were these people, they were there. That's why. These were part of these people. They learned to be like that.

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<sup>11</sup> person (Yiddish); a decent person, someone of noble character.

They learned not to give up without a fight and we never have to give up without a fight if we have to survive.

Q: So strong leadership?

A: That's right.

Q: Anything else when you look back at this time in your life. What do you think about?

A: When I look back, I wish I could have said to everybody in all these ghettos, "Don't let yourself just go like sheep to the grave. Fight back. Don't let yourself, don't go to the graves just like that. If you go to the grave let it be written – let it be said that you were fighting and you didn't give up, but you were fighting for something that you believed that, you have to fight, not to go like a sheep but to go like a person, like a human being, to fight back." I believe it now, too.

Q: Thank you.

A: I never give up even now, no matter how hard you know. We had hard times. Like now, I married my husband. He was very sick. He was twice in a hospital. He had surgery after I married him. He had a surgery by-pass and then five times since we live in a house now. One year he was five times with infections. He went through a lot, so I never gave up. I never said "he's going to die," and I was sitting and talking to him and I said, "You're not going to die. You'll see. You're going to pull through it because you have to. You have to. You have to." I was saying to myself, "No he's not going to die. It's not going to happen to him because we're going to fight and we're going to survive." It's just like anything else. I'm a fighter now too. I always believe when I go to sleep at night it's like a nice letter that's going to come. I live day by day like that like it's going to come a letter tomorrow, something good is going to happen. Like I'm waiting for the next day, every single day in my life I'm waiting for something good to happen. Even if it's not going to happen, I still believe that it will happen. I never believe that it's going to be an ordinary day. I believe that it's going to be the most beautiful day tomorrow.

Q: Is that the way you felt when you were in hiding?

A: I always felt like that. I think I was born like that.

Q: Just tell me briefly, how did you meet Joseph, your current husband?

A: I knew him a long time because – I met my current husband a long time ago but I didn't know him, but a few years ago, when he moved in with his wife – I used to live on the fourth floor and he moved into my apartment on the third floor. He moved in with his wife and his wife had Alzheimer. She was very sick. I saw them and I knew them and I said – I opened the door and I let him in – I said, "These are two old people I'm going to

let them in, let the door open. They're carrying parcels. They moved into that apartment.” Then I heard from far his wife said, “That's Zina.” I said, “That's Icek?” And I call him Icek, because his name is Icek and not Joseph. I said, “My God, he looks so old and that man is not so old.” He was about 63 years old at that time. I said, “My God, what has happened to them?” At that time, his sister in law came – and I used to go a few times to his house to have coffee there with his wife too. His wife didn't know nothing because she was very sick, Alzheimer. She was still a young woman because she died at 63 years old.

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So, I came up to the house and I was – I saw – when his wife died, his sister-in-law came and she stayed by me upstairs, instead of staying in a hotel, I gave her my apartment because my husband was dead already. She says, “You know what, you two are so good for each other, you're going to marry him.” And I didn't even think about it because first of all, his wife just died. I'm going to think that I'm going to marry him? I said, “You're crazy. Anja (ph), why are you talking like that?” That was Erwin's wife, and I knew Erwin since 1951, very well. I said, “You're crazy, don't talk like that.” But every single day that his wife died, I started asking him to go for a walk because he was very depressed and he was talking about his wife all the time and we were going and walking a lot, and talking. Then, I fell in love with him after, and the same thing happened to him I think. So, I never believed that in that age I'm going to fall in love with somebody, because I think I love him more than my life because after that he was so sick a few times he was in the hospital. Quite a few times, and I stood by him and I always gave him faith. When he was in the hospital with a by-pass and this is the second one, because 15 years ago he had one bypass and this was the second one. He thought he was not going to live because the doctor told him that that by-pass is not going to be able to make a by-pass. I told him, “Don't believe the doctor what he says. I heard many doctors. They talk to the patient and they die before the patient dies, so don't listen. You'll see that you're going to be alive and you're going to be able to have the operation.” A few days later he came and he says, “You know, what we're going to try to operate.” He was so happy, just like he was going to go to dance, and I said to him like that, “Before you go to the operation, have faith, believe that you're going to live and after you're going to see we're going to buy the most beautiful things for the house. You're going to sell all the old junks you have and we're going to buy the nicest things. You're going to see you're going to have the most beautiful life. Just believe it.” He was six weeks in the intensive care and I was sitting every single day and talking like that. “Just believe it, you'll see, you're going to have a good life.” Just like I thought in the time of the war. I didn't think I was going to live but I still didn't want to believe it because I think I'm a survivor.

Q: Thank you.

02:55:52