

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lillian Bielsky-Bell
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Lillian Bielsky-Bell, conducted on June 25, 1992 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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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LILLIAN BIELSKY-BELL

June 25, 1992

Beginning Tape One

Question: Wh-What is your full name?

Answer: My Jewish full name is Leah, Lee, they call me Lee. Lee Ticton Bielsky.

Q: And when and where were you born?

A: I was born in Bialystok, Poland, the 13 of January, 1923.

Q: And could you tell us a little bit about your childhood?

A: I was still age a year and a half, or two, I ri -- really don't remember that age, my parents lived in a little city in between Wilna on the Dutchna called Garadock. My father had his business there, and he was a very good situated man there, he made a very nice living. And we kids went to Hebrew school, and we had a life of luxury because my father wasn't a poor man, and he tried to give his kids, that's all what he had was me and my brother Meyer.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father had like collecting all kind of shmutas and transferring this to factories which it was made to paper. Was a educated man, good-hearted man, and a man that did not live for him - - for himself. I meet people today and they are telling me stories of my father that I never knew because I was too young to know him so well. When they were in need, when they couldn't return the money, if they borrowed, or what -- whoever had to get married, or whoever was poor and -- and they could not afford, my father was always with the wide smile and a -- and a open hand to help the people. And a lot of people were supported by him, by -- by [indecipherable] helping hand.

Q: What areas and villages did he work in?

A: He didn't. He had big storage rooms where people worked for him, they used to collect the shmutas from all around the villages, and once a week bring it to him. This was a Friday, when they were paid, and they had for Shabbas. So a whole week from Monday til Friday, those people were always, you know, out of the house from one village to the other village. They used to -- how should I tell you -- they used to let my father trade things. They traded soap, they traded some kitchen stuff, other stuff for the shmutas. The peasant needed this because he used to get a chit, he couldn't afford to buy this in the city, and they got, instead, the -- the -- the merchandise that was what my father used to supply them, that they bought from my father, he didn't supply them. But there always were more on the books. Oh, oh, oh, and they paid. But once a week that they used to come and he used to make with them, you know, a settlement, how much you owe me, how much I owe you. And this was the day, Friday, when he settled with them always.

Q: What was your home life and the role of your mother?

A: We were very, very -- that's all what we were is two kids. And they [indecipherable] over us, you know, the best clothes, the best toys. My father used to travel a lot so everything was bought from -- from the big cities like Warsaw, like ma -- like Bialystok, like Wilna. And all this -- the - - all the little town used to come ra -- to me, because I had toys that nobody else had. But there was never a [indecipherable]. My mother always used to say, come, come, doesn't matter that it's her toys, it -- right now it's yours, come and play with it. And you know, that they didn't know even that here are the people in the States, that you -- my mother used to refer to them, come in, you don't have to stay behind the window, come in. The -- nothing will happen to the doll, we won't be mad at you, go in and play with the doll. And up to date, I never knew -- I am not a type to -- to talk and to share my experience, and to -- to say who I was. Take me what I am

now. And I -- but there are people that tell my friends, oh my God, she never told you that? She never said nothing?

Q: Then what happened as you got a little older?

A: As I got older, my bigger brother, he was six years older, Henry Meyer, our whole family was in Bialystok and around Bialystok in the little towns. My grandfather, my grandmother, my aunts, my uncles. And he went there to high school, of course it was a Hebrew high school, my father was a Zionist. He liked very much Israel, and he liked his kids should know a perfect Hebrew. So he went to -- I went to a public school, a Hebrew school, which my teacher is still in Israel now. And -- and he went, finished it eight cla -- eight grades, and he went to Bialystok. My parents hand him to -- to the family, to stay with them. And I was still finishing up public school. The last year of his graduation from high school, I entered high school, to Bialystok, they send me. He finished and they send me. In the first half a year, when I came home for Hanukkah, for vacation -- and I will say we had the first phone in the whole little town. Had a phone in the -- my father's business, and we had a phone home. And -- I'm sorry, the druggist had a phone. And as I was sitting and doing my homework, I heard a call. I knew that you cannot get too many calls there. And they said, comes -- hurry, come with the doctor, your mother passed -- fainted. And my father was playing checkers my neighbor next door. So I call him. I still remember how I climbed the -- climbed the stairs. I got such a weakness in my -- being so young, in my knees, because the doctor was some very high steps. You had to climb the steps and I just couldn't get on the steps. So on four I climbed the step screaming, my mother -- I didn't say my mother fainted, I said, "My mother's dying, my mother's dying." It was too late. He came there, you know, it wasn't a long distance to -- to drive or to walk, is -- was -- it's -- everything was very close. But my mother fell off the chair and that was it. Never saw. In fact, when we brought her

home, she was so warm because she was fresh dressed. And my mother was a very elegant woman. With the lipstick on her lips, I never -- I didn't let her to put -- I -- I did not let to put her in the floor because I didn't believe that she is dead. And from there on my trouble started. My brother returned to finish his schooling, to get his m -- his -- what do you get, diploma?

Q: Degree.

A: His degree, and -- and I had to remain home. And that summer -- and my father, on top of everything got very sick. He didn't take any food, he was a heavy smoker. He was transferred to [indecipherable] to a place where they tried to feed him very often, and you know, things that had -- had a lot of calories like a lot of butter and just to -- his intestines were terrible, terrible. He was there seven months. So, in other words, besides the girl that worked for us and -- for so many years, I had no mother, I had no father. But my mother's brother stayed with us to watch me. And he took care of some of the business and then my father's brother used to come to take care on the business. And this -- there was no life already, this -- everything was, you know, went to pieces. And my har -- my father was there seven months until he returned home. And at the meantime, I went already to my aunt -- aunt's -- to his sister, to my father's sisters, to Bialystok, because I entered school bo -- baca -- my brother finished and I entered.

Q: So you were going to school during this time?

A: Right, and my bro --

Q: And what else did you do -- what else did you do during that time?

A: Nothing much, I had -- my family was very big in Bialystok, I had a lot of young cousins. You know, everybody -- when you get to be already beaten but [indecipherable] with no mother, with no father, father was sick, we didn't know what the -- tomorrow will bring. Ye --

Q: You were how -- you were how old at this time?

A: 13. 13. My mother died exact on my birth -- my 13th birthday. So I stayed a whole year there with my aunts. I was very thin, I was sick. I couldn't take any food, I was vomiting. My aunts had full hands with me. For the summertime, my brother came to take me, they didn't trust me to come home myself. So he took a sleeping train, I should be -- and I vomit a lot when I was traveling, so he was afraid to let me travel just like that. So he took me in the sleeping train, and we came home. Before we had to -- we didn't have a station. Like here, you come, you take a cab, you go to -- from the airport, straight. We had to travel from my town. We had a man that used to pick us up by wagon and horse. So he was waiting [indecipherable] about 30 kilometers - - 50 kilometers from -- from -- from my town. And he used to bring us home. He knew -- he worked for us f -- for my father for so many years. And this was star -- we are supposed to meet the man to take us home, my brother said, you know, "We'll make a stop here in --in this little town Moladetchna." Said, "What for?" "Oh, I want to introduce you to somebody." He was afraid to tell me because I wouldn't go home. He knew that I cannot have a su-substitute for my mother, he knew my attitude. So he was afraid that I won't come home for the summer. But so close to home, where will I go, I cannot go back already. So he decided that he'll tell me. My father, returning from his convalescent home, wherever he was, at the train he met a woman from Wilna which was a divorcee with a child -- with a son three years older than I. And my father was a ga -- a very good looking man, very handsome and with a lot of money, so what's bad about? She was a very smart cookie. She knew how to take him in, and [indecipherable] and -- and my brother knew about it, and to me they didn't say until I will meet her. Sure, in the first time she was very nice, tried to impress me. But I do -- didn't stay there more, I just couldn't picture somebody taking my mom's place. And we stayed there a day or two and we went home. And then slowly, slowly, she start to come visiting and I knew that it's something more than a

plain visit. You know, I wasn't really baby baby. And I saw my father's attitude, he was in ba -- he was in bad shape, he didn't -- he wanted to do so much for his kids. And in the same token, I guess he fell in love. Which I could swear, and anybody else that knew him, that this could never happen after -- because s-such a life that he had with my mother, you don't see, you don't hear. And that was -- and that was it. Then slowly, slowly, now this was '39 already, close to the 40's, the Russian come in. My father was already the -- they wanted him, they were watching him, he couldn't do this, he couldn't do this. Everything is capitalism, everything is richness, and -- and he -- he cannot have any [indecipherable]. E-Every day they found something else to a -- to blame him. And he's on --

Q: And you were a child, were -- were you aware of the --

A: Yeah, because I was -- I wasn't really a stupid child, I was -- I knew. And I went through right, a lo -- a lot, I went through a lot. And my mother was a extremely intelligent woman, so was my father. He put in too much effort in their kids. I don't know if shows today, but at that time it showed.

Q: Were you still going to school then?

A: Ah, sure -- no, that time it was a mishmash. There was no schooling, there were -- the Poland went out, the Russian, it didn't come in. There was a mishmash. As soon the Russian came and settled their government, I went back to school. And my father said he is not going to Siberia no matter what. If it won't be today, it's going to be tomorrow, but they are looking after him. And one night he picked up himself and he went, he said, you stay home, to my stepmother and her son, and I'll go. In meantime she brought already -- she had in Wilna a s -- two sisters and a mother, and she brought them in, you know, to our town, to be closer to her. Why not support the

whole family, only her? So they got to go our little town, and they got my -- my father got for them an apartment, not a big and luxurious apartment, but manageable.

Q: And the name of your town?

A: This was in Grudeck up -- but this wasn't in Grudeck, I -- I meant to say that this was in Lida, after we moved to Lida. And my father picked up himself and he went to look, if it wouldn't be Lida it would be a different town. But he had a few people that he knew in Lida, so he decided he'll go first there. Sure enough, he got, you know, in good times we would never pass that street. But he didn't want to be showing, he didn't want to be -- people should, you know, recognize him. He wanted to sit quiet, and have his meals and see what will -- will happen. And we left everything, and we moved to this town, to Lida with -- comparing our -- our conditions that we lived, with the help, and with the luxury and with -- with the -- with all kind of -- of what do you call this on the floor, the rugs, the Persian rugs, and all that going and it's such a mess, it's -- it was like th -- going in a stable. But we had no choice because my father wanted to hide.

Q: How did you get from one town to the other?

A: A wagon. Wagon [indecipherable] train, wagons. He hired somebody to transport us. [indecipherable] too many around we need to get our private belongings, we needed our clothes. We're storing about furniture here and there, you know. But [indecipherable] we left everything, not -- and we didn't take nothing. Our life went to pieces. It was nothing -- nothing left. But you know, when you are young, you don't think, it won't be today, it will be tomorrow and -- and -- and what's doing about Germans? Who was telling me again about the war. I went back to school. My older brother didn't -- couldn't stay home, he didn't like the way my stepmother handled me. He didn't like -- every day she found something that I'm not doing right. That I'm not -- I don't have the right friends -- I grew up with these friends. I went to school with them.

They -- it -- vera -- you know where you come, you are two years old, and you grow u -- and you are f -- the -- 14 - 15, how can you desert them? And that's one house next to the other, and that's not that you have to take the car and drive. So when you look through the window you always saw somebody walking by, passing by, knocking in your door, knocking in your window. So she didn't like this, she didn't like that.

Q: So you're [indecipherable]

A: And -- and I got to be a slave, you know, already, do this, do that. I never -- I never washed a -- a sock in my life. I didn't know I was -- I was so k -- they cared about so much I had to really -- was very, very spoiled. Very spoiled. Me and so my brother. When I was in Bialystok, Daddy used to come and open up accounts for me. Here, you should buy the fruit, here you should buy the chocolate, here sh -- you should buy the ice cream. So what did I do? Yeah, sure I did. But I didn't eat, I brought the whole class to the -- to the stores, and then when [indecipherable] used to come, take care of all that.

Q: Then what happened when things started to change in --

A: Then she brought the whole family to Lida to -- my stepmother brought her mother, she still had a mother, and two sisters. And my father took for them a small apartment. I wouldn't swear, I don't know, but I think he paid the rent, too, because they were all three women. And what did they do? They used to do some kind of alteration, o -- the two girls -- they weren't girls, they were people already in the 30's. One was younger, one was older, and th-they used to fix clothing, or sew something. They made here and -- here and there something, but not to support themselves. And my husband, should rest in peace, got to know one of the -- of my stepmother's sisters. I don't know where they ment -- wh-where they met. I think he went to some kind of a convention and she was there, too, I don't know, and they met. My husband lived in Lida when

he left Soubotnik, in my girlfriend's house. So when I used to come to my girlfriend, I knew my husband. I knew that they have a border.

Q: And your husband's name?

A: And my husband's name was Tuvya Bielsky. And as soon she found out, she called my step-aunt, that I know Tuvya, I got to be her messenger, bringing him notes, he used to send to me notes, but mostly she send me there. Where is he, if I saw him, if I went to see my girlfriend, if I met him. We used to take a big ladder to go and see, he was so handsome, he was so -- he was so good, he always t-took us to the movies, me and my girlfriend and maybe we want to do something, you know, when he had the time. So in order to see if we could something get from him, we used to take a big ladder, climb up and see if he's in the room, or he's sleeping, or he's eating, whatever. And that's how I knew the news, I could bring her the news. So --

Q: And then, as conditions started to change, what happened?

A: And then the conditions started to change when the Germans started to -- to a-approach us and the war started. That time --

Q: Wh-When was that, that time?

A: This was on the end of f -- four -- in '41 -- in the end of '40 or in the beginning of '41.

Q: Wintertime?

A: Wintertime.

Q: '40 -'41.

A: And we still lived in the same apartment, and in the beginning it was again the Russians started to leave and the Germans started to come in, and there was no government, there was no city, everything was burning, everything was in fire. We had to leave for a few days the city with my father and stepmother and my brother to some, you know, village, to survive, because we

didn't know how li -- badly that will burn, if it will reach us. Not that we have so much to lose already, but my father had his money. And -- and then I -- I'm trying to remember what happened. And then my husband was -- he's still in Lida, he saw the whole commotion. They got very close, they -- both my step-aunt and him got so like they would live together already. So he took her, he took bicycles for her and for him, and he ran -- as soon they saw that Lida is burning, they decided they'll go to -- his father had a mail [indecipherable] carriage [indecipherable] and he decided that sa -- there it will be the safest place for him. And that's how w -- what he did. Cause the first bomb that fell, fell where -- where he was the border. It killed my girlfriend and killed her father. And it was nothing, it was like wiped out. So then he grabbed her and he went to the village. His father [indecipherable] where he had a mill, and there was other twe -- he's one of 12 kids; 10 si -- 10 brothers and two sisters.

Q: And you went back to your house?

A: And I went back to my house because my father was young. When my father died, he was only 49 years old. So my father had the very strong mi -- he was very strong minded, and he didn't want to be exception. He said what will happen to everybody -- I don't know if it was wise, or not wise, but he did not feel like to be exception, like he could do it and nobody else can do it because he had a way of escaping. So after we stayed by the -- in the village, you know, we escaped for a few days and the major burning of the city stopped, we returned to our house. Sure, people took away things, sto -- the sto -- things were stolen, a -- a lot of mas -- mishmash. And this happened until -- yeah, I worked at the Germans, and right near me where lived, very -- you know, I am telling you, in good times we wouldn't even pass the street, not only live there. But there was big -- a building, a empty, big building, and as the Germans walked into this -- to the city, they occupied it and they made like a headquarters there and they hired young girls to work

for them, like to peel potatoes, like to clean, like to fix their socks if they are torn, to wash something small for them. They were very nice to us. Wi --

Q: What -- what did you do, specifically?

A: I peel potatoes, that was my -- my job. And at night, we used to gather in a friend's porch.

The [indecipherable] came too, you know, they always say -- came, and they sang song with us, and they were telling us story. And never came on that [indecipherable] even, that we are Jews, or they are -- they used to give us bread, sometimes butter, you know, it -- a payoff. They didn't pay us in money, you know, like a job, but this way -- but they never said, oh because you are a Jew, you have to work. That was it, some there, they felt very close to my girlfriend, some of them had the romances at that time. But it was a very short while until it got to our minds that that's not the reality. The [indecipherable] didn't come for it, they came to -- to -- to do something else with us.

Q: And then when did things start to change?

A: And then the things start to change when -- they didn't put us in a closed ghetto, but they assigned -- they divided the city in five boroughs, where the Jews -- where the Jews ha -- can -- they st -- gave us the star already, the yellow star, and they assigned us to five boroughs, and according wa -- who -- where it lived, you belonged to the special borough. Let's say if I lived on Zaracha, I belonged to Koshorova. There was all the camps, the big camps, the -- how shall I tell you [indecipherable]? That's where you stay mil -- mi -- the armies is stationed, what do you ca -- barracks?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Tremendous military barracks --

Q: Bases.

A: -- there was the Russi -- bases. There were Russian, there were Polish, and now the -- the German took this over. And just where they transferred us was across the barracks -- the bases, the military bases.

Q: So you had to move?

A: Absolutely. And you know how many people in one room? Ah three, four families in one room. So they moved us with a whole family, but who -- we rented the apartment, they were [indecipherable] five people, six people. Me and my -- we were four people and my stepmother's mother and sister, one, because the other one went with my husband. As of there -- my husband didn't like my stepmother's attitude, but she was a very clever woman, my stepmother. I give credit where credit is due, she was intelligent, and -- but by nature she was bad. You know, she had the terrible nature. And he could not -- he suffered a lot with me when he used to come to visit us and see her attitude, it bothered him. You could see on his face that it hurts him. And then he used maybe to tell his girlfriend, and she used to tell her sister, and it was even worst, because she used to tell her, stop that, you know, it's -- it's very -- people see, people pay attention to it, stop that, change a little bit your attitude. So she -- instead to get better, she always used to get worse after.

Q: What were the living conditions like?

A: Terrible. So many people in two rooms, and my stepbrother was very good friends with me and I think this was the main reason that she was afraid maybe someday he will marry me. He was about to finish engineering and he was hired by the Germans as -- in the electra -- in -- in the field of electricity, I don't know exactly what he did there. But in those bases, in military bases, he worked for them. And in the -- whoever worked for the military bases had a special shein. Shein is a permit that he works for the army and there's a lot of thing they were allowed to do,

like get more bread maybe, or get some other stuff. And I was a messenger for the Judenrat in my -- in my area.

Q: This is still 1941?

A: Right. Until in 1942, May eight, my husband's birthday, he closed up -- yeah, meantime I must -- I marked that -- not once my husband came, he was already there, he met already with his brothers, they had already conversations there, in -- at father's home and there was already relatives from Novagudek that escaped from the city because of the mess, but -- when they came to them -- but them -- and they had the meal and they had the chickens and they had the milk, and they had the -- all, you know, a supply -- mostly supply of food. So they were more safe than in the city. So a lot of relatives came to visit them and it was impossible already to live in the house, too.

Q: What kind of messages did you take, or who did you take them to?

A: Let's say -- I don't know how to explain. Judenr -- a Judenrat was like a --

Q: A council.

A: -- a council of the section where you lived. The Germans gave their messages to the juden -- to the major Judenrat and they used to divide them between the -- each section. In my section I was a messenger in Judenrat. So whatever they told me, go tell this one and this one that he is called to the Judenrat. There was no phones. Well, this one, this one, tell him that he has to be at this time there and there. Tell the policeman has to come and take him, you know? That -- that was the only way that we could communicate.

Q: And this continued until?

A: Then in -- yeah, my husband [indecipherable] few times to the si -- to the -- to Lida. Already 19th of June he had the Russian passport -- passport, and not passport but papers. He grew -- he

looked exactly like my son looking now, with the big moustache. His name was Belowsky and he had a friend, but you know, it was very, very dangerous because he knew a lot of people already and he was afraid that somebody will recognize him. And he tried to get through to us, and my father's accept to come to their village to enter the forest. And my father said nothing doing. It will be with everybody it will be with me. He made the effort maybe two or three times. He didn't help him, until the real section came up, and it was too late. On the shein, on the permit for my stepbrother that worked in the -- in the military barracks -- military bases, we could survive. In other words, the whole action was on our street. And they went from door to door, I'll never forget, May eight, it's unbelievable, it was snowing. And I went out, my father told me to get dressed, but I didn't have a chance because I thought maybe they'll leave out our house, maybe they won't come in to us. You didn't know what's going on, but they went house by house and -- and that morning my father got up and he says, "I had a dream." Said, what kind of a -- he says, "This situations is no good." I said, "Daddy, why didn't you go, you had a such [indecipherable]?" "I told you, he has his family there too, his relatives from Novagudek. Who will sleep in your woods, who can sleep? We're not animals." I said what's -- I'll answer you what you answered, what will be with everybody it will be with you. There is people too. Nothing to eat. Nothing doing, I'm not escaping, I'm not hiding my head. Fine. I was -- I was under his command. We were re -- we respected our parents very highly. So before he -- so he said he had a dream that I'll remain, but I'll be leaving the town, the -- that I'll -- I'll go through the section with not being hurt, they won't kill me. He doesn't know what will happen to him, but he knows that I'll remain. Then, leave the stories already for later, not for now. There's no time. And sure enough, on this w -- the Germans went in barefoot, in the snow in my nightgown they took me to the -- to this section. And it went -- my stepmother's mother and her sister, one

of her sisters, Fanny, and the guy sh -- did -- the German was standing and we didn't know left is to le -- to leave or right is to leave, but right by the older woman that was there, mother was already older. So he put his hand, you know, like cut. We four went to the left, they went to the right. Later on we found out that we remained and they went -- and they were killed. And this was pretty long, nobody knew when and what and how. This was pretty long until they send us the [indecipherable] ghetto, because they took out plenty of people there, and you could go -- they didn't assigned you, you have to go to this house, to this house. Whatever you grabbed, which house you grabbed when they brought you on their -- on their security, on German security to the ghetto, you knew already that you are lost, that you cannot go out from here, that the ghetto is already a closed one, that you have a curfew. And we went out to a house -- into a house.

Q: What happened to your father?

A: Father was with me. My father and me. My father died in the woods. He was killed in the woods.

Q: So you went to the ghetto.

A: And next day we had to go already to -- it was organized about the work. What shall I tell you, there was five, six families in that -- in a room. You practically slept to -- one on top of the other, such a narrow -- whatever you -- it was in the house cause those people, they took out from the houses. How many of them were dead, I don't know. I know that day it was killed five and a half thousand people in that -- in that day.

Q: What was your daily life like in the -- in the ghetto?

A: From the morning [indecipherable] we were -- had to get up in the morning and somebody was waiting outside for us in a certain -- in the beginning when Lida was ruined and the Germans

came, we were cleaning the -- the bricks, you know, that -- the houses that was ruined, to clean up the bricks and make the property, clean up the properties. It was not easy work. Sunday morning the Germans were playing with the -- with us a game, let the big dogs -- I worked just across the -- their -- their residence. They used to let the dogs down, make a game with us, and the dog used to tear you in pieces. And there were like wooden, you know, like trays that you put the bricks, and they told you not to [indecipherable] bricks, to slap -- they told you to put -- that you should really get a backache, or break your neck or break your head. So this -- two of you cou -- could only sneak in when they didn't look at you. That was my first job. And the worst thing was Sundays, when they used to eat their fat and nice breakfast, and then go for a walk, but their -- their dogs ate better than we ate [indecipherable] the whole time that they were there.

Q: Where did you get food from?

A: We used -- we -- we used to go to work, you know, it's [indecipherable] when you -- we knew some -- you gave away everything from yourself, the money and everything, th -- and the peasants that knew you used to sneak in, that you bought from them all of your life, eggs, or milk or this or that. They used to pity you in the beginning and they give you and then they made good business too. If you had money they sold to you, but not always you could buy. If a German used to catch you and he was in a bad mood, you didn't want to. So he was a --

Q: But you could not get -- you could not get outside the [indecipherable]

A: No, I'm talking about even before the ghetto got closed.

Q: Yeah, oh.

A: In the ghetto there was certain things that you could bring in, not too much, and listen, Jews are always very smart people, they always knew how to get along.

Q: Were there many young children your age there with --

A: Yeah, I have a lot of friend with -- we survived together, yeah, in that time after wa -- after the -- I mean, the action. Sure I lost quite a few friends, this -- this was -- and then in this ghetto my husband came one time. Said to my father, "You see, I told you what will happen. I warned you, I begged you. You didn't have to go through that. The woods are full of trees and the trees are covering us. Here, no matter how you walk out, they'll see you." And I was upset about it because the reason that I worked in gardens of one of the Polacks -- lot of people, you know, were used -- they -- they used to plant and we had to clean it and watch it and water it and there was big fields of -- of -- of gardens. In the fee -- and it was so hot in the summer, and the German was standing over you and you couldn't -- you know, you really couldn't not work, or play that you are sick, or you don't feel good. What -- what more you complain, the s -- more you got over your head. Somehow my stepmother was very good fren -- friends with the owner of this -- of this gardens that he was in charge of them. I don't know if it was his or if he was only in charge with the -- th-the Germans made him in charge of it. But he lived there, and as soon you know, they produced to make [indecipherable] tomorrow was a -- a section. To- Tomorrow it will be something happen. I pass by I heard somebody say tomorrow something will happen this guy, this guy. And that's how in the ghetto started to where the talking and what to -- what we will do, where will we hide, and what -- how and what. At night still were young, we used to -- too long we couldn't go, and too far we couldn't go, but next door we used to [indecipherable] and come to one backyard all together and sing fa -- Hebrew songs and -- and tell stories and what will happen, how come that we'll have a terrible youth. And you know, and go home, next day you had to go to work. So I remember one fact, that right after this action in ma -- in May eight, and they told us that the next day we have to go to work and we should all get together in this and this point. I had a watch. I wanted to check the time I shouldn't be too

late because I was afraid. You had so much fear in yourself, you weren't -- when he didn't mean to do nothing to you but to look. Not so much I -- even from the Germans, like from the Polacks that the pol -- the police that helped them out. And I -- I ask somebody what time is this, and a Polish guy came over to me and he said the time, and I said thank you, and we went into the house. Didn't take an hour, he comes in with a German. He says, "Where is the girl that asked me what time it is?" My father ra -- pushed me already away out to the room, complete to another room where other people were. And he showed him, he said this one, this one. He said no. I want to see the girl that asked me the time. So my father got very nervous and he started already, he said, "Kill me. What do you want to do to her? Kill her? Kill me, I'm old man." Four -- he was maybe 46 years there. Kill me. Said, "No, I'll tell you what, I won't do nothing to you. I'll -- I'll murder you, but after you give me your -- your dau -- what connection do you have?" He didn't want to tell him that I'm his daughter. Anyway, I saw it's -- it's very crucial, I came out. I came out and he said -- "I didn't do nothing," I said, "I just ask you what time because I wanted to be on time tomorrow morning." It was just a stupid game that he wanted to scare the whole house and he want to make a -- a game of it. Turned around, took away my watch and went out. What di -- what did I do? But just stupid game. You know, anything to show the authorities that they -- they-they are the big shots. And this wasn't the lesson for my father either, because that time I started to bother him [indecipherable] look, we went through, we could have waited. Tuvia asked us, he begged us, who else ha -- who else has in the whole ghetto such a privilege to go out of the ghetto one of the first ones because people would love it, but they didn't know how and what. What Daddy said, Daddy said. And after the action this was [indecipherable] I'll never forget. I came for my girlfriend, in fact, she was killed wi -- in the woods, from the white Polacks. Her sister and brother-in-law still in Israel, and the whole family

was saved by my husband. And we were sitting in their backyard, singing, you know, songs from -- from -- from I don't know, maybe 60 - 70 years ago they used to sing that in -- in the Jewish tradition. And I came home, and I said -- and I [indecipherable] crawl to my bed. It was very crowded to pass b-by to find your bed, you know, but was cold and chilly. So I took my girlfriend's jacket, I put the -- threw it on top of me. A blazer. Came home and I lay down in bed, took off the jacket, took off my clothes, lay down [indecipherable] ready to work.

[indecipherable] I wasn't working all right. [indecipherable] had, you know, we had -- didn't have any peace in the house, she always why didn't you do that. Why didn't you cook, why didn't you bring, why didn't you that? Til one day, I'm going -- I'll bad -- back to this story with ma -- with the jacket, because that was the night that we left the ghetto. But what I want to tell you from my stepmother and I said, in the beginning I didn't want to confess to. [indecipherable] I will tell it. Let it be on record, let people know that when you are making a hole for somebody, you are the first one to fall. She said to me -- I come to work in the fields and the one that I told you was in charge of me, says to me, "Today you'll work later." I said, "How can I work later, how can I get to the ghetto later? After six o'clock, if I'll be met by -- by the Germans and by the police, I'll be killed." We have no excuse, they kill you on the spot. That was a [indecipherable] and now order [indecipherable]. Said, "I don't know what to tell you but I need you for work." What can I do? Helpless. My stepmother sometimes didn't come home when she heard rumors that something's going to happen the ha -- ghetto, she used to hide herself there on the roof. He used to hide her. Her and another few. Came six o'clock he says to me, "Go home." I said, "You told me to stay. I have nothing to lose already, cause after six I won't go nowhere." He said, "Go, go with the group, return to the ghetto in time." Passed a few weeks, and he starts telling me a story, that my stepmother paid with the money from five ruble gold, of my father's money to

keep me later in order he should send me home and I should be killed by the Germans. So what for you needed the Germans that your own people could kill you. And I -- I kept it a secret for a long, long time. And he said to me, "You know, even not being Jewish, I had no conscious, because you were so innocent, I couldn't do it. I took the money from her, but was for money they were [indecipherable]. But I told her I'll do some other time, not today." And I kept it a secret for a long time, I didn't tell no one. First well I thought nobody will believe me. In this time of struggle for your life, of survival, you are able take my father's money and to kill me? I -

Q: [indecipherable] the story of the blazer, your friend --

A: Yes. That night with -- I came home with my friend's blazer. I don't recall actual night. And I went to sleep, and all of a sudden I hear somebody's touching me. I woke up, I thought my father maybe he's not feeling well. He says, "No, I'm fine." I decided to leave immediately, get dressed. If you -- my eyes [indecipherable] Daddy, takes time to get ready, Daddy, let me put on my shoes. I don't want to wait [indecipherable] can change my mind. Now, right now. And we were the first ones, me, my stepmother, my stepbrother and my father, to crawl out from the Glost ghetto. Where the police was, where -- where -- where the Germans was, were -- were standing and somehow, on our stomachs, under the -- what do you call this, the [indecipherable] this that the ghettos were assi --

Q: The walls?

A: Not walls, the metal, the metal, and th --

Q: Barbed wire?

A: The wiring. The electric wiring, because everything was -- was with electricity. And we passed under the wiring. And th --

Q: Who was leading you?

A: Nobody, but on the other side Tuvya Bielsky was waiting for us. And that's it. That's how we came to [indecipherable] to the -- to the forest. Then he met -- when he met us, he brought us to somebody that he knew for awhile, to rest up and a few hours later, these two brothers were waiting deeper in the woods for us, and then I came, and there were 17 people of the family and with us it was 21. And that's how it start.

Q: Was anybody else aware when you were leaving the house?

A: No. Nobody knew. We disappeared with no sound, with no nothing. Was very dangerous.

Q: What did you take with you?

A: Absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing, just to chan -- one change -- you couldn't -- how can you, you have to crawl, you have to run, you have to walk, you have to be in -- in -- you know, [indecipherable] for the rain. It's -- Europe is not -- Europe is not America or Florida. You know, you never know, there could be below zero, maybe 20 or 40 degree below zero. And that's how I survived til we left the woods in '44.

Q: Ho-How did your husband know that you were leaving at that time?

A: Oh, he -- he came to the ghetto just -- in the ghetto, in the Glost ghetto he came one time, and then he send somebody -- to the same peasant where we stopped, you know, for a rest, when he was waiting for us behind the ghetto, about two, three kilometers behind the ghetto he was waiting for us. And he took us to this peasant and this peasant came to my father to tell him. Because he used to come very often to bring us something, you know, like a piece of bread, or some milk, or some something. Some cheese. So he said Tuvya was here, he asked me to go and to tell you again and again. So I guess my father had some kind of a -- at wa -- sa -- was -- was talking to this man, but he didn't tell us, us he surprised. Maybe his wife knew, but us he

surprised. Me and my stepbrother were very much surprised. Later this same night we had to go out. And that's how it started. We --

Q: What -- what were you thoughts as a young -- as a young woman at that time, a young --

A: What I thought?

Q: -- what -- as you were escaping, do remember feeling?

A: I was escaping, I -- I don't know, I had -- I had the picture of my old -- that whole night was the fi -- picture in front of me from the bench, from where I put on my girlfriend's jacket. The whole young people there were sitting, and just like I left everything behind me. I wa -- I didn't have a feeling of sorry, but I -- I said to myself, why couldn't I share with them and tell them? First of all, I didn't know, because I didn't know until I didn't come home. And I didn't go into bed, my father came to me, because he was afraid maybe next bed, maybe I'll te-tell somebody something. You know? But I had a picture, oh they remained there, they'll have to go to work tomorrow. They'll have Sunday the same show with the dogs. They'll have this, they'll have that. I was too young to have special feelings. But I said oh, I'll miss that sitting in the backyard and not seeing my friends. I don't know where I'm going, I'm going to the wolves, I'm going to the bears, I'm going to the -- to the woods without nothing. It's very har -- it was very hard to turn into a animal, being a human being. In that time we were animals, but we were -- we had freedom. We could move. Not in daytime, but at night time. And that's how the leadership of my husband went. My husband was [indecipherable] then we were constantly together. He was with his girlfriend and I was with my family, but this was counted as we lived in one bunker, you know, we made one -- one place of -- of living together. And he saw that -- how much suffering I'm [indecipherable] how alone I am in this world. And he saw that my father wants to help me and he can, but he was -- he was threatened that she'll leave him [indecipherable] do that. So he -

- and so he tried, he tried to supply me boots, he tried to supply me warm clothes. He tried to always when he went out to bring something more for me. He told me always not to take so much to heart, things will change, everything will pass.

Q: Where was the first place that you stayed after you got out?

A: The first place was very close, I don't remember exactly, but it was very -- it wasn't organized. And that people were already -- the one, the family people that were there, they -- and the -- and the -- there were family people and there were neighbors next village from them, that they were relatives of m -- of my brother-in-law, that he got involved with one of their daughters, so he took out the parents, and he took out the sisters and the brothers. All together with us it was 21 people. But the other 17 people started already, especially the older people. What are you going to do, how will you feed them, at least we are 17 people, here four more mouths, four more this. But my husband always find a way. He always said to [indecipherable] "I'll find a way to -- to feed them, I'll find a way to supply them. Don't you worry about. It's more Jews, it's better." And slowly, slowly he started with his love and he wants to save Jews from the ghetto. He doesn't care how, he doesn't care what people will say, he doesn't care if they'll be satisfied with it. He must save Jews from -- and he was asked the question, what would you rather do? Kill 10 Germans or save one Jew? And very openly and with a lot of dignity he said, "Save one Jew."

Q: Well -- well I -- yeah, we're going to have to change the tape on that wonderful quote. We're going to change tapes.

A: Okay.

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

Q: All right, tell us again who made up the group, the first group, once you got out of the ghetto.

A: When I came to the woods, there was no group, there was a family, members of the family, there was -- all related to each other. And they were in -- hesitating if to accept new people.

Because like I had mentioned before, there was a question of supporting them, there was a question of feeding them, and this wasn't the easy thing, because they had nothing with -- a-and

they were empty handed. The whole luck of it was that they were raised -- the Bielskys were raised in villages, in hills, in woods, wi -- and trees were their friends. So they weren't afraid to

knock in a peasant's window. They weren't afraid if -- to knock in -- and they had s -- their

stories with the peasant. For instance my husband -- where they -- wher -- f-first of all where

they -- where they came during the day, they didn't sleep the night. Or they slept, they didn't --

they weren't during the day. They couldn't stay because they were afraid for their own shadow,

and we didn't have any trust. It's not [indecipherable] determines. That was, at that time we were

-- we organized, it was White Russia. So you had the wh -- white Polacks, the white Russian.

Then you had the Polacks that they wanted to be very friendly with the Germans and they helped

them a lot. So to give out a Jew, it was just a cinch. It was a -- a -- a big deal. And they were

know in there, in their facilities where they lived. But they had a -- their father had the -- a mill. I

personally did not know my in-laws. When I got to know them, they weren't alive already. Ah,

when I could get to know them, they weren't alive already. They were taken away to

[indecipherable] ghetto and were killed. So I knew only the one that they were in the ghettos --

they -- they were in the woods with us, I'm sorry. And for instance, my husband had a friend --

first of all, my husband was a military man. He was in the Polish army for two years and he was

a very good soldier and he had right away a [indecipherable] of certain things that he did better

than others. He was very good in languages. First of all, he was g -- he grew up between Gentiles. They had the business, they had mills. They had t-to -- to grind th-their grains, they had to -- to do a lot of things that they -- you know, there was very little Jewish temples, if they had to go to temple for a holiday, they had to walk about two, three kilometers. They didn't have this in their village. They were the only Jewish family in their village. But they had good things too done, and certain people that they want to remember, and th-the -- they pay -- they pay them a good price later on. Meaning what? Let's say there was a neighbor, my husband's friend that came to the mill for a certain thing. I don't remember what he came for but was -- I really -- I wasn't born there, I don't know the -- the -- all the obstacles there, but that's what I heard and read fa -- about my husband. So he came there, and there was a he -- they were not poor people either, the -- the neighbors, the -- the man that I'm telling you the story about. And there was a mill by [indecipherable] not far from each other, and there was a big river. This guy was 12 or 13 years old and he went to the river, he jumped, and he drowned. My husband was right near the river and he saw that. He jumped in his clothes and he saved him. His parents never could forget that. In the time of the war, when he find out that he is somewhere in the neighborhood, he paid him a visit. But he didn't know even which house is his. This was so many years ago.

Accidentally he knocked in the house of his parents, and he ask him about Andre. And his father says -- he recognized him immediately, he said, "You are -- God brought you here, you are my son's savior. You saved his life. He is not living with me, but right here and here he is living, go knock in his door, he'll be very happy to see you." And sure enough he did it, and as he knocked in the door, he said to him, "It's a very familiar voice, but I don't know the name, I don't remember you." He says, "Don't you remember how you drowned and I saved you?" "Oh my God," he said, "Bielsky, what are you doing? I thought you are long time not between the

living.” Took him in, he stationed him, he gave him to eat. There was days that th-they were hungry. They couldn’t find the -- a house to go in or they couldn’t, or there was Germans, or there were Poles, or they -- the owner didn’t let them in because he was afraid for him his ho -- his lo -- own life. But a lot of risked their own life. And he was very happy with him, and he said, “Look, I’m married, I have a family. Do me a favor, let me tell my wife that you are one from the Polacks that escaped from the army and you are trying to hide, and you are not Jewish.” At the moment my husband said to him, “Okay, tell her what you want.” But as the day passed and he rested up, and he came to his senses, he said, “Why should you lie to your wife? Did I lie to my conscious by saving you? I want to tell her the truth.” And sure enough, she reacted beautifully, according to the story from my husband. She said, “I don’t care who you are, you are a human being, and I’ll do anything and everything.” But for the neighbors she tried to play the same game. And at the same night, her sister-in-law came to visit them, she asks them -- they named him right away a different name, my husband, and she said, “Who is this guest in your house?” And she said her name was Mary, and she says, “Mary,” to her sister-in-law, “oh, we have a Polish guy that escaped from the army and he’s hiding.” “Oh,” she said, “you know what? I want them all in my house next week. I’ll make a little party and we’ll have a good time. Bring your guest along with you.” Course for some reason, I don’t know if they knew or they didn’t know, but they didn’t go. Husband and wife didn’t go, and my husband went to her, and he knocks in the door and walks in, and the table’s all set, and five heavy-set Germans are sitting and drinking and eating. She didn’t lose her head -- they ask right away who are you. She didn’t lose her head and she says to them, “Oh, that’s a friend. That’s my sister-in-law’s friend that he’s working for us, blah, blah, blah, whole story. They shook hands with him, he was shivering. He said that he da -- he was telling me always that he does not know how the table didn’t turn over

from his knees shaking. And he said -- and he drank, and he was afra -- afraid to drink too much, maybe he'll say something, you know, you are not responsible for after awhile. So he said, "You know what, I cannot leave -- I have to go to my work, I have to go to my job. I cannot stay too long." And they ask -- so he ask them, he wanted to know what's going on in the world. He said, "What's our situation by the way? How do we fight?" "Oh, we are so close to Moscow." We are so close to here, we are so close to there. It won't take no time and we'll be the winners of the world. Shook hands with them nicely, said goodnight and disappeared. He ran so fast -- it was a cold night -- he ran so fast that he thought in his mind it was a fantasy or a thought, I don't know how to describe that, that somebody's running. He's hurt, he didn't realize that ha -- he's hurt, he's speeding so fast that he thought that somebody's behind him running after him until he fell into the snow, to the deep snow. And in the deep snow, saw that it's very cold, he'll freeze to death, he'll remain here. He got up, he shlepped through to some other house where they let him in and -- and at that time it was empty -- still empty handed. But this guy, I think -- I think, I'm not sure, gave him the first gun, or the first rifle, or the si -- fi -- or showed him a place where he could get. But this was the first guy that filled his hands up that he should -- shouldn't be empty handed.

Q: Let's return back to your ex -- you got into the woods, and how big was the group of people there?

A: 17, with us 21.

Q: Okay, and then what happened?

A: And then a short while after that my husband is -- said to the whole group that not to worry, the wa -- like this we won't survive, because small groups will have no chance. We have to try to bring people from -- from the ghettos. And he wrote a letter to his cousin, it was still in a -- in

[indecipherable] in Novagudek ghetto and he told him, organize as much as you can, because they had another pes -- farmer that spoke beautiful Jewish, you would never sa -- say that he's a Gentile. And his son was in Novagudek in -- in the police station, a big -- a bigshot. But he was - - who know -- I don't know, or they paid him or they made money or he was a friend. I don't know how -- how to -- to calculate that. But he had the whole information from the [indecipherable] ghetto and he was the one to send constantly with messages to the ghetto and get to the people and give them the letters. The first letter he sent to his cousin, a Bielsky, too. His name was Yehuda Bielsky. And he wrote him, for your sake, "For my sake, for the sake for the Jewish nation, please organize and get out of the ghetto. We had -- the roots are wide, the forests are deep. We'll survive, if not all of us, some of us. In ghetto you have no chance." With this message, after awhile, came seven young boys. And one of them I want to tell you should have died [indecipherable] mentioned it. And they sat down, seven boys and I think -- and I'm very sure that I don't remember exactly if two wives came with them, or they came a short time after that. And they came to the woods. And then, in between them, they made a meeting and they said, "Tuvya, you are the oldest from all of us," -- he was at that time in the early 30's, "and you had military experience, you were in the army, you know what discipline is. We want you to lead the group." So he answered them, "If you listen to me, and you'll obey my orders, I'll do it. If not, take somebody else." So in one voice, they all said, "We'll agree, we'll do whatever you say." When he was in the army he had a very -- first of all, before the army, when he was a young guy yet, he was always interested in Zionism. He wanted very much to go to Israel and to work for kibbutz. But his parents -- one brother was already in the States and he -- his -- the condition, the family conditions were so poor that he had no conscious to leave, a -- mommy say -- and -- and his mother said to him, you want to go to Israel, fine, take your brothers and sisters

and go because we won't manage -- we won't be able to manage. So he was, you know, there was all kind of parties in Europe, so he belonged to a party, it was a chalutz, he used to go out for -- for hard work, for building, for -- for -- for -- for other work, ha -- this was a -- he bel -- he belonged to a party chalutz. But when he was mobilized to the Polish army, and the word Jew was for him on such a level, that nobody, nobody could ta -- take away the pride from him, being a Jew. So one time -- and -- and h-he -- he was very -- he was very good in the -- I'm -- I'm going to a very important point here

Q: [indecipherable] experiences in -- but we want to get -- talk about what you experience with Tuvia, how your relationship developed with him.

A: My relationship developed with him in -- when I was his messenger, and when he saw that I -- I wer -- I was sitting sky high on a high chair, and all of a sudden I fell like to the -- to the earth, and I had nobody to care for me. And that's when -- that's what -- his heart -- he had -- he had a heart from God, he had a heart from goodness. He -- just to do your favor or to care for you, that was his whole life, because when he was called Jew in the army, he killed the Gentile, he killed it. He -- he was about to go to prison himself, i -- just because he mentioned to him that he is a Jew.

Q: Well he had another relationship with another woman, he'd been married before?

A: He had a relationship before the -- until the Bolsheviks came and the Russian people occupied White Russia. He lived 10 years in his little city [indecipherable]. He had a big, big business there, and they were very, very well off.

Q: And then what happened to her?

A: And then she had the -- a mother that she had cancer, and her mother wouldn't budge, and she wouldn't leave her, and she wouldn't leave her, and Tuvia could not stay there because the

Bolsheviks would send him to Siberia, and in that time it was the worst thing that could happen to somebody.

Q: And then he had a relationship with -- with your step --

A: With my --

Q: -- step-aunt.

A: -- m-my step-aunt, right.

Q: And what happened to that relationship?

A: She was killed.

Q: She was killed.

A: She was killed together in '43 with her sister, my stepmother -- with her -- my step-mother's son --

Q: And how --

A: -- in a attack of -- of the -- of the -- in -- in the woods already.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your role at a -- in the beginnings of your group getting together in the woods, and how your relationship then developed with him.

A: My relationship that he always cared for me.

Q: Pardon?

A: He always cared for me. He cared for me, he couldn't see, you know, that -- none justice was done to me. That he knew from where I'm coming. He knew that -- how I was raised, he knew how my father was caring for me. You know, when you live in a town you hear stories, you her - - you hear rumor -- rumors how you were raised, and all of a sudden you saw that, you know, I'm like a slave.

Q: What kind of duties did you have in the woods?

A: I had duties, I had to come to my own husband and give him the reports the whole night, I mean eight hours -- six hours, I don't remember already, that you had to stay on -- on parole -- not parole, what do you call this with your rifle in your hands and -- and watch the headquarters, or watch whoever comes on -- on the base, or whoe -- what -- and in the morning I used to say, commander allo-allow me to tell you and get a report to you that this one and this one came this hour at night with -- with the -- with food, this one went out from the base, a Russian came into the base. Everything is in order, nothing special happened. Not everybody used to do that. I never showed my authority in the woods that I am a commander's wife.

Q: Were you involved in any acts of sabotage?

A: I was with him twice, twice I was with him. One time he was really [indecipherable] Germans, but by Russian -- by Russian people, sniper went through right here, and he died with the scar. Right here. I was that time with him and this wasn't -- this was Russian partisans, they did it to him. They didn't like the idea of being -- getting so big as he got. And he was the only -- only person that he cared for children and old people. In the Russian groups, if you had a wife or young per -- a lover or whatever, you couldn't pick her, you had to go out. You ha -- they throw you right away out. He opened his arms and said come. As -- more is better. And whoever it came to the woods, and other people started to -- to object, what will we do with kids, kids cry. We-We'll have a -- a -- the -- i-in case the Germans make a raid, which not once had happened that they had the raid, how will you save if a child will cry at night, it a child this and -- that's my responsibility. I'll do. I don't guarantee you. That was always his -- he was always [indecipherable] to make a big meeting in the open fields of the woods and say, it's my responsibility. The only thing that I demand from you is to listen, and discipline. Without discipline we won't be able to continue. And somehow they had love for him, admiration for

him. And they -- if he wasn't on the base and something happened or the Germans raid or -- or some -- people were lost.

Q: Besides being a messenger for him and making reports, what else were you do --

A: I [indecipherable] the same, I had always to receive the Russian commands to prepare, you know, special food for them. We needed them. We had to buy them. So when, let's say somebody came to visit or he had a meeting for somebody, this was everything in my bunker, I had to receive them, I had to prepare.

Q: At what point did you became man and wife?

A: From the first minute that my hu -- my father got killed, he told me that he'll never, never -- he never had mine -- in his mind -- he -- better saying when his wife was killed, he said, he couldn't do it before, but he always was with me, he always shared my sufferings and he'll -- I should never be upset because wi -- whatever it will happen to him, it will happen to me. We'll never, never separate, and he will never leave me alone.

Q: How did your father get killed?

A: My father, he went -- now that my husband allowed him, after his wife, his second wife got killed from the Germans, he wanted to be very brave and pay the Germans for it. Usually my husband never let him go because at that time comparing 20 - 30, he was a old man in the 40's, so he didn't want him to schlep around, you know, for food, and you never know who will come from the back and -- and shot him, and you -- he liked it to -- to send the young and the brave. But he was very stubborn about, and he decided that he's going to take, you know, revenge. Begged my husband not to go and he didn't listen. Well, it wouldn't be my father, he would take away the rifle and say sit on your behind, excuse my expression. But here he respected him too much, and he knew that he wasn't -- he was a big businessman. So he let him go. And I was

sitting at the fire [indecipherable] and I said to him, "Daddy, how can you leave me, I'm all -- already left all alone. You are the only one, you are the only soul that I possess. How can you leave me and go? The times are so un -- unpeaceful, you know, and we never know what will happen. I don't know if you -- if you go, you never knew if you come back. How can you do that to me?" He listened, he picked up himself and he left. In five, 10 minutes he's coming back. I said, "Daddy, you see? You -- you weren't impressed when I was talking to you, but you came to your senses." He says, "No, I went -- I never go away without kissing you good-bye." So he came to say good-bye [indecipherable]. 12 people was killed that d -- that night. He went for food, and the farmer send out his son to mou -- to go to the ghetto and they -- and they told the Germans that here is a group of Jewish people. He couldn't go, it got too -- too light outside. We just moved at night, the day was the night and the night was the day. Well -- and when there was light outside, nobody from partisans moves around, only at night. So he send out and a whole group of Germans came, and the -- and they didn't have even a chance. One guy remained because he knew the pe -- the farmer. So he went to a chicken coop under the [indecipherable]. And when everything was over and all the people were killed, he came out and said, "You feel better now? What do you think? What did you do? You will be paid a high price." So his son came out with a sword, and -- and killed him right on the spot.

Q: Did your partisans group keep moving around, or did you have --

A: Yes, we had to keep -- to move around, we had to move our land around because ber -- if we had a big -- oh, what do you call it, the -- we had people that they were investigating constantly what's the conditions, where are the Germans, how far are they from -- from us. There was always 10 - 12 people around, always on horses, to find out what's going on. You couldn't live in the woods if you wouldn't know how far the Germans are with you -- from you. And then we

had a lot of problems from the Russian partisans. A lot of problems we had from them. He used a -- until we got the -- until we got the rifles, until we got the machines, until we got the guns. And then if a group used to go out, they used to ca -- take away -- take away everything from them, and that's it. Until my husband put this under the [indecipherable]

Q: Put -- put you under what?

A: Put this on order, he went to the higher command, and they to -- he explained to them that we are all fighting for the same reason, we are all fighting for existence, we all want to survive. Why should -- and the se -- the -- the aim is the same, to save -- that time was the Russian army, to help the Russian army. So why are they taking away because we are Jews? After a lot of fights, after a lot of struggle, they came to the senses and they were punished for doing such a thing.

Q: What was your role as a woman or the other -- was it different than a man? Did you carry a gun with you?

A: Yeah, I had a gun. I didn't use too much, but I had.

Q: When did you use it?

A: I used -- I -- I didn't use my gun. They -- they took very, very little the in action, the women, because they always had -- don't forget that we had schools on the base. We had places that were -- we were making bread and soap and salami and -- and fix all kind of [indecipherable] for us, and for strangers because with that we used to ba -- they used to exchange other things with us. They were from -- th-they called the -- our base, they called the shtetl of bells. It had a name, shtetl bells. The e -- the u -- the little city of bells.

Q: And what -- what were your every day jobs, besides being messengers?

A: You had to have -- there was -- there was hospitals, there was sick people, there was people in typhus. Look, in -- in my position, mostly I used to go is sometimes I stayed on the -- on the

base, but if he used to go somewhere, not for -- for -- let's say to attacks, I used always to go with my husband. If it was to go and vi-visit somebody, or he had a meeting with the high authority, then he -- he wasn't the whole authority, they had the headquarters from the whole partisans of the woods, which there was a Mr. Platone, that was not his -- his name -- real name, I think Janika was his real name. And they had to report to him like you have to report to your supervisor, like I had to report to my wherever I worked, my supervisor. They had to report everything, there wasn't just you can do what you want to do.

Q: And when did you travel, at night?

A: Everything was at night, forget in -- in the woods about the day. We had -- we had a -- a wait for 10 days from the Germans. Nobody, not from Russia, not from [indecipherable] survived fully. Our -- we were at that time, I think, close to 800 - 900 people, and not one was missing. 10 days with no food in -- in -- sitting in water up to your throat. And so the kids were carried out, because the management, it was [indecipherable].

Q: Let's talk about how the -- the camps were set up. Did you sleep in tents?

A: In tents. In tents in the summer, on the earth, tents in the winter, used to build things, in the beginning especially and cover them, you know, winter if snow and you make one step, it's very -- it shows. So we used to take a -- what do you call this? A strainer. As you walked, you had a strainer and you cover it right away with the snow, it -- that your steps shouldn't show.

Q: And how many people were in the tents?

A: Depends. Usually, you know, friends got together, I want to stay with this one, I want to stay with this one. And there were bigger tents and there were smaller tents. There were then -- in the winter we had under the earth. We had to build, you know, under because you couldn't -- couldn't survive it's -- the cold.

Q: How did you do the cooking when [indecipherable]

A: Cookings was like this, for -- it was a general. Before each husband went on a -- some kind of operation, no matter how you watched him and how he was restricted, you had to bring -- you always brought something for his wife. So she used to prepare herself. But there was a general kitchen for everybody. Special attention [indecipherable] all the people and the kids. We had rabbis, we had traditions. You could not force the people to do that, but the -- the people that wanted to observe, they did, they had no problem with it. They came to my husband, they asked they wanted to pray or they want to b -- to bake matzoh for Passover, they know the date, they were welcome to.

Q: What about personal hygiene and sanitation?

A: We had a hospital. We had a -- it was a problem, and when the problem got -- when we started with typhus, they made a -- they build it, a special what do you call -- it was the solarium, that's for sure.

Q: A special ward, or -- a ward or a --

A: Right, that had always hot water, and at such a temperature that you could hang up your clothes if you had some insects or lice, or anything in it, it was -- it -- it -- it was -- i -- they got rid of it because the -- the temperature of the heat killed them.

Q: Was lice a problem?

A: Oh yeah. Sure. Not everybody. I didn't have it, I don't know what it means to have it, but it was. Certain people had it.

Q: How large was your camp, the largest it grew?

A: 1250 people were left in the woods. And this is after we lost -- we lost very little people. But the last day of ca -- going out from the woods --

Q: Is that -- part were older, and what part were younger?

A: The -- we had -- in the beginning we had a lot of young people, but then the Russian --

Q: Just a min -- could you -- there's -- something's the matter with the tape. [inaudible] ... I was asking you about the make-up of the group, how many were older people, how many were children. [indecipherable]

A: Exactly, I cannot -- there was -- were -- in the beginning was a lot of young people, and then he d -- he didn't rest. The only thing what he wanted is to save. And the -- he opened his hands for kids -- for older people and children. Some [indecipherable] we had -- the children were born in the woods. Abortions were done in the woods. We had a medical staff. I wouldn't say that we had so -- so much of antibiotics, it was very hard, but certain operations were done. People with frozen feet were cured. People with typhuses were cured. And the food wasn't so excellent excellent that, you know, you could put them so fast on -- on their feet. But the most privileges of food and milk and the better things had the kids and the old -- elder.

Q: Did you yourself come in contact with any of the Russian partisan [indecipherable].

A: Oh yeah, sure, sure. First of all they came to visit us because this was a show, we had shows. They came to a show, like you are going to a show, like I am going to later a show. Our kids used to perform, we had [indecipherable]. They prepared it, and at night, whoever had a little talent, they rehearse it and they gave a show, and a lot of people used to come to us cause we had a lot of space, we build a special place for it.

Q: And then you had to continue moving, so you would just pick up --

A: We had to continue moving because we didn't -- we could not show always for a long time that we are staying in one place. This was very dangerous, because if so -- w-we found out our -- a -- not agents, intelligence knew that something that determines a [indecipherable] they heard

the rumor that they know one person knows where we are, more or less the vicinity, we had already at night to pack up and move. Leave everything behind us and move.

Q: How long were you in the woods after [indcipherable]

A: I was from '42 in ju -- end of June, to '44 July.

Q: And let's talk about July of '44, ha -- how do you remember --

A: That was a messy day, this was a very messy day because we lost nine people that day. For the whole time of -- besides the group of my father's and the other group on January fifth when my stepmother got killed, there was about five people, I think, this was the biggest amount of people that to -- were killed in one day. This was when the Russians started to come in, and the Germans started to move out. And they were wild, and they still had weapon, and -- and they came to our woods, but we weren't afraid of them because we were -- had already a backing from the Russian that we knew that the army's coming in the back. And our people wanted to take revenge. So every German that they found, they were killing him. They were revenging better than they did, believe me. They cut it -- pieces from them until my husband made a stop of it. He said, "Just leave it, let's leave them to the authorities, they'll pay their price." But before they came up to -- to our -- to our base, they met with our people and they had a fight, and nine people killed at that time in one day. Next day we led to [indcipherable]. This was a tragedy because to live through years, and then the last day just before freedom, to lose people, he was sick over it.

Q: And the ma -- then you started to leave the woods [indcipherable]

A: He lead them -- he lead them to Novagudek. He made -- he made -- there was, you know, very little people left, only the one that survived in the woods. That's -- so what -- the people were left, the rest were all Gentiles. The one -- the war -- the one that lived through the war

there. For Jews there were only the one that escaped for -- to the woods. And maybe some of them were in Russia that they came later on. So they organized, each one of the partisans got a -- a notification that he served in the partisans from this year to this year, and now they are free and welcome to go where and do whatever they want. And each one went out for the document -- there is the doc -- documents in Israel to -- that they have, you know, they made photocopies of it, because very little ha -- remained with them. They could travel to [indecipherable]

Q: And what did you do?

A: They were -- husband didn't stay too long in Novagudek, my husband decided to go to Lida and they give him -- he had no problem of getting work. I was a librarian at that time, I got a job. And he started to -- we had no electricity in Lida during the war, and everything was destroyed. So they put him on the job to bring back the electricity to the city, to Lida. And he should manage that and be in charge of it. And it was a big deal to build it, but he was very [indecipherable]. He knew that he wouldn't be able to live in Russia, and that too many people knew him.

Q: Were just the two of you together?

A: T-Two of us together, and his brother and his wife and a younger brother. But we lived -- everyone lived separate, so we didn't live together. And he didn't like the attitude of the Russian people. He didn't like them in the woods, and he didn't like them coming out from the woods. And he knew that someday they'll find some reason to -- to do something to him. And in not quite a year, I think maybe nine or se-seven months, he decided that he wants to leave Lida, he wants out of Poland, he wants out of Russia. And that -- then we escaped. We were again the first ones to escape. We left. Him, me, I was pregnant at that time and we went through hell, we came to Wilna, from Wilna -- but everybody knew my husband, so wherever he came he had a

welcome, he had no problems of getting nowhere. Everything was directed. People fr -- even from Israel there was [indecipherable] representatives sent from Israel, you know, for the survivors to th -- to direct them where to go. So we were direct to -- to Poland, I came to my city, Bialystok, I looked at the -- at the streets and the houses and this -- I didn't want to stay one day. And on top of everything, my husband was recognized by one of the Russian [indecipherable] and he said, "Oh, you are still alive, you are here?" So next morning we were -- escaped.

Q: Where did you go?

A: We went to Lublin, and in Lublin was the same story, we stayed 10 days, after 10 days somebody met him again. And he didn't want to get involved with them. And -- and slowly we went through [indecipherable] it wasn't so easy. We got in touch with the Israeli representatives, and they managed us, from there we went to Czechoslovakia, and then we went to Hungary and then we stayed in Romania for a half a year. I lost my child there, and -- and then they -- we got official certificates from the British government to go to official [indecipherable], yeah, just because of him. So we legally -- legally by boat went -- after a half a year, we stayed in Romania a half a year in a kibbutz, and as th -- and waited for our certificates because they promised them, else we won't go any other way, you'll go legally to Israel for your [indecipherable]

Q: And when did you arrive in Israel?

A: In '45.

Q: And how long did you stay?

A: I stayed there a la -- quite er -- probably about 11 years, he stayed 10 years because he got very sick. He had a very bad ulcer, and in that time they didn't operate in Israel yet, so he had a family in the States, and they forced him to come and to operate, but he didn't want to do on his

own, so he waited I should come, and I had two small kids and I didn't want to part with Israel for no money. I was tired of wandering.

Q: So when did you arrive in the United States?

A: I -- I -- with no choice, I wouldn't leave my husband, in '56, with my son, the one that you saw, and my older daughter, and one son was born in the United States.

Q: Is there anything you would like to add to this interview, we're almost finished. Some statement?

A: I -- I would like to say that thanks to him, not only I live, but a lot of people, tens of thousands of people in Israel and all over the world because the families got bigger and the families had children, the children had children, and he is counted as a war -- the biggest [indecipherable] in the history.

Q: Well, thank you very much for the time that you spent.

A: You're very welcome.

Q: We're very, very [indecipherable].

A: I hope I -- I didn't -- I didn't upset you, but it's -- it wasn't a easy story.

Q: Well, what's going to happen now is they'll stop the tape --

A: Right.

Q: -- and then -- and now set up your photographs, and what they would like you --

A: That's a picture of me, right, coming back to Lida from the woods.

Q: What year?

A: '44? 1944.

Q: This was after liberation?

A: Yeah. And this -- this was right after the liberation of ca -- ca -- of -- right after the [indecipherable], when we came [indecipherable] and the liberation.

Q: Okay. Now they're going to put the next one on.

A: That's the --

Q: Wait, wait, wait.

A: That's my husband's office when he came right -- the first job after we ca -- our liberation in Lida, installing the electricity station.

Q: And what year was that?

A: '43.

Q: They're going to go to the next picture. Always say the year when you --

A: I see, mm-hm.

Q: Who, what and where -- wait, wait, wait, wait, they haven't started yet, but you know, when this was, where -- no, I know, I know. But when you do it, you know.

A: I don't know when this was. This is three partisans, very active partisans from our woods. I recall the names Bensiem Kolcovitch, Amber Novitch, and his nickname was Kaderl. I don't remember exactly the time it was taken. It was sent to my husband from somewhere.

Q: Do you remember any more of the name of the third person?

A: They -- it's a nickname, Kaderl, I don't know. He was killed in Israel in the independence war.

Q: And that -- now they're going to put on the next picture.

A: This is my husband to --

Q: Wait, wait, wait. [indecipherable]

A: [indecipherable] gave me a sign. This is my husband, Tuvia Bielsky, was still with his workers installing the electric station in Lida right after we returned from -- from liberation of the woods.

Q: Which one is he in the photograph?

A: The first. The one [indecipherable]

Q: They're going to do the next one now.

A: That's me and my husband in Israel in '45 when I was pregnant with my daughter.

Q: The rifles first, and then the grave later. Is that a picture of rifles?

A: I cannot tell you too much about it, because I didn't know who I am or where I am.

Q: Well, just what this is, you know, what -- wh-where it is, what -- what it is and when it is.

A: That's the burial of my husband in 1988 in Hermnahaute in jeru -- in Jerusalem, a military [indecipherable]

Q: Next I'm in Israel [indecipherable]

A: That's the grave of Tuvia Bielsky in Hermnahaute. The commander of the Jewish partisans.

Q: Could you talk about who's in the photograph, what this is [indecipherable]

A: I can tell --

Q: -- mention a little bit about the people in the photograph.

A: That's a group of [indecipherable]

Q: Why don't you say what it is.

A: This is a group of partisans that celebrated exactly I don't remember the occasion, that wanted to take a picture of him. And I think he -- that was the last picture that he took with them.

Q: And anybody -- can you point where he is in the photograph, and just say where he is.

A: Yeah, he is sitting, oh, one, two, three, four, five, the fifth one on the -- on the right side.

Q: And anybody else in the photograph that you spoke about in your talk, in your interview?

A: There is quite a few people right here. I know -- shall I -- I know everybody's names, but I don't know if you are interested. [indecipherable]

Q: When th -- w-were the people here just from his group, or other gr-groups --

A: All from his group.

Q: -- what was the occasion of this and what --

A: It was only from his group, it was in '85.

Q: And what was the occasion?

A: The occasion, I think they all came to celebrate my youngest son's wedding.

Q: And where was this taken?

A: This was taken in -- in Brooklyn on -- on a -- a hundred -- on 93rd Street, or 95th Street, I don't know. That's only part of the group that was there. This one wanted to take a picture.

[indecipherable]. That wasn't the last.

Q: That's going to -- that is the last photo they going to --

A: That wasn't the last, I have the --

Q: No, there are others, right.

A: He had a -- he had a testimonial dinner four months before he died -- five months before he died, so that's not a actually -- it's a mistake, it's not the last picture with the group.

Q: No, I meant this is the last one for you to describe.

A: Right.

Q: For the tape is what I meant.

A: Right, right.

Q: Again we wanted to thank you for coming in --

A: Mm-hm. You're very welcome.

Q: -- [indecipherable] the interview. It was very meaningful and always very special.

A: Mm-hm. For me for sure.

Q: Yes.

A: So what's now with the pictures?

Q: You have to get on [indecipherable]

A: They are -- they are remaining with you, or I'm getting them back?

Q: I'll give them back to you.

A: Okay. Thank you so much.

Q: I'll come out with you.

End of Tape Two

Conclusion of Interview