

NATIONAL

Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

BARBARA STIMLER

Interviewed by Jennifer Wingate

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Oral History
British Library Sound Archive
96 Euston Road
NW1 2DB
020 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk

F94 - Side A

My name is Barbara Stimler, nee Krakowska. I was born in Aleksandrow-Kujawski, which is Poland, 5th February 1927. I was an only child of Sarah and Jacob Krakowska. Being the only child my father wanted to give me everything which he did. I was sent to school, not to school, how do you call it, ehm kindergarten when I was four years old, where nuns were the teachers. From there, that was the only private school in Aleksandrow. I was actually the only Jewish child there. From there I start my elementary schooling as well. Where I also was an only Jewish child there. The nuns were lovely to me. When it comes to prayers they told me, I should ask my mother to keep the prayer of my religion which I did while they were praying their religion, I was in myself praying my own.

There I was four or five or six years, I don't remember. Then I had an exam to go into how you call a grammar school here, which was a high school in Poland. It was a Hebrew school. My father was a little bit worried I should not get mixed up with the Gentiles I suppose. (Laughs)

Where was that?

In a town called Wloclawek. I had to travel there ehm every day. I was commuter. And ehm I had to get up very early, the journey took about an hour. And ehm for the winter my parents made arrangements for me to stay with a family because the winters were very bad in Poland. But I didn't like it and the following year I didn't want to stay any more. But then I become ill and I had to leave the school. Then the war broke out which was 1939. Am I going too fast with my childhood?

Well shall I ask you a few questions?

Yes.

I'd love to know, how did you travel to the school and to home from school?

By train. And ehm there ehm the train was about, we had lessons, we had to be there at eight o'clock for school. Not like here, nine, eight o'clock. And we were there till one or two o'clock. One day was till one o'clock and one day till two o'clock. And when the trains, we used to catch them about three o'clock, so we were allowed to stay at school and do our lessons. And we got home at about four to Aleksandrow, I was at home at about quarter past four, half past four something like that. Sometimes it was lovely because my cousin who was living not far from Wloclawek, he used to meet me there and take me to a patisserie and buy me some cakes. Why I mention this cousin is because he also was in Auschwitz and he was alive. I mean he died only two months ago in Israel. But the family were very good to us, but I think I will mention them later.

What I'd also like to ask you is what you remember about your early family life before you went to school?

My mother had three sisters and two brothers. One brother had five sons, they all perished, the whole family. They all perished, I was the only one who survived. My mother's family, my second cousin who is a doctor is in America, he also went through the camps, he lived in Syracuse. And my father's family was in England mostly. One brother was living in a town called Lubraniec and two brothers were living in Paris. One of the brothers with a whole family in France, was killed. And one of them with a family I don't know how, but they were alive. If they were hidden by the French people I just don't know. They emigrated soon after the war to Canada

and that's where they are living with my cousins. There were three cousins and my uncle and aunty.

When did they leave home?

They didn't, they were in France.

Yes but...?

This I don't know. Many years before the war. I didn't know them in Poland at all. That uncle who was killed I did not know him at all. Also ehm two brothers of my father's and a sister and his parents were living in London. And I remember my, the addresses like NW10 or W11, I did not remember which they belong to, my grandparents or my aunty or my uncle.

As I say my childhood, mostly I was living in Aleksandrow, which was not far from Ciechocinek and it was a spa, which during my holidays we used to go there. Or we used to take a flat in a village and that's where we used to spend the summer holidays. My father, we had a shop, we were selling textile materials.

This was in Aleksandrow?

That was in Aleksandrow. And ehm I had quite a lot of friends which were Christians, being in a school where I was the only Jewish child. They were very very kind to me. Of course the anti-semitism started and they used to put pickets in front of the Jewish shops. They used to wait at the trains where the Jewish boys were

coming from somewhere and they used to beat them up. I was in a way very very lucky because my father was rather a tough man. And nobody dare would touch me.

I had one experience, being in a small town. In the summer time when you close the shop they used to sit outside, outside the shop and my father happened to drink tea which was in a glass, he didn't drink tea in a cup. I was already asleep I didn't know anything about it. And a drunken Pole came to him and he said to him, which my mother told me afterwards, he put his hand on his shoulder, "You are a good Jew." Then my father was holding his drink and he started to abuse him, so my father took the glass, put on his palm the glass and put this into his eye and left him in the gutter and closed the shutters and went to sleep. And nobody but nobody would touch us, they would never put any pickets in front of us. You see you have to be strong. The Jewish people before the war were very afraid. I mean they were throwing stones at them, not at me.

Was there many Jewish people in your town?

I don't know, not many, it was only a small town.

It was larger than a village?

Oh yes. We had cinemas and all this so you can't call it a village.

Could you tell me when you were born?

5th of February 1927.

So you were going to school then in the early 30's?

Oh yes. I went to this ehm kindergarten first, but I was quite a clever girl and they were pushing me from one year to another. Passing quicker, because being my age I should only, I was only one year in the high school. And I got ill and the war broke out.

I'd like to ask you a bit more about your school days. You said that you were one Jewish girl among many girls and later on girls and boys. When did you first have feeling of anti-semitism?

I had this feeling already because when I had to leave, let's say they made the religion the last lesson or the first lesson, so I had to come either nine o'clock to school or leave one hour earlier. And I was afraid, some of them should know that I was Jewish. Oh I had the feeling, though they were very kind to me. But I had this feeling because it was also a high school in our town which was only for boys and before they went to this high school, these boys used to come to our school first to have elementary.

Up till the age of eleven?

Oh no no. In this high school, yes about eleven or twelve yes. And what happened, where the male school was, the high school, there were priests teaching, only priests, there were not Jewish children there at all, maybe one boy from our town. But they would not accept anybody there. They mostly had to go out of Alexandrow or to go to a strictly Hebrew, Jewish high school. And ehm I did have this feeling because I was just afraid, these boys did not know I am Jewish.

But what did you feel might happen if they had known?

They would abuse me. They would call me names. But maybe being only one and having, I was good at sports and I was good in the class, maybe they would have this respect and they would not do so. But I was still afraid.

But you had had experience then of...?

I only felt because I know how they were behaving themselves towards other Jewish people.

Oh you'd seen things?

Oh yes. As I said they were having pickets and they were beating up. And don't forget I didn't go out late because you were very sheltered.

You saw people being beaten up?

Not just personally myself, because they were not doing so much during the day but they were in the evenings. Let's say we were already in bed and somebody came, one of my cousins came running and said to my father, "Uncle will you come?" because one of my cousins were coming from another town and they knew the Polish boys were standing and waiting there to beat them up. My father quickly dressed, I told you they were afraid of my father because he just didn't care, he was just smashing

them up. It was the only one thing that I was not afraid so much of them but this feeling after all is there, being Jewish you see. But don't forget we are very sheltered. And by nine o'clock I was in bed you see. And my father wouldn't even want me to know all these troubles that were going on.

But tell me, were you a religious household?

My father wasn't, my mother was. So we kept a very Jewish house.

Shabbat?

Oh yes. The candles were there but he wouldn't make, I mean he would make a Kiddish but he would not make...

What about Shabbat, did you keep Shabbat?

Oh yes the shop was closed which I had also another experience of... I had to go to school on Saturday because this was a Polish school, which I told you the nuns were teaching at. And ehm some of the Jewish people were not so happy about it you see. But as I say we had been very, my mother was also taught and schooling by my father came first.

My father left home when he was twenty one and went to Russia and he joined the Russian army just for the simple reason that he like the Russian language. When he was thirty he come back... When the revolution broke up he ran, he came back. And when he came back my grandparents were just making themselves ready to go to

England and my uncle the oldest brother, was already in England and he was trying to bring over the family to England slowly.

Now the two brothers were in Poland, during the coronation which was George VI, my aunt wanted my father to come himself to England for the coronation. But my father said, "Either we all come or not at all." So we didn't. And ehm that's how it was. We were left in Poland. Then to Russia which my father would have the opportunity to go to, he didn't want to go because he saw what the Bolsheviks were doing when he ran away and he said he'd never take his wife and his child to Russia.

Can you tell me how he had the opportunity to go to Russia?

Because anybody could run. You see when the war broke out we were hit, one of the first ones. In 1939 the war broke out, we ran and hid ourselves from the bombs and while we were, then we come back after a few days because as I said I was living not far from the German borders and we were one of the first ones. The war broke out at ten o'clock in the morning but about seven o'clock they were bombing us already. So we got scared. We didn't know what it was about, my father went over the road and wanted to see where the bombs were falling. We just did not know.

You didn't know war had been declared until that moment?

No. We didn't. And the war broke out at ten o'clock in the morning and they already start bombing us before, about seven o'clock in the morning. So we went to a village and we came back from the village.

A different village?

Where I was living was a town but we went to a village.

To get away from the bombs?

Yes. We come back, I don't know what happened to my father but when they were declaring the, when the sirens started to go off that the planes are coming, we went to the cellar because practically every house in Poland had a cellar. And my father was not with us and the corner of our house was bombed. And the whole place went up. But it just hit the corner and the next house was smashed. And we were all black and all the windows were shattered, everything was broken. When we come out after the planes left, we came out to the streets, they said that my father got killed but it was not. He just happened to be somewhere and went also to a cellar anyway. Do you want to know the address where I lived in Poland?

Yes.

It's 25 Pilsudcki.

Your social life, did your parents entertain much, did they entertain friends and family?

Oh yes.

You haven't spoken much about your mother's family?

Sometimes during summer I used to go to a village where my mother's oldest sister was living, she was married to a widower and he had three sons and she had also three children to my uncle. And there were two girls and a boy and when I went, nobody's alive after the war when I went there. My mother's parents were living also in this small town which was called Sluzewo and my grandmother I did not know because she died quite young.

But my grandfather used to come for every weekend to our place. He was a very religious man, he used to wear the Yarmuka and all this. My mother's youngest sister she was not married and she used to live with her father. One weekend he came and he became very ill and unfortunately he died. And you know in Poland the children were not allowed to stay with the dead or whatever and I was sent to friends. And I don't remember much about that. Only I remember one thing, that on the dying bed he asked my father to look after the youngest sister of my mother's and she stayed with us. So she was to me like a second mother, more than a mother, she was fantastic to me, she was really lovely. My mother became once very very ill but she got through it and ...

Your aunt helped to nurse her did she?

Oh yes yes. She was staying with us. She also had a house. In the town where we were living she had... Because my grandparents had a house in Sluzewo where they were living and that was sold and it was left to my aunty, the money. And they bought a house for her in Aleksandrow but she stayed with us. And after a few years, a couple of years, I don't remember exactly she met this man, or she was introduced as you know they introduced to each other people. And ehm they sold this house which was her dowry. And she was living also in the same town as my father's brother Sheil, his name was Sheil. And so quite often we used to go there. You had to go through Wloclawek from Aleksandrow to Wloclawek and from there you had to take a little train to Lubraniec. And ehm my uncle Sheil had two sons and a daughter. They were also quite comfortable and we used to see each other quite often as well.

My father was born in Brzesc Kujawski it was all the area of Wloclawek. Lubraniec, Brzesc Kujawski was not far from Wloclawek. In Brzesc Kujawski my father's aunty lived, her name was Kurtzman, this is the family I was talking about that my cousin used to meet me from school and entertain me a little bit. Ehm then in Aleksandrow Kujawski my mothers oldest brother was living with five sons and another brother of my mother's was living, he was younger than my mother, in Rajejow. And my mother's sister, the oldest sister was living, I can't remember the name of the town, she had only one son as well. And unfortunately all of them are gone. Nobody is left.

I had at school quite a lot of friends. When it was birthday parties we used to go to each other,. Then after school I used to go to some friends to do homework together or they came to me. For the Hebrew, for the Jewish religion I had to have a private tutor. The school I was talking about where the nuns were teaching was also a private school, where we had to pay for it. And I had a Jewish teacher teaching me Hebrew and Jewish religion. My friends were practically the aristocracy of Aleksandrow. What I mean is the daughters of mostly professional people. And ehm one daughter of mayor of Aleksandrow...

F94 - End of Side A

F94 - Side B

We had only one synagogue in town a very old one, a lovely synagogue. My parents, as I say. were not very religious but Yom Kippur Roshashana and ehm Suchot we used to go to the synagogue. Actually my parents when they went on Yom Kippur to the synagogue they never came back, they stayed there all day long. But I as a child didn't fuss. At one o'clock I came home then my friends used to come and dress up in my mother's clothes.

Your Jewish friends?

Yes. We dressed up in my mother's clothes and my mother's shoes which were miles too big. And we used to put lipstick on. It's coming back to me, because that was the only opportunity that we could dress ourselves up, knowing our parents are all day long in the Shul and we will not be told off. And ehm I had my own bike which I used to ride, I was the apple of my fathers eye, he absolutely adored me and he wanted me to do everything. I also had piano lessons and in this private school I used to have German lessons and French lessons.

That was until...?

Before the war, all before the war I'm talking about.

Yes but how old were you?

Until eleven.

Until eleven you learned French and German?

Oh yes because it was a private school. German I do understand and speak a little bit, but French is very... I had that just one year before I left the school, only one year we learned languages. They were preparing us to go to the high school you see.

So you said you were at school with non Jewish girls, where did your Jewish friends come from and did they not think it odd that you were at a non Jewish school?

Yes they did. I was the cat's whiskers you see, because going to this school, it was the only private school in town, otherwise it's only the elementary.

And you went because...?

Because my father wanted me to, first of all they never spoke Jewish to me in case I would lose the accent, the Polish accent. My father was very funny in this respect. What he was missing in his schooling, he was putting everything into me. Whatever he didn't have I had to have. Personally he nearly killed me, it is true.

Because you had to work so hard?

Yes, he nearly killed me.

But you say he had a textile shop?

Yes.

Where did he get his textiles from?

Well he brought money when he came from Russia. Our address was very good and when he came from Russia. He swallowed diamonds and gold rubles, my mother had rings and earrings from the diamonds he swallowed. He was a very comfortable man actually in Russia, he owned houses, because he left the army and he stayed in Russia till the revolution broke out. He was ten years in Russia.

Where did he live in Russia do you know?

A town called Penza.

And why did he go?

There was a few brothers and sisters and the parents were very very religious, I suppose he was maybe tied down.

And he went on his own?

On his own, he was twenty one, he just left.

Where was he born?

I presume in Brzesc Kujawski. I have his birth certificate here somewhere. Because I told you they wanted my father to come to England, he sent his certificate but then he thought, why not my wife and child! I used to belong also to a Jewish Zionist organisation, that's where I met my Jewish... you see it's coming back to me. I don't remember the teacher we had, she was teaching us Hebrew and we used to have for Chanuka little shawls and I remember I was dancing. And I had dancing lessons. And we had little like sketches and that's how I got really more friendly with the Jewish children, with Jewish girls. And ehm...

Did you tend to speak Polish together?

Oh yes only Polish. They all tried to speak Polish because, Polish was a Slovakian language, it's like you would only speak German not Yiddish or you would lose the accent. I understood Jewish because my parents among themselves used to speak Jewish. Only to me they spoke Polish. And all my friends they would speak Polish. They were all children of business people or professional people so they would all speak Polish. Only among Polish Jewish people that's where they spoke Yiddish and that's where the trouble started mostly you see.

Tell me when you were with your Jewish friends did you feel differently from the way you felt with your non Jewish friends?

Of course you do. You see when I was going to the elementary school with the Polish girls I didn't feel so much, I didn't understand then because I started the nursery when I was five. You don't understand these things yet. So let's say ehm it was also when I

was older when the Passover came they wouldn't let the Polish children because they said that the Jewish people kept them and killed them for blood.

You actually heard them?

Oh yes plenty. And I know them, my friends were stoned and all this, not stoned to death but throwing stones at, this I know for a fact.

Were there rumours at your non Jewish school?

No. Never. We used to have shows every Christmas and they used to do the shows in this male high school where the priests were teaching. They had a big theatre there and the nuns used to take, always before Christmas this hall, this theatre hall and we used to have shows. Now shows for Christmas mostly was Jesus and Mary but they used to be very very nice. I one year had a sketch with another boy and he didn't remember his lines and I had to tell him on the stage what he should say where everybody was laughing and after the show the priest which was like, not a bishop but he was the director of the high school, came over to my mother and he said "What a lovely and clever daughter you have." And he knew I was Jewish.

Then one year, the last year when I left the school there were four seasons in the show and I was the summer, the queen of summer, which I had the poppies and cornflowers, what I wanted to say, they really were very careful how they dealt with me, not to be direct when it was Jesus or something like that. But I had an experience I must say. I remind myself now, when they go to the communion, when they were eight or nine went to the holy communion and they had to have white dresses and they go to the priest and he listens, I had to have a white dress because my friends had white dresses.

The school said you had to?

No no I said I had to, my friends had them. You see you can be very easy influenced. I went once with my friend to the church, my close friend. You see you can be so easy influenced and during Easter time as they do Christmas time with trees, Easter time they used to make a table with all the food, they used to kill a pig, all the food they used have it beautifully dressed up and the priest used to come to every house and pour the holy water in and used to have little holly cards with Jesus. And one year I had to be there with my friend and also had to have this water sprinkled, it's because I didn't understand that you see until I was older, then it hit me. It was harmless really and maybe that was my father's thought, he thought I had to go and be among Jewish children and send me to the high school which was travelling from our town and went to the Hebrew school.

You went to Hebrew school?

Oh yes, but only one year because the war broke out. Well from after half a year we started to learn English because Palestine was a British colony. And that's why when I come to England I knew the grammar which was helping me quite well. And then we had to learn Hebrew lessons, English and Latin. So that started after half a year that I was in the high school.

What was the name of the place the high school was in?

Moraja in Wloclawek. And the Polish school had a name, it had letters, I would have to write it down for you because it's very very difficult. And ehm you see all showing that I was going to all these schools and I had all this and I had witnesses here, the

man is dead now but he knew me since I was a little girl. And they could confirm it because the school after the war still existed. Because I went after the war to the school and I saw them and they said to me, the nuns, they said to me, "Only the night before we spoke about you, we looked at the pictures." I don't know how stupid I was that I didn't ask them to make a copy and give me a picture from the school. And a couple of sisters were still there who were teaching me. And they were saying, "Is she alive?" Like before I come.

When did you go?

Soon after the war to see if anybody was alive. You know it's on your conscience. But nobody was there. I went to the town, I walked down there it was only four or five kilometres from Aleksandrow and I went there, nobody was there, no Jewish people at all. And in Aleksandrow the Burgermaster and he called me and he asked me to stay, he wanted to give me a job and all this. I wouldn't stay there nobody was alive. I went to our neighbours, one had our dining room, one had our bedroom and paintings and all this. No Jewish people why could I stay there. I'm starting talking already about what happened after the war.

Let's get back then to 1939, you were in high school for a year?

Yes. In May before the exams were starting we were saying, "Oh I wish the war would break out so we wouldn't have to have these exams..." all this was stupid, nobody realised. It didn't enter my mind. How could anybody imagine, how could anybody think that people could do such terrible things to another human being, it's just incredible. And ehm then there was a holiday, the holiday starts in June, end of June, July and August and we start in September, 1st of September, just like here. But of course the war broke out. Now it was just a normal life, they were talking about the war but they said, "Oh gosh Hitler has no chance. Oh Poland would never be taken." But what was happening in 1939 I can't remember very well.

Did you talk politics at home with your family?

My family was talking but I didn't at twelve. I was thinking about my exams. In Poland you had to have the end of the year exams to see if you are able to go to the next class, if not they left you in the same class again.

It's the same here to a certain extent?

It's not so much you know. It was a better method you see.

So you're saying the first you knew about the war was when the bombs dropped?

Oh no they were talking about the war. They were talking about the war but we didn't know when it was going to break out. Just before the war there was pickets everywhere but you see it was strong Communism among the Jewish people. Mostly I would say 80% young people belonged to the Communist Party and they were fighting as much as they could the Fascists with the working class people. Because the working class people in Poland they were quite poor. They lived practically from one day to another.

We had a maid living in and then we lived in a different place. Then we moved to this 25 Pilsudcki I don't remember the other address because we lived quite a long time, about seven years at 25 Pilsudcki so we didn't have a maid anymore. And my aunty was married and a woman used to come three times a day to clean after the meals and all this, a young woman, her name was Wanda I remember, Wanda

Zbikonska that's right. And why I mentioned this is because after the war I went to see her as well.

And on her off day she used to take me to her place and they used to live in one little room and there was five of them and two beds. They used to have straw put in the beds and for the night they used to take out this straw and I suppose they slept on the floor I don't know how they did it. But they were so very very clean, you could eat from the floor there. And they used to have, they used to make some soup from, when the milk gets sour you have cottage cheese, I know it's Servadka but I don't know how it's called in English and they made this, to make a soup out of it with a potato and I used to love it.

And at home I wouldn't eat, when my mother used to make chicken I would like to have minced meat and when she had minced meat I would like to have... I was a very bad eater, terrible. You know being one child it was very very difficult for my parents. But anyway I know my mother couldn't have any more children, she had a little boy and it was born still and then she didn't have any more children.

I heard her talking to a friend of her or a neighbour, of course things like that were not discussed among children. It was, I mean I never knew that a woman is a virgin lets put it this way. They didn't tell you these things which is very very wrong because when you grow up you would know more how to behave. But ehm this is how narrow minded they were. Maybe when I was older she would've told me but she didn't have the opportunity. That's only what I can think of.

Did your mother make traditional Polish food?

Yes, it had to be chopped fish for Shabbat, Friday night was chicken soup and chicken. And for Saturday the same.

Would she cook on Saturday?

No. No she was religious. No the woman used to come and put a fire, no no.

Did she make things Yiddish?

Oh yes all Yiddish food, which I never knew how to cook because she never told me. I had to experiment myself here in England. And not throwing a lot of stuff out because I didn't like it. Being hungry during the war years I never threw food away. What I mean is, if I made a bad cake I just made pudding out of it but I wouldn't throw anything, I don't even throw away potato. It tastes terrible next day but I will not throw it away I would fry it over or do something but I will not throw food away. And my children were told exactly the same. None of them are fussy with their food. I used to pump into them, "Mummy was one day very very hungry and begging not for a piece of bread but for a piece of dirt to eat and you must eat everything". I was such a bad eater before the war that my father once said to me in Yiddish "Das da versindichen fur ein stickel brod" do you understand no?

No.

And he said it and he told me and it was true. He said it and I did. I never forget his words. And I always remembered afterwards. So I kept saying to my children, really, and they all ate everything. My daughter-in-laws are quite happy that they eat everything you know. And thank God my husband is also not fussy because he also went hungry when he was in Russia. He was in Siberia so he met with hunger as well.

When I was going to the high school I had a crush on a boy. There were two good looking boys in my class but ehm one everybody was running after him, it's Risiek, I've forgotten his other name, and the other one was Adas. And ehm I had mostly a crush on this Adas and funny enough in the high school they used to pick up pretty girls and they used to buy them chocolates during the break and I was one of those, funny enough. And they used to buy me chocolate, it was lovely, but Risiek he had an eye on somebody else. This girl is alive, her name is Stefa Arant and she lives somewhere in Israel now, married to a man called Rappaport. And ehm Risiek is alive. He lives in America and he is a doctor. Risiek Jakob. It was very nice and happy days, what can I say. Which finished unfortunately too quickly.

What sort of games did you play with your friends or did you...?

Monopoly and ehm as a very young child we used to have little shops and sell to each other with dolls, like children play. And ehm post office, we used to have post office, we couldn't buy those things, but collected stamps, made little letters and pens. I used to take my mothers, I used to play like, we used to have drug stores separate from chemists. A chemists was strictly for medicine so I used to take my mother's old bottles from her, perfumes, I used to collect them when she had an empty bottle and put them on the dressing table. We had also the dressing table with three mirrors and I used to have this shop and used to sell and buy. And snakes and ladders, monopoly and draughts and reading quite a lot.

You were a serious reader?

Not a reader as to, I also had to be careful what I was reading because, school books mostly, because parents were a little bit you know. I used to belong to the library, also the organisation I used to belong to, they used to have a library as well.

The Zionist organisation?

Yes yes. And my mother was a very strong Zionist. I told you that my mother's sister was married to a widower and two of his children went to Israel. One of the daughters, I don't remember her name, she left, must be about five years or six years before the war, for Palestine. But one of the sons his name was Ilhak and my mother was a Zionist which did not believe in fighting but buying your land. He was in an organisation where you fight for your land. And I remember my mother used to have discussions with him all the time and then he went to Israel.

F94 - End of Side B

F95 - Side A

... on 1st of September at ten o'clock, at seven o'clock they start bombing already our town because we were living not far from the German border. But ehm we never realised how bad it was going to be. Even with the bombing my father just over the road wanted to see where the bombs are going to fall. And when the whole town was shaking he quickly came in and we went to the shelter and we didn't have any shelters as such, we went to the cellar. And we went back after the planes went back, we went back to our place, to our rooms and then we slept and the next day the planes came. I don't know, my father wasn't there. I think I already said that before, this experience that they hit our house and so what we did, we packed up a few things afterwards and we went out for the day out of town into the fields, because in the fields they weren't bombing, there was nothing to bomb. And that's what was going on for another day.

When the Germans came we were not home so my father wanted to be together with his brother who was living in Lubraniec with his family. So what we did, I don't remember how we got there. Oh yes my father bought a cart and a horse. I know we ended up in my uncle's in Lubraniec and we were together there during the bombing and when the Germans came we were in Lubraniec, we were scared stiff. We were just shaking from fear.

Was this the same day, the first day?

No we went out into the fields and then my father thought to be together, wait a minute we came back again. Before the Germans came, during the bombing we went to my father's brother in Lubraniec and the Germans came I think three or four days after the war broke out, I don't remember exactly, but I know soon after the bombing the Germans came. And we were in Lubraniec and the mayor with two other representatives from the town hall were greeting the Germans with wine. We didn't see this happening because we were all very scared and we just shut, my uncle also

had a shop and he shut everything and we were just sitting there and shivering, wondering what's going to happen. And then one of them looked out of the window sees everything okay and we opened and the Germans came and we went back to Aleksandrow.

When we went back to Aleksandrow one of the neighbours who used to come very often to my father, German neighbours, because there was a lot of Germans living in Aleksandrow, he was a butcher and he came to my father to speak politics and my father said, "Oh Poland has Hitler under the shoe" and he repeated that after the war and they came and arrested my father which was still the end of September or beginning of October. And my grandfather used to deal with raw skins which he had to buy from the butchers. And one of the butchers which my grandfather used to deal with, my mother knew him very well, he was a German of course and my mother went to him and begged him to get my father out. And they got my father out from the jail and then the next day we saw how they were already evacuating, taking the Jewish people, the poor ones and they were holding their bedding in their hands and you know they had a lot of children. And my father said, "It's no good, we have to run from here." So that's when we bought the cart and the horse and packed up whatever we could and went to my father's brother to Lubraniec. And we stayed there. My uncle was a Yudenalteste, what that means is, he used to belong to the

It's literally the elder of the community?

Yes and when they needed people to do the work they used to come to this synagogue, to this... Oh wait a minute I forgot to tell you how they burned our Shul in Aleksandrow. Oh I forgot to tell you the fear, och the petrifying scare. It was terrible. After they arrested my father and they let him go.

How long was he arrested for?

Only two nights that's all. That was all happening in September, straight as they came in. Then we see suddenly a very big fire and they were burning the synagogue, that was the first thing they were doing. I don't know if it was the Poles that were doing it because when the Germans came in they made the Poles, my husband would know the name, they used to take the Poles to sign, to also join the army and some of the Poles were willing to do so. And they were collaberating with the Germans. So I don't know if the Germans were burning the synagogue or the Poles but it was really petrifying and as I say the next day they were taking the poor people, taking them away. We did not know where or what. So my father got scared and we bought a cart and horse and we went to my uncle's, to Lubraniec, and as I say he was one of the Yudenalteste and he had connections right to the Germans, when they needed people to do the work, how many people here, how many people to peel potatoes, how many people to weed the street, how many people to go on the building sites. So they had to take the people, they had to go to the houses and tell the people, "You have to do this, you have to do this," and we had to do the work for nothing.

So your uncle organised that?

Yes the other people as well. Like a Yudenalteste was probably about six or seven people and they had to go to the houses and say, "You have to do this work today, tomorrow," and that's how they were doing it. They sent me to peel potatoes. And one day I was peeling potatoes for the German soldiers and I came home to my aunty because we were staying with them and they took my father and mother away and sent them back to Aleksandrow.

The Germans did?

The Germans. Because they said all the people who did not belong there, they had to go back, they were not from the same camp. It was lucky I was just working otherwise they would take me back as well. Can you imagine what I was going through, I didn't want to show the sorrow to my aunty and uncle. I used to go to the toilet, and the toilets there were outside, not inside, they didn't have any canalisation there you see. So I'd lock myself in there and I was crying bitterly. My uncle was very good to me, aunty was a little bit sharp, but uncle was very very good. Of course it was his brother.

Anyway Aleksandrow didn't want them, they sent them back again to Lubraniec. There we continued with the work just before Christmas in winter, again placards, 'All the people who do not come from this town they have to leave Lubraniec' we were packing again. And we had a sleigh with a horse, we hired somebody that time. And my father sent, he had a friend in Warsaw so my mother's jewellery and my mothers furs, whatever was of value, he sent to his friend in Warsaw thinking that we were going to Warsaw. He thought, you go to a big town, you may hide a bit better, you see. That's what he probably was thinking. I don't know what he thought.

So it was a terrible journey and we stopped in a town called Kutno where we had some friends of mine. I was going to school with her and I told you once I went to the church with her and all this, they were living in Kutno, so we went to them. They were Polish. We stayed there, they were very very good, they gave us their saloon and put beds in and we were sleeping there and eating together, cooking together, we didn't care at that time whether it is kosher or not kosher, we just ate what we could, it was already starting to be scarce. Anyway this is all 1939 going into 40.

We were staying there for about two or three weeks and one of the people came, he just looked, they were called Lebiezinski, this family was called. My friend was named Krysia, her parents I don't remember their first names. They came to them and they said, "It's no good you keeping the Jewish people, they've started to know, some Poles don't like it and you can be persecuted for it". So my father went to town and I don't know how he got this place, it was just these people were living... When we were living still with this Lebiezinski my father went to the station to buy tickets to

go to Warsaw and he met somebody who was a train driver, who came from Aleksandrow. And he knew us very well, so he told my father "If you want to kill your wife from hunger or your daughter, don't go to Warsaw, it's very very bad". So we didn't go and we went back and stayed with these Lebiedzinski till these people came and warned them that they might get themselves into trouble. So we went.

So my father found a place. They were living over the station, you had to pass through the rails, these Lebiedzinskis, just over the other side of the rails was a family called Kronzilber who had a grocery shop. And the shop was still open, that was the beginning of 1940. And these people did not suffer yet you see. None yet suffered very badly only in occasional cases. Only we had to leave because we were living so near the border and we were one of the first ones. They gave us their salon and we had beds there and my mother, they were a religious family, they were elderly people and they had a young daughter, one daughter as well. And this grocery shop was still open and we used to help in the greengrocery shop selling because there was no school, no nothing.

I forgot to tell you, already in Lubraniec, in Aleksandrow already we had to live with this star, straight away when the Germans came. We didn't wear the star first, in Aleksandrow we had a three corner one, yellow only on the back. And in Aleksandrow we had to walk on the road, not on the pavement any more. And in Kutno was the same. But in Kutno I was getting a little bit away because nobody knew me. So I didn't bother so much with this star. But of course we also had, which I forgot to tell you, special documents with the Abdruckfinger..

That was special for the Jews?

Only for the Jews, special papers. We had to go to a special place to get it. Everybody had to go and get it, that was in Kutno. I don't remember in Lubraniec or Aleksandrow but in Kutno I remember. I remember the place, it's very vague you know and we had to have like special documents.

And were you asked to show them?

Oh yes on the street.

Quite a lot?

Oh yes, as a Jew. Walking along the road, they would ask you. But ehm I was getting a little bit away, I didn't look like a Jewish girl. And I took a little bit of chance to walk on the pavement because the Jewish community was quite big in Kutna, I think 11,000 Jewish people there. And ehm we used to meet young people like me, but it was a curfew by nine or eight o'clock, you had to be back. Although my father was walking backwards and forwards until I came back. But what enjoyment did we have, nothing. So we used to sing and we used to read all sorts of things to each other. You know aloud, or poems or something to each other, just to entertain ourselves. And sometimes you would put on a little bit of music and had a little dance and all this. Not knowing what was waiting for us.

When you went out on the street and walked on the pavement, you left your yellow star behind?

Of course. But ehm once I had a terrible experience there. They used to knock in the night and used to turn the place upside down, the Jewish places. And one night they knocked to us. I had been lying in bed with the flu, I had a temperature, at the time I was about fourteen. Yes it was after my birthday, my birthday was in February, I was fourteen. And with the crowbars they would open the door, we were already in bed. We asked who they are, so they said, I don't know what they said. Only one thing,

our room was the last room, to go through to our room, they had to go through the dining room and their bedroom. And the Kronzilbers daughter was sleeping with the mother and the father in a separate bed. She, when they heard knocking she quickly dressed herself and through the back she ran off. And they came right up to our bedroom, I didn't think to dress because I had the flu and had a temperature and my father ran as well and Mr Kronzilber.

As they came into our room and the women, Mrs Kronzilber and my mother stayed behind. We didn't have a chance to run really because we were in the last room and I was lying in bed. He opened the door and they went straight into our bedroom and they had the chance to run and we didn't. And my mother ran I think, yes. Or she was in the other room or something. They came straight into my bedroom and you know, whatever we had we'd tied up into my nightie. Whatever we had, some money or something like this, into the nightie thinking that I was not well, they won't touch me you see, because they were a little bit scared of any illness. But they didn't. I also ran and they caught me, that's right. I remember now. They caught me and they tore my nightie and all the money fell on the floor, they were not interested in money. They told me to go to bed, but they didn't rape me. It's terrible to tell, I never talked about it. (Interviewee emotionally upset)

I remember now it was not like that. I ran as well, I was already over the train in my nightie, not dressed, it was February, the beginning of March, I know it was snow. They caught my mother, that's right. I was running to the Polish people you see and they caught my mother and they start to beat her up and told her to call me. My mother said she called me but she didn't mean me to come back but I come back. Now I remember. And that's what they start doing to me. They left my mother and my mother started to shout on the street.

I forgot to tell you that a man who worked on the trains. A German young man, he used to come to the shop and he liked me. He said after the war he would take me. He didn't know I was Jewish. They used to come to the shop, they didn't know who we were. And my mother was shouting on the street, and he'd just come from work, he had night shift. And my mother told him there was an S.S. man there with a

civilian and they were doing something to her daughter. So he came, no, he says, "You go back." And he called the police because it was Rassenschande, you musn't have anything with a Jewish woman. You know what I mean.

So he, I'm lying naked and I have my mind still. We used to have muffs you know and my identification paper was in the muffs. And I undone the zip and I showed them that I was only fourteen. I am only a youngster. You know they start mucking about, I'm not going into it and suddenly my mother comes and she takes a knife and she wants to kill him. So I says, "No no mamma they didn't do nothing". I mean they didn't rape me as such. And then they could hear through the shop German voices because the police came you see.

The German boy had called them?

Yes. The police came and when they heard German voices they just left the room and they went off you see. And what happened then I don't know and I didn't want to know. But I was very very ill. And my father was already afraid I should stay there because the pub was not far and he was afraid somebody might say, "Oh there are two Jewesses living there".

These were Polish people then who'd done this to you?

No German. S.S. man and a civilian. I don't know who he was, the civilian. I don't know one civilian and one S.S. man.

But they still ran off when they heard the German police?

Yes. They spoke to them something and they ran off. But at least they left me alone because it could've been terrible circumstances you see. But the fear, I can't tell you what I went through. But for six weeks I was running a very high temperature. I was not staying... The cousin who is now in America his parents and his sister was there as well, living in the same town quite further away and I stayed with them six weeks until I got myself better. And came back home.

You weren't with your mother during this time?

No. And I didn't see them for six weeks, it was too far to walk you see. They had to wear their stars to go, they would be afraid to go without stars, it was too dangerous.

You must've been very frightened?

Oh terrible, you can't imagine. But I suppose that is nothing when I went through more. Then we stayed with these Kronzilbers and I mean I didn't go out any more, I was already ill, I was frightened, I was scared stiff. In May, beginning of May they took rich people from Kutno, a thousand people and these Kronzilbers were also classed as rich people. They took them and they took us and put us in a tobacco factory which was not in use before the war. And they put us like pigs on straw and everyday S.S. men were coming, a few times a day they were putting (CANNOT HEAR) or something there and they said "It's missing," another one went and didn't come back. This was how they were doing it to us for two weeks.

One day they come, called my father up. My father was a biggish man, we heard a shot, they told him to undress himself, he had to put Tefillin on and then threw him out (Interviewee emotionally upset) and they were kicking him back to us. Then they took one man, a jeweller because some German soldier left their watch or something to be repaired, I don't know what and they wanted it from it and they took him away

like that and he couldn't give them it because they took it away and they killed him in front of everybody. That poor man.

They kept us like that for two or three weeks I think. And they took all the people from Kutno and put them in a sugar factory which was not in use also from before the war. The other people from the town they could take all their things with them, whatever they could, some furniture. We didn't have anything any more, we weren't there. Bare floors and when the rain was... there was so much water we had to stand on someone else's tables. Some people gave us some beds and bedding, it was the most terrible experience I was put through there. Auschwitz was nothing, people were starving from hunger there. They were throwing bread over the fences. My uncle with his five sons was there as well and this person who is...

F95 - End of Side A

F95 - Side B

When we were there in Kutno in this lager we stayed there I think it was about six weeks, it was just terrible. There was no food, my father one day came without any wedding ring. And he brought me a glass of milk with a roll or piece of bread. Because somebody else had a little bit more than other people. But in the end they just didn't deliver any food inside of the camp, they were just throwing the food over the fences. It was just dreadful. In this same camp my mother's brother with four sons was there. They had really five sons but one son was in the Polish army and we did not know what happened to him. And my mother's cousins were looking after me when I was not well, they were also with their daughter and their son lives now in America which after the war I found out. I will tell you later about it.

Lucky that my uncle in Lubraniec, my father's brother was one of the Yudenalteste and one of the letters which we were sending from the beginning when we got into the camp, got to him. He received it and I don't know how he did it, but policemen, a German policeman, not S.S. man, came with a letter to the camp and they let us out. So that was very very lucky because none of these people are alive and I really don't know what happened to them.

Can you explain how you got out, what led up to you...?

The German policeman came and they called us out. Because as you understand there was also like a little office there where Polish people were working. There was only eleven thousand, maybe already ten thousand Jewish people because they were dying there. What they were doing with the bodies I don't know. I was just too young to understand what was happening. It just was not penetrating. And nobody was working there in this camp. nobody was doing anything. They just put us there. And I don't know how long these people were there. Because as I say we were only six weeks, lucky. And when we got, what can I explain, it was just, people were starving.

And I think typhus got into it because they started throwing food over the fences. I just don't know. It was just a miracle they let us out of there.

Who was throwing the food in?

I don't know. The Germans were coming or the Poles I just don't know, they were just throwing food.

And inside this camp there was a whole group of people just sitting, just there?

Of course that was like black market some people maybe knew some people who was bringing some food and they were paying them money or they had some jewellery. We didn't have anything any more because when they took us to the sugar factory, they took everything away from us. We didn't take anything with us. Anyway we didn't have much, we'd already left our home over a year ago and we didn't have anything with us anymore. I told you whatever jewellery my mother had and some possessions, they were sent to Warsaw to my father's friend and we never heard anything about it any more. Because that time was the protectorat, what that meant I don't know.

They put people like us in the ghetto and the Jewish people were living already separate. But in the ghetto they used to work for the Germans and they gave you food for it, which I will come to later. I can't remember anything for this Krapiere lager, I only know that it was terrible. Some other people gave us two beds, some linen, you know covers to sleep on because the other people came direct from Kutno and they were allowed to take whatever they could. But these people I told you, two or three weeks ago they took the richest people from Kutno, I explained to you before, we couldn't take anything.

You had a shelter to sleep in?

Oh yes in this sugar factory.

You were sleeping indoors and the Germans just left you entirely alone for six weeks?

Yes.

Can you estimate how many other people were there?

As I said I think it was eleven thousand. I don't know how many people were in Kutno, I don't know. But all the people from this town were brought in the night to this factory.

You called it a something lager?

A Krapiere lager, a death camp.

That's Polish?

No German. Krapiere is German. And death camp is in English.

Do you now know how it was that you got your release?

My uncle he sent this letter with this German, this German came right up to this camp and spoke to the people who were in charge. Because I think in the office there were some Germans as well in charge. But whatever we had to do, they used to tell the Jewish people. But we did not do any work direct for the Germans like we used to in the ghetto. They just didn't take us, they just throw bits and pieces and that's it. And if you had some money, you know how it is, some people knew people and they had a little bit more, so they were selling things. And ehm when we got by train, they took us by train, we had to walk to the trains.

With the Germans?

With the Germans.

But what did the piece of paper say, how was your father released, you don't know that?

This I don't know, we never saw the paper. We just, they called us up and we had to dress ourselves and we went.

Because your uncle had some influence?

Yes because he was a Yudenalteste as I explained to you before. He was chosen to help who should go to work and whether they should go to work and how many people have to go to work to do this job and that job. When we got to Lubraniec by

train we had to also change to another train because the big trains did not go to Lubraniec you know the steam trains, it used to be called Koleyka. It's a small train not a big one, I don't know how to explain in English. With me it's becoming like a nightmare I can't remember everything. Anyway we were there, we had to, everybody knew the Jewish people so we had to wear the stars in front of the garment and the back of the garment. And we had to walk in the middle of the road, we were not allowed to walk on the pavement. They left us alone.

I'm sorry I have to correct myself that is not true. They did not leave us alone. The shul was already burnt when the Germans came, what they did was took the rabbi when I was there and ehm, I mean I directly didn't see it because my parents wouldn't let me out, but they got him out and he had to sweep the streets and they had to... Let's say if you had to carry something with a wagon, they didn't have horses but the Jewish people had to push it. And they took all the books from all the homes, they also came to my uncle, all the Jewish books, they... They upset this place upside down and they burned it all in the middle of the market place. And they were doing all sorts of things which was very very frightening.

And every time a knock was on the door because we tried to have it closed all the time. I mean there was no business going, we lived in fear. And every time a knock, on the door, my stomach was going over I want to be sick and I can't be sick from fear. Because you see the people living in Lubraniec did not go through so much as we went through. We were already a year in front with all these problems.

And ehm they took first all the men, it was on the streets a placard that all the men had to be on this and this time, there and there. Which was early in the morning. And my father went and my uncle, he had two sons and a daughter as I told you before. And I remember I ran, I dressed myself and I ran and I was lying... Because it was not in the market it was somewhere outside the town, that I can remember. And I was lying in the bushes and I thought my father was coughing. I could hear his sound, because you can imagine when the men left what a state we were all in. We knew they were separating us and my father used to say "As long as we are together, whatever they do, as long as we are together." We were running from one place to

another just to be together. And we never saw him any more. Then we had a letter in about three weeks time, that the people that are not so well and youngsters, young boys, are coming back. We waited, waited, waited, they never came back.

None of them?

No. And after the men went we had to live, we'd lived before, my aunt had some money and still the work was carrying on, still we had to go to the Germans to carry on the work. No no, some men were left behind but my uncle also went. Some men were left behind I remember because a friend of my cousins ehm Abram his name was. He was much older than I, his friend was there and they were business people but they changed to decorating. And they were decorating rooms for the Germans and they left them. That was a father I think and two or three sons. And they were left behind. And a friend of my cousin he used to come and visit us quite often. And he used to bring us some food as well. Then after three months when the men were taken away, they took all the women, one o'clock in the morning and whatever we could carry we were allowed to take.

Just what you could carry?

Just what we could carry. And I remember that Henry the friend of my cousin, came and helped us to take the stuff.

He was a German?

No a Jew, but they were decorating, but they finished them off as well, none of them are alive anyway you see. So what they did with them in the end I don't know.

Because after the war I did go to Lubraniec and I did go to Aleksandrow and nobody is alive you see.

When you say they were decorating for the Germans, do you mean the military or the people?

They were decorating for the civilians or the military I don't know. They were quite free to walk about.

But they weren't paid?

I don't know what he was doing, I only know that they had quite enough food, because he did come and brought some food. And my uncle also had a textile business and they had a friend who was a German, a very very close friend. And my uncle as soon as the Germans came, gave a lot of materials to hide by this German friend you see and what he was doing this friend of my cousin's, this Henry, he used to go there and he would take a piece of material and sell some and bring my aunt the money you see, which helped us and we were not hungry. And when as I said they took us one night, it was still summer. When they took my father it was very cold, it must've been the end of the winter. But I remember it was very cold because when I was sitting, lying in the bushes, the steam was coming out of my mouth. You know you remember such silly things, but that is how I remember.

This was the winter of 1940?

41 I think. Yes because when we went to this Krapiere lager it's 1941 we are talking now I think.

The place you were in in Lubraniec was that a ghetto?

No. It was only a small town. That's why they took all the women and sent to Litzmannstadt ghetto, Lodz as well, that's when the trouble started for me. When I got there we were... The people from Lodz were already in the ghetto and people who are coming from other towns were put together with the families of the people from Lodz.

Litzmannstadt was German, Lodz was Polish. And we were living with a family, she had a son in one room and myself and my mother. No bed, no nothing, but they were kind to take us. We used to have rations... Oh I forgot to tell you that all the time we had rations, that's how we lived as well. Even in Lubraniec we had rations already, cards.

What sort of food?

It just was bread and potatoes and all this. You see Lubraniec being a small town everybody knew my aunty and my uncle as well, so one of the cousins used to go and get a sack of flour and we used to do it all ourselves, bread and all this.

Did you get together with other people or...?

No no just the family, because we were scared. Anyway I am going back to the ghetto to Litzmannstadt ghetto. And that was just dreadful, that was a nightmare. You walked along the streets, people were dying, lying dying from hunger, skeletons everywhere. I thought, oh my God what am I going to do here! Then from the people who came, we were, I don't know how I got there, but I got in to somewhere where

they were forming a childrens hospital in a place called Marishinietz in the ghetto. A part of the ghetto was called Marishinietz.

And a lady was there called Maryla who knew very well the president Rumkowski, he was a Jewish man. And his brother became the director of the hospitals in the ghetto. And I don't know, some people said that this Maryla was a girlfriend of his, I don't know he was much older than her.

I don't know but living in the same town everybody knew each other, I did not know anybody and I had to pass time. And it was very very difficult to me. I went to her and I said, "Look I just come and we haven't got anywhere to live. My mother is not well..." which she wasn't, as soon as they took my father away she was going to pieces. "Will you please take me I can't go back or I will starve, will you please take me to do some work in the hospital?" So she said, "A child is going to look after a child?" I said, "Look I can do the cleaning I don't have to look directly after the children, I can do anything as long as I can live with my mother somehow." Anyway I suppose people felt a little bit sorry for me, I don't know, she took me in and we had a little place to live there as well.

In the hospital?

No no. I'm sorry I am doing wrong. Then when I got this job we were paid, it was special money for the ghetto. There were factories in the ghetto to which I'll come afterwards and tell you what I was doing afterwards. That was true, I had a very tough time working in this hospital, but I kept myself, I was very tidy and clean. And I really worked hard and I was an example to all the girls who were working there. Even when the president came to look, to see how the hospital was running it was an example.

What were you doing in the hospital?

Anything. You see there was children, young children with T.B. and boils. All over they used to have boils.

From malnutrition?

That's right. So what did they do, they used to call these injections auto haemo which we took blood from your bottom and put it in your hand, jut to circulate the blood better you see. Because they didn't have any medicine, nothing. Anyway when I was working in the hospital I was cleaning I was giving food around, they used to come with soup in a big kettle. I was just doing anything that was necessary.

You didn't do any nursing?

I did wash them and I used to change the dressings, they taught me how to do this and I was doing it. I worked myself up so that I didn't have to clean after.

The staff in the hospital were they Jewish?

Yes. The whole ghetto was Jewish. The policemen, everybody was Jewish. We had shops because you had Russians, the shops were only co-op, co-operatives, like grocery co-operatives, there were offices where you had to pay for your gas, gas we didn't have, electricity. And even for your rent for whatever you possessed.

If you didn't have a job and you didn't have ghetto money, you lived on ration cards?

Yes. I lived on ration cards anyway they didn't give you money. But they in the hospital I had a little extra food. Because you see when you give to the children, there was a little bit left so we all shared between each other., In the hospital it was very good, my mother still lived with these people, I used to sleep in the hospital. But what I did, I went to certain offices, I don't remember where or what, but I know we got a little room for ourselves, not far from Marishinietz. It was a little bit of a walk, maybe about half a kilometre.

Ehm that was a room which we had in the middle a little cooker, no furniture, only a table and two chairs, I put a little curtain with a string where I'd hang up any clothes which I had, which were very little and two beds. And in this same house, we had a co-op where they were distributing once a week bread. But it had nothing to do with me, I mean I didn't have any more bread than anybody else you know, because they didn't bake the bread, they just distributed for so many cards. You had to put your name down that you are going to collect your bread there. And when you came with the card and they put a stamp onto it you see.

Where did the bread come from?

From the ghetto, everything was baked in the ghetto. And ehm so I also managed during the day to run to my mother with a bit of soup you see. The children were dying there was not enough food, no medicine, there were children who didn't have any parents because in Marishinietz where did the children come from. They had like huts there and there were children who did not have any parents. They were orphans and that's why they came to this little hospital, because they lived there, they had school there, teachers and all this. And some children came from the main part of the ghetto and they were also going to schools there. Now the children who were orphans who were living there and in every little hut they had like grown ups to look after them who were teachers.....

F95 - End of Side B

F96 - Side A

And unfortunately one day lorries came, covered lorries and they started taking all the children, pushing them into the lorries. We were just lucky they didn't take the staff, the nurses. The children were hiding behind my apron, crying. I don't know if they knew where they were going because I didn't know where they were going. I really didn't. I really did not know what was going on. I was very ignorant. Then we found out the children went into these lorries and they finished them off in the lorries. So the hospital was finished and all Marishinietz was finished. We didn't have any hospital there, I don't know what they did with the rest of the children and I came back to my mother and started looking for a job.

And I found myself a job knitting. They were knitting big table cloths for the Germans. The German woman used to come, they used to choose the pattern and that's how this factory was keeping themselves. And you used to get paid, I don't know how much. I forgot to tell you when I was working in this hospital I got ill, very ill. So my mother came and took my job and she used to work instead of me there. And that was the first time I saw my mother washing the floors. But still she says to me "As long as you're better." I'm sorry I had to go back, I had to tell you this.

When I was working in the knitting factory also everybody had to work in the ghetto. When you worked you used to get a card or a book, I don't remember and with this every day there was centres where you would go and get soup. I didn't have to go because I used to get the soup in the factory. And when I was working in the hospital I used to get it in the hospital. But my mother did not work so I found her a job to work in a kitchen. And at least she was not hungry, but she was getting terribly swollen, she was getting ill in front of my eyes. When I was working in this factory knitting the table cloths and serviettes, that's how I taught myself knitting.

Women who were wives of the men who were working direct for the Germans also had positions in a co-op, the men had positions in an office somewhere, the wives did not work but they had to produce their jobs, they did work. So mostly they belonged

to the knitting factory, so they didn't have to knit, they had women who knitted for them, gave back the work to them and they got the soup. But this soup was given to the person who was knitting. Do you understand, like homework. They used to call it homework. So that's what I was doing before my mother had a job I did that work, so I used to work practically all night to do the work for the other woman.

You were doing two peoples jobs?

Yes yes. For my mother too. I was just a father, a husband and a daughter to my mother. She just was going to pieces.

She was helpless then?

She was just helpless.

Was she physically ill or...?

Just physicall and mentally. When they took my father away the world fell down on her. Anyway some of the girls sitting on the back benches working, used to do the homework and they were caught. They were caught and they stopped their soup. Unfortunately I was the youngest one but very energetic and I started to strike, we struck we didn't do any work because you see they were looking out for the Jewish people and they knew that some mothers were helpless and couldn't do the work. And the children are trying to help their parents for this extra bit of food. So you look away the girls stop doing it and that's it. So they arrested us, the whole group, I don't know how many of us, twenty in a group.

It was a big factory it was a few rooms you see. And we stopped working and they arrested us and they took us to the police which was called Sonderkommando. And they used to take, we were very lucky, that night they did not come and arrest us and send us off. We were just lucky.

But I'm sorry I forgot again about something. My mother was already very ill she was already paralysed. Because I remember when they arrested me, I asked the policeman, I said, "My mother is lying there starving," because I used to leave two chairs next to her. One with a potty, not a potty, something to slip on.

A bed pan?

A bed pan, because she was paralysed on the left side and she could lift herself up this side to use it. And the other with a bit of drink and some food that I had, because I used to buy in the ghetto peel from potatoes, used to chop it up fine and steam it on the frying pan with the steam. And I used to leave it for her with a piece of bread and I used to get, we used to get a monthly ration of oil. A little bottle, it must be about a quarter of a pint. So I used to give her every morning with a spoon hoping that it might make her strong.

Anyway so he came with me, the policeman came with me and helped me to chop some wood and make a little fire and warm up a little drink for her. And I had to go back. But the next day they released us. What am I talking about, they didn't release us, they took us outside the ghetto, we had to work and pack direct for the Germans in boxes, instruments that were heating up the engines of the plane.

This was a different factory outside the ghetto?

Yes we didn't go back any more to the knitting factory, they took us there. They probably already were planning maybe when the Sonderkommando came in the night but they were already planning to take us there to help them you see. And my mother was left lying there, but the policeman came with me that night and he helped me to do the necessary for my mother. Can I go back?

Yes please.

Now as I told you in the same house where I was living was this co-op. I couldn't understand when I used to go with my book for bread for myself and my mother, because the bread my mother used to get but not the soup because she didn't work. And the man who was in charge, it's lower than a director I don't know what you call it in English, Kierownik it was in Polish. He always called me and I used to be one of the first ones, not standing in the queue. And ehm also I took the advantage and I just, after a days work, my mother was still all right at that time when it happened.

One day when my mother was working, I told you I found her a job in the kitchens where she had to peel potatoes and there was quite a lot of dampness there and what could I do. Anyway I went home and he comes in, this man and starts making advances to me, so I ran out, left him in this room, ran out quickly from the room. And of course I didn't get my bread first, I had to wait till the last to have the bread. And it was a man with five children, would you believe it. That's how it was.

A Jewish man?

A Jewish man yes. To be truthful with you, I used to say to myself I would never go to a Jewish country, honestly I was so bitter with the behaviour of the people. Then of course I didn't get a book for the electricity or nothing, everything was spent, I did not know what was happening. Suddenly what happened, because I was supposed to

pay, the bill was coming into the co-op where this man was working. Anyway so I got a bill to pay for the electricity, so I went to the office and I pay it.

So this young man, he was about twenty one, he wanted to make a date with me, and I never went out with any boys. I was fourteen at that time and ehm I didn't. And I come home and I said to my mother that this young man... She said, "Why didn't you ask him to come here?" I said, "Mother what am I asking him to, this beautiful place?" Anyway the second time I go there the following month again, so I said "Okay you can come and see me." So he came and his brother-in-law was in command of all the co-ops. So my bread I go to without a queue, my groceries I go to without a queue. Not for anything, he was a nice young man, he just liked me. And we used to go out.

The curfew was till eight o'clock and we used to start work early and finish early. They had to give us a couple of free hours to do something because of the curfew. Anyway he used to come, we used to go out, I met his friends and we spent always a couple of hours in the evening. Until of course he put his arm around me and I finished it, again I had to stand for hours in the queues. (Laughs)

Where did you used to go?

Jennifer, I should live to my grandson's barmitzva, I'm telling you the truth. I'm telling you the truth. Though my mother used to tell me, "If you bring me one slice of bread more than you should, I throw you out." She knew what was going on there. "We have to live with what we've got and that's it," She said. And that's how it was. Maybe I was wrong maybe I should have done, maybe I should have got more food for my mother, she maybe would be alive, I don't know. Anyway...

Tell me what sort of places would you go to with these friends?

Just to one another's houses. Some had a little bit nicer places than I, because I told you some people who were living there we came already when the ghetto was formed, we had to go and stay with other families and then I had got this room, I was very lucky. Then also I went to another office where they gave me the bedding. Because we didn't have anything when we came there.

You didn't know anybody there?

Nobody. Unfortunately I had to stand in the queue and worry myself if we would get wood or if we would get some coal or potatoes, I had to stand in the queue and I had to carry everything on my back. I didn't have anybody. Because I did not know anybody, just accidentally as you can hear what I'm saying to you.

Then when I was working in the factory that I told you about. I met a girl there and she didn't live far from where I was living but she was with her whole family. The whole family was brought into the ghetto. They were from Lodz, they used to live there. She had two brothers and a mother and the father, they were all there. And ehm they were also better off because the older brother had also some direct contact with the Germans, so they were not hungry. And the younger brother who had also a little eye on me, he was working in a greengrocery factory where he used to give me little notes and I used to go there and I used to get some extra, whether it was beetroots or carrots or potatoes and it helped me. But he was a very nice young man, but again the same thing happened when he put his arm around me, I lost again, I had to queue again.

But still it was very very tough. They used to closing the roads and they used to start and evacuate people. When I was working in this factory directly for the Germans, we used to have a little bit extra soup so I used to take a soup for my mother from there, but I couldn't go through the proper road, because it was not allowed to leave there. And I had to go between the... There was only an ordinary fence and I could

get through it, but I had to go through the fields and it was winter, it was very very cold and snowy. And I had to go through this terrible, when the earth gets frozen, I don't know but God was with me, I never fell running to my mother. Going back I fell about ten times, but God was somehow with me.

And ehm the director was also a Jewish man and as my mother was so ill, I said to him "Look I'm not from Lodz, I'm here with my mother and my mother is very very ill, would it be possible for me to get her to the hospital?" and he got her in to the hospital. But then when my mother was lying in hospital somebody told her that this particular man, I don't remember his name, he was a very good looking young man, he does a bit of business with the girls. So my mother said I should be careful, but he never approached me or anything. And he tried to help me as much as he could. Even when they were giving rations for shoes I had from him and I went to get a pair of shoes. And when I got home one was different from the other, but I was happy to have a pair of shoes. (Laughs)

But anyway the ghetto was the worse part for me. Seeing my mother in this terrible terrible state and when it was raining, it started to rain just where her bed was, lying there. I had to spend all night with the basin because I couldn't move her, she was in the hospital for about a fortnight, they put some weight on her...

A weight?

A weight on her leg to stretch her.

To strengthen her?

Yes yes. Then they brought her back home, she was not better, she was in a terrible terrible state, she was in terrible pain, she was all sore, her bottom was sore and my neighbour next door, they had only a little room, they were a couple living there.

They said that somebody had this ring and I always remember running in the night for this ring, she was screaming from pain and it was terribly dangerous. And I got this rubber ring for her and it was a terrible life, terrible to see her in this terrible state. I just don't know how I got through it. I just don't know. And then when they started evacuating and they were closing our road. So I quickly before I went to work, I dumped her in the garden and went to work and prayed to God that they didn't find her.

In the winter this was?

No that was not really winter, that was already like spring. I was in the ghetto for one and a half years. Nearly two years. And when I come back I had to schlep her back, carry her back, she couldn't do anything. Worms were on her legs.

They were coming during the day to take people away?

Yes.

Just at random?

Yes yes. And they were closing the roads, but I had been working. They already did that when I was working in the hospital. I remember they stopped me once and I had this hospital uniform and a card where I was allowed to walk about with working in the hospital. At that time they were already doing it and I already dumped her that time in the garden.

Did your mother know what was going on?

Yes she knew, she aware. And we were starving.

Did you know where people were taken?

I thought they were taking them to work. But I knew that they could not take my mother. I would go alone by myself but I could not leave my mother. You see everybody was practically gone and I was with my mother. I used to go to another room. Some days they didn't raid. So some days I used to go to another place and maybe there was a bit of flour there or something when they took the people away, they left something so I used to go to places and take food and some water.

When they took me away the last time I think it was the end of 43. When they took me the last time I think it was the end of 43. It was a Sunday. Till now I didn't go to work any more. Till now I was hiding myself in the cellar or in the loft. And when the Germans came and she was lying there, because I couldn't shift her any more, when she was lying there, she used to say that I went for the ambulance so that they would collect her. If she said she was by herself they would finish her off you see.

She spoke beautiful German my mother, she spoke German and Russian beautiful. And when they left I came down again you see, that was when one Sunday I just put some flour with water and made a little fire to make something to eat, like a bread whatever you call it. Two S.S. men came and I had my rucksack always ready, and my mother was lying there and I just stood in the door. I was afraid even to go to say goodbye, because they would kill me and her together. I just stood in the door and I said, "Mama God should be with us." And I that's how I left, I don't know what happened to her at all.

They took me to the wagons there and actually when I was just going into the wagon I saw the boy who helped me when I was paying for the electric bills and the wagons were full of people. In the corner was a couple with a baby and they were trying to heat up with a candle some water or milk I don't know. (Interviewee emotionally upset)

We went into the wagons and they gave us some bread. There was a barrel of water which was not covered. And I wasn't concerned for myself, I was concerned for my mother, what was going to happen to her. All these people were on top of each other, the wagons started going so the barrel started to go backwards and forwards and all the water was splashing around. Here people needed to go to the loo, it was just a nightmare, how long I was there I don't know.

And usually when I used to get up in the morning, when I was with my mother, I used to put two dresses, two pairs of stockings, we didn't have tights at that time and shoes and galoshes in case they came and took me. Usually whatever you weren't wearing you used to leave you see. And one young man going in this train together, he says to me "Why are you wearing so much, why are you wearing galoshes in summer?" I said, "Because whatever you wear you will keep on." He says, "You must be joking," he knew where we were going, I did not.

F96 - End of Side A

F96 - Side B

When we got to Auschwitz, I didn't know it was Auschwitz, I didn't know anything about it. I did not know about concentration camps, I did not know what was going on at all. When we got there, they didn't let us stay in the clothes at all. They started separating women from men, cries, it was just terrible. Husbands from wives, mothers from sons. It was just a nightmare. I started to get diarrhoea, I was sick and diarrhoea suddenly.

How did you get to Auschwitz though, you said you were on a barrel?

No no the barrel was in the middle of the train with the water, but when the train started going the barrel was wobbling and all the water was... That was in the train I'm sorry.

How long was that journey?

I don't know. I think we were there in the morning they took us and we didn't get there until it was dark, how long we were going or if it was night and day I just don't know. We were all in such a state. We were collapsing in the trains.

As I said, when we got to Auschwitz they told us to get off the train and they started to separate. And separation was the worst part. I mean, I was by myself but I could see what was going on. And I got myself terribly ill. I thought, my God I left my mother and they will finish her off. That was what I was concerned about, my mother. And then they separate the women from the men and they start going through the gates. S.S. men were on both sides and the girls, young people they could see what state I was in, they had a bit of sugar and they start putting sugar in my mouth to

revive me. And when we were going through the gates they were just holding me up. And it was left and right, left and right, I went to the right, they told me to go to the right, the S.S. men. They formed us like five, five, five, we had to stay in fives.

And it was dark, it was dark and they were starting to march us. Can you imagine the screams. The mother was going to the left, the daughter was going to the right. The babies going to the left, the mothers going to the right. The mothers went together with the babies, I cannot explain to you the cries and the screams and tearing their hair off. Can you imagine. They formed us in fives and we start marching and then we stopped they counted us and every time they stopped I had to sit down. And the girls are picking me up and giving me sugar, keeping me alive.

I was very very lucky. Very lucky because I didn't tell you, in the ghetto when I was ill I had fifteen boils in me. You see it's coming back to me. And when I got there I was so clean on my body, I've still got some marks from the boils. I was so clean, not one mark on my body, because I'll explain to you later what's happening again with sorting us out. They were sorting us all the time you see. When it was getting lighter, I can see there are like blocks. And a girl came out from a block she has no shoes, she has no hair, her dress is far above the knee. I thought, this block maybe some girls got mad and they were keeping them together in a mad house. Not thinking that in a couple of hours I would look the same.

And we were marching they're counting us, marching, they're counting us, non stop counting. Until we got to a room, a big big room, one of the blocks, full of S.S. men and with bats, "Undress" in German. And there are also Jewish men working with, they looked like striped pyjamas. Of course they had to do what they were told to do. And one second we were all undressed like God bore us and beating and doing this and doing that. We had to go all round, single all round this room. And go round and round and round. And they were still picking out girls and women, all the time sorting out. Who knew what they were doing. They were sorting to put in the gas chambers, but who knew it. I still was very ignorant, I still did not know what was waiting.

And eventually they put us in another place where they started shaving us everywhere the hair, washing us and showers and giving us dresses, just dresses nothing else. And I knew why the dresses were getting shorter and shorter. Because when you went to the toilet they didn't have no paper so we were tearing the dresses off to wipe ourselves. I have to think a little bit, if you'd like to stop for a second.

I forgot to mention, when I was in the ghetto with my mother one day somebody said, that people who were in the camp with my father were brought to the ghetto. I forgot to mention also that my father was taken to Fort Radziwil which was near Poznan. And he was doing work there. They had to walk many kilometres to do the work on a railway station, I really don't remember what he was doing. But he got ill, his leg, a vein burst in his leg and he was ill so they put him in the kitchen where he was working. Which was not such hard work.

Then as I mentioned before, when we got the letter that they are supposed to send these people who are not well and young boys, which was my cousin as well, they were supposed to be sent back home, but of course as I mentioned before, they were never sent back home. So when I heard that people from Fort Radziwil were in the ghetto, I ran there to see it. To see who it is. They were surrounded by wooden fences, but I managed to scrape a hole in it and start calling "Krakowska" and one of my aunt's brothers who also lived in Lubraniec, he called me out. "Who's calling, who's calling?" And I called my name. So he said oh "Uncle Shia and Abram are here, I will call them." I said, "Before you go and call them, tell me what happened to my father and Mordaih my younger cousin?" So he told me, "I have to tell you this, don't get upset, but they were sent to Auschwitz," and I said, "What is Auschwitz?" I didn't even know what he was talking about. So he told me "I better not tell you, one day you will find out."

Well my uncle appeared walking towards the fence with my cousin, it was a terrible scene to see. My cousin's eyes were gouged out, he was thin like a rake, he could hardly walk. Funny enough my uncle didn't look too bad. He was a big man always and by losing weight was not too bad. But when I saw my cousin my heart broke, it was just terrible.

I begged them to get out from there. I said to them, "Though we've got only one room and my mother is not well, what we will have you will have. We don't know where they are sending you, you haven't got the strength to work." I didn't realise that they were sending them to gas chambers. I thought they were sending them to work.

Anyway he said, "It's better not, I don't want to be a burden for you, you are fighting for your mother and yourself alone." He didn't want to come. I said, "I will come and see you next day and I will bring you what I can." He said, "Don't worry everything will be all right." And that's what they were saying through the fence. (Interviewee emotionally upset)

Anyway a few days later they sent them off. I didn't know where. But I found out after the war that they sent them to Auschwitz and my father as well. Because I met somebody in America who was in the same camp that I was, who actually helped me in Auschwitz. It was my cousin's friend and I'll tell you later about it.

Now when we got to the trains and we got to Auschwitz as I mentioned before, they separated the men and the women and there was terrible screams, the babies were taken away from mothers, it was just dreadful. And ehm as I also mentioned before, I also was in a terrible state, I think it was playing me up that I left my mother there and my stomach was upside down. I had diahorrea and was sick, the girls were holding me up and I went through to the right. Which I knew afterwards the left were going straight away to the oven.

Can I ask you, do you know if you saw Mengele because ...?

Yes I did, I'll tell you in a minute. He sent me to work. I mean I'd never heard of Mengele, I didn't know anything about Mengele at that time. Then they put us, as I said we had to undress ourselves. Again we had to march around and they still were choosing people to I didn't know what. Elderly women and people who were not so

well built up but very thin. And people who had spots on their bodies. Did I mention to you that in the Lodz I had boils?

Yes you mentioned it.

I forgot to mention that when I was in Lodz we didn't have enough food and I had to share it with my mother, I had about fifteen boils on me. And they were doing these auto haemo, these injections. And ehm somehow when I got to Auschwitz I was completely clear. I had little marks from it, which I have still got, but I was just clear. I think from hunger I was more blown up, swollen then getting thin. My mother was getting absolutely thin in my eyes and I didn't. And that's what saved me. I also forgot to mention to you that I had a very very good voice and I was singing. And that helped me quite a lot in Auschwitz. And the working camp.

In Auschwitz I was like schmuck stuck, what that means is that people were not sent to work and they were selecting us all the time. And you did not really know which one was going where. In the block we had in the middle like a chimney, going along the block.

In the dormitory between the bunks?

It was not such a thing as a dormitory, it was a block which they used to keep horses in before the war. And in the middle of this block it was a chimney built from bricks. And at the end of the chimney you had this like a bunker and this was where they were putting the fires to make it warm when the horses were staying there. Of course it was not heated up when we were there. And the blockalteste which was Jewish, these people were sent first to Auschwitz.

People who were sent first to Auschwitz were either smuggling, making some business illegal, prostitutes who had black books and ehm I never met among us political prisoners. Only because I was among Jewish people. And ehm she used to walk on this chimney and she had a bat and if you didn't behave, 'boomf' you see. It was a blockalteste and a woman who helped her, I don't remember what they used to call her.

These were both Jewish women?

Jewish women. I was under Czechoslovakian ones and once I was under a Polish one. Which actually, the Polish girl was a sister of a young woman who was my instructress in the factory where I was doing the knitting in the ghetto. And the other girl was such a lovely girl, the instructress, lovely, and this one was a...

Martinet?

Yes they all were, the blockalteste. They used to have beautiful nightdresses, lovely clothes, plenty of food. Anyway...

Who gave them...?

The Germans. Because you see they were keeping them. They were the ones to do the dirty work for the Germans you see.

Were the Germans using them?

Of course.

They were sleeping with them?

That's right. I'll tell you afterwards. When I was sent to Auschwitz they were sorting us out, of course they shaved us and washed us and give us all these dirty clothes and ehm I think I left when we were marching. We were marching and they were counting us and then they put us in this big room and then they shaved us and all this. Then they started putting us in the block. First of all they were doing the tatoos and then I was put in. I was sent to a block C which was, we had bunks and the girls were sleeping one next to each other, it was just terrible. Sometimes when we got up in the morning, you see there was all electric wires and some of the girls just finished themselves off by touching the wires.

There were bare wires inside the hut?

Oh no no outside.

Round the perimeter?

There were thirty one blocks, I know there was thirty one but how many in block C, all the blocks it was called C and that C lager, they had... I was in number thirty block first I think, I don't remember. Anyway I was first sent to C lager and there we had to get up very early in the morning whatever weather it was, by five o'clock or six o'clock we had to stand outside, snow rain or whatever.. And also in five and we had to wait for the Germans to come and count us. And they came about ten o'clock and

when the Germans counted us they gave us afterwards the daily ration of bread and some drink which was looking green.

How much bread?

Very little. Like a thick slice of bread and that had to last all day long you see. Then they gave us during the day a so called soup. One day I was ill already and where they were counting us I fell and they took me away and put me in lager B.

But before then, I'm sorry I have to go back. Before then somebody told me, that my cousin Abram's friend Henek in two blocks in lager C men used to come and do some work, sewing, I don't know what they were doing. And one of the girls from Lubraniec came to me and said, "Listen Henek is there he was Abram's friend, I'm sure he remembers you, he might help you."

So I sneaked out one day and went there and calling his name out. A man came out and that was his brother, older brother. He picked me up and he said to the man "If you saw this girl before, now she's unrecognisable". And he told me that Henek was not there, he asked me which block I was in, I told him and he said he would come and see me.

The next day he came and the blockalteste when they saw a man they were in their glory you see. And he introduced me to her and he brought me bread the next day and he brought me also socks, clogs and ehm kaftan, it's like the top of pyjamas and a scarf for my hair and a little apron. And he also told the blockalteste when he introduced me that I can sing. So that kept me.

I was singing, they asked me from one block to another and I could move about because I was dressed. So I looked like a Stubendienst, that means that I'm doing work. So I could move from one block to another. But before this happened I must also explain to you. They were taking us to the toilets, not when you wanted but

when they wanted, they took us twice a day or three times a day I don't remember. It was just also a block and it was in the middle a big big hole. The block was one and a half lengths of this and three times as wide.

So it was about sixty feet long?

And we were standing around and doing our business and when they said it's finished, you had to finish and that's when I realised that the girls had short dresses, because this is when we are tearing the dresses to wipe ourselves. Of course in the evenings the camp was lit up because of the burning bodies and I did not know what it was. The chimney was lit up night and day, night and day.

I don't remember if it happened before Henek helped me with the food, when I was singing they sometimes asked me and I had to sometimes sit there till one o'clock because they had a good time with the Germans the blockalteste and I would sing and they were dancing. But when they went to sleep I put everywhere, wherever I could food. In behind my apron, in my apron, wherever I could and went to the block and gave it to the girls to eat as well.

You were singing for the blockalteste's who were enjoying themselves with the Germans?

That's right yes.

You were going from one block of Germans to another?

They asked me you see.

What were you singing?

I used to know all the Polish tangos and all this. And actually I used to sing Jewish songs to them which was... Because my aunt in Lubraniec she and her daughter had lovely voices and in the evenings as you know we couldn't go out and she used to sing. We used to all sing, so whoever could sing we would sing. And I learned from her two Jewish songs because I couldn't speak Yiddish very well, but I learnt two Yiddish songs which I sang even after the war on the stage because one song was about Russia, about Russian Jews.

What were they, what were these songs?

I don't know the titles.

What is the first line?'

'In ein Russichen dorf' and the other one was, 'In ein Litwichendab vor weit'. You know my husband knows more of the words than I do because I used to sing to him. I will remind myself I will ask my husband and the next time I come I will tell you the words more or less, what I remember.

Did you have any accompaniment?

Not when I was in the camps. But after the war on the stage, I'll tell you afterwards.

F96 - End of Side B

F97 - Side A

And that's how I kept myself alive. I used to get extra soup and I was alright. But I think that happened before all this. When I on one zahlappel I fell and they took me to an ambulance, which was a little hospital. One of the blocks they made like an ambulance and I remember that was Yom Kippur because there was a lot of Hungarians with us. The Hungarians already came as well. And they were davening, they were saying their prayers because that was Yom Kippur. I mean I lost time anyway. At that time also, when I was in this ambulance we heard the bombing and we thought they were bombing the camp and we prayed to God, "Let us be dead, but let us also see that they are finished."

But now after the war we found that they didn't bomb Auschwitz they were not far from there somewhere. Anyway from there they send me to lager B which I did not know. That lager B they unfortunately they used to select from there and send direct to the gas chambers as well. And the blockalteste knew me from somewhere that I was singing. The one who was looking after the new girls. And she sent me back to lager C. They had pity on me somehow, I don't know. And ehm you could see only the big blue eyes with me. The face was gone, only the big blue eyes and somehow I don't know I had a lot of luck I must say.

And she sent me back to lager C and that's when I start looking for this Henek and my life became a little bit easier. As I said Auschwitz was paradise to what I went through in Litzmannstadt, seeing my mother going down and not being able to help her. And seeing people dying on the streets from hunger, there was very little people from Litzmannstadt there, they were mostly people coming from around the places because they were either sent to Auschwitz, other camps or they just died out because they couldn't take it anymore.

One day I met a friend of mine in Auschwitz who I was together with in the ghetto. Where I was working for the Germans packing the cases for heating up the aeroplane engines and I met her there. Now you can imagine how we felt. So I tried to help her with the food as well and unfortunately with clothes I couldn't. And we kept

ourselves together. When Mengele came I was in a certain block and before I came in and I could hear that Mengele was there, I didn't go in, I went to another block and that's how I was going from one block to another.

When you were singing you mean?

Yes but that was not only singing that was going about during the day. As I was dressed as a stubendienst, as a cleaner or doing work, I was moving around.

You did cleaning as well?

Very little. I was getting away from it because I was not stopping in one block. I was going from one block to another you see. And ehm once we went into a block where they didn't have bunks but a thousand women were lying on the bare floor. And it was just terrible, we were sleeping so one goes with the hand, one goes with the leg. And the whole thousand women start fighting and this blockalteste comes and I was on the edge, it was dark. She picks up my clock and she starts beating me. So I said to my friend Bella "Next time when Mengele comes I can't take it anymore, I'm going wherever". And that's what it was. A few days later Mengele came.

Why did you say that, was Mengele there at the time....?

I couldn't take it, when she beat us up. Because she wanted to keep us quiet so she started beating you see. You know it's a miracle of miracles. Because with a clock. I couldn't take it any more although I helped myself with the food and all this, but it was already unbearable seeing other people in this state. You lose your, you can't fight anymore.

So a few days later Mengele did come, all this thousand women had to go one side of the chimney and we had to undress ourselves as God bore us again. And he was standing near the entrance outside the block, not inside with other S.S. men. And we were holding our clothes on our arms, I had a little bit more than anybody else as I told you and one out and one back into the block on the other side. Because all the thousand women on our side of the block, one back to the other side and one out. So Bella was with me. We were one of the first and we were looking around, which ones were coming out, the ones who look like people or the ones already bad and praying to God, where are they going to send us.

Well by that time we knew about the gas chambers you see. And ehm when he selected, well actually he took me by the hand, he took everybody by the hand, front and back and he gave me a clap and throw me out and that was Mengele a very good looking man, dark and handsome, you wouldn't think that such a devil was in him. And all the S.S. men, they were so good looking young men, it's just impossible to think that people like that can be so cruel. Anyway they took us again to a room where there were showers.

Were you selected to go outside the hut?

Outside the hut. And the other girls were on the other side of the block.

So how many of you were taken out?

This I can't tell you. The Polish of us were up to two hundred, but I don't know if he was collecting from other blocks or ours as well, but when we got to the working camp there were two hundred Polish Jewish girls and eight hundred Hungarian Jewish girls you see. So it was a thousand. When we got there we dressed ourselves outside

the block and then they took us to a place, we had to strip ourselves again, left our clothes out behind and there were showers on top. Now what's going to come out, is it to come out gas or water, we were all holding ourselves with our hands like that, (demonstrates). And what is going to be, gas or water. Water starts coming out and if you can hear everybody, "Thank God". After we had the bath they didn't shave us anymore. After we had a bath I don't know how we dried ourselves, you know it's a funny thing how things are coming to you. But the next thing I know they were giving us clothes, shoes...

Clean clothes?

They were warm. You see from time to time even in Auschwitz when I was there, we were disinfected, all the time they were taking us to have a wash and different dresses. But in the seams you could see dead lice you see. So you scraped it out and put it on. But in Auschwitz they only gave us a dress, which this man gave me clothes, but not knickers you see. This was the worst time. But still when they were giving us clothes, they gave us coats, but they all had red crosses. They gave us dresses, shoes and stockings. I asked her to give me a towel, so she gave me like a towelling rag, so I tied it up on both sides as knickers and I also asked her for something to cover the head, so she gave me a slip, so this I tore in half and gave Bella my friend, because we were together now you see, to cover the hair because we didn't have much hair.

And they took us and the girls said to us, "How lucky we are, one of the lucky ones that we are going to work". They took us, I cannot tell you exactly how we got to the train I just don't remember. I just remember sitting in this lovely clean train a passenger train, not a cattle train. We were sitting like ladies.

I don't know how we got food and we landed up in a place called Pirshkow which was Nieder Chlesien. Nieder Chlesien, Pirshkow. It was a big farm where they put us in barns, one barn was where the pigs were, one barn where the horses were and one barn where the cows were. It was full of straw and in the middle we had an oven

and it was not too bad. We had, the trouble only was we had to walk a long long way. When we got there it was the end of the summer, I don't know the month but the sun was still shining it was lovely.

May I ask how long the journey had been on the train?

I don't remember, it's from Auschwitz to Pirshkow. I remember only a few bits and pieces. Maybe they've got records there somewhere. And when we got there they gave us food, we used to get soup, we used to get a ration of bread in the morning, like a big slice, and in the evening as well, not like in Auschwitz with one slice of bread you see.

And ehm the trouble was we had to walk a long way to work. We had to dig anti tank ditches. So we thought to ourselves, Golly if we're supposed to be the workers... You see that was the Polish, German border and they were afraid of the Russians. Whether the Russians were already coming I don't know. And we were the workers so we thought, it must be very bad. Anyway when the winter came that was terrible because the snow was very high.

Is this 42?

Oh no this is a long way now, this is 44. And ehm that was very bad when we had to go to work and the snow was high. You know we looked like in Siberia the workers going to work. We had to pickaxe because the ice was frozen, they could see we couldn't do it any more so they were blowing it up and then we had to straighten out.

This was just women not men?

We were just women but behind us or in front the men were working. I come to it later. I just wanted to tell you a little bit about this camp. They gave us, when the end of this camp, whatever number you had they put it also on a little pack, it was like leather with a number on it and a little string. As a matter of fact I again was singing there. So I had a little bit extra food. There was not many S.S. men there, only one S.S. man there and there were only police, like German elderly men. One was a Volksdeutscher who came from Poland and he joined the German army you see. That's what it was when I was in Alexsandrow, a lot of them joined the German army. They used to call them Volksdeutscher.

And he heard me, I was singing to the girls, just in the evenings, we were entertaining each other. And one of the girls wrote a beautiful song and I don't remember the words. The tune was from a silent Chaplin film. I've forgot. Anyway, it's a shame I should have written the words because that was about the camp and you see you just don't realise these things would be after the war. And you just lived from one day to another not thinking that you would live through it and have all these things. You just didn't think about it. You just lived through thinking, what's going to happen in one hour.

Anyway so I had a little bit because the girls were quite good to me and all this. And they used to call me to the kitchen to sing so I had a little extra soup. So one day when I was not well I stayed behind and Bella had to go to work. She went to work and I used to keep the soup for her in the straw to keep it a little bit warm. I shared with her the food to keep her alive as well. And one day I washed myself and left, you see we used to wash ourselves in snow, we used to bring in snow and wash ourselves in snow. And I still don't remember how we dried ourselves. And I put this tack somewhere and I couldn't find it and all the S.S. men one day came.

We used to stand inside as well there because they had to count us. They counted us every day when we went to work and when we came back from work. In case somebody disappeared. And ehm the girls made up for me, they found a bit of curtain

and he saw it is not and he sloshed me and Bella is the witness, she's here, he sloshed me terribly and twice I got sloshed, once for this and once by a Hungarian.

They were pushing themselves everywhere and whenever something went wrong they used to call us the Polish schweinen and they used to accuse us that we were doing it. One day they were giving us some cottage cheese which was very rare so I said "Can I have a little bit more" and she gave me a slosh. The Hungarian woman.

When you say slosh do you mean...?

She gave me a smack, she hit me.

Not beaten up?

Oh no no not beaten up. The S.S. man beat me up because I didn't have the proper tack. Anyway do you know my face, I can't tell you, I couldn't move myself. And ehm then it was Christmas time and we had to sing, there were a lot of German women and they were worse than the men looking after us. They were dreadful and we had to sing in front of their windows the carols. And by then every one of us got bread, about four of us, it was our Christmas present, which was good because you went back and gave the girls a bit of bread.

And ehm one German who was taking us to work, we were going in hundreds, so my friend Bella was chosen to look after one hundred which I was in and a German man, a policeman, he was not an S.S. man but he was an army man, an elderly man. And he always had pity on me so he always gave me a little soup because you, when you finish the camp that's how it was. Everywhere when they were giving us food, the girls were fighting to get a spoon more. Because they would give us bread in the morning and in the evening and sometimes they would give us a bit of cottage cheese

and sometimes they would give us a bit of germ which was rare and a soup during the day, it was still not enough. They used to give us soup when we were at work, I don't remember if they gave us soup when we came back, no just bread. It was still not enough. We were young girls you see, young women. Anyway this German was very good to me, so I told him it was my birthday and he gave me an apple. So the girls wonder what happened, every day a girl had a birthday.

Did he give them...?

Yes some of them he gave and some of them... But he walked next to me and he said to me that he had a child my age he left and an older daughter and son and he was longing to go home to see them. It was so unfair, but I didn't say anything, I was too scared to say anything anyway.

Apart from that what were conditions like in this camp were you still dirty and cold?

No because we had snow, we had water, we were able to walk about. I told you that stove in the middle. When we got there it was summer and you see we had to do the work for them, they had to give us something otherwise we wouldn't be able to do the work. But also the girls were getting ill and it was also a part of the barn was made as a little ambulance and the girls which were ill, they were ill.

You mean a hospital?

Yes, they called it ambulance because it was not a proper hospital.

So did you have to go and get wood?

It was ready for us and I suppose some of the girls were chopping because all day long we were working. Who was doing the chopping I don't know maybe the girls who were in the kitchen. Because the Hungarians always pushed themselves first into the best positions so they were in the kitchen. Do you know I have suffered so much by Hungarians in that camp during the war. I said I would not take revenge on the Germans, only Hungarians. I mean it, that's where they gave us so much sorrow, in that camp. There was eight hundred of them and only two hundred of us, they were terrible to us. I know everybody wants to survive but you don't have to... Alright I asked her for this cheese, she didn't have to smack me. You can be decent. And they were the first ones to get the kratze. Kratze was... and they were running from them like hell, none of us had it, but they got it. How did they get rid of it I don't know.

That's the skin disease ehm...?

Yes, it's very very catching, you are scratching yourself. So we were one up from them. We didn't get that because we kept ourselves very very clean. Every night when we come from work we did wash ourselves in snow. And dried ourselves near that stove, so we took turns. We were about a hundred girls together, we were really beside where the pigs were, it was better because it was not so high. Where the cows and the horses were it was higher, so we were better off.

You were always doing the same work?

Always the same work.

And was it in open country?

Open country. And I must tell you something, one day I told you that when they were working in front and they were working behind because they were finishing off the trenches. I don't know if they were Jewish or not, but one man who was going with the wagon and the horse, he was bringing wood there.....

F97 - End of Side A

F97 - Side B

... and was passing. And one day he threw to me tobacco and a letter that he would like to save me from there. If I would be there standing he could put me between the wood, because he was bringing the wood and he was bringing something else, I don't know. You were afraid to look really. And I knew he was not Jewish because I could see him. He was a young man, he maybe twenty. The tobacco was very useful, I didn't smoke but the Hungarians smoked and I had plenty of soup and my friend smoked as well. So that was my saviour. I didn't write to him, I didn't stand where he told me, but he still threw me bread and tobacco. I thought to myself, I don't know who he is what am I going to do. If he is a Pole he probably fancies me in a certain way and would like to marry me or sleep with me, what am I going to do. I'd rather stay with my people and what will be will be. When you're by yourself you don't worry too much, when I was with my mother I worried over her and that was breaking my heart. But when you're by yourself you don't care, what will be will be. Anyway I didn't go, I stayed in the camp. My friend is alive, she is a witness, she lives in Edgeware.

It was already after Christmas in January, suddenly they woke us up, one o'clock in the morning, I don't know exactly the time because we didn't have watches but it was night. All in the forecourt, because it was a farm you had a big yard and the pump was in the yard, two pumps actually were in the yard where you could get water. We were also not allowed to go out after nine, but till now we were moving around wherever we wanted in this forecourt in this yard. All of us had to go into the yard. Dress ourselves and go to the yard. And the girls who were ill again in fives, they were pounding us. The girls who were ill we had to put in the blankets, those who couldn't walk, four girls had to carry them. A girl was lying in the blanket and we start to march. There was snow, we haven't got strength to carry the girls but you can imagine.

And we were walking, walking, no food, no nothing. We were just living on snow and when we were resting we just flopped on the snow. The snow was building up on

the shoes, it was just terrible. And then eventually I don't know how they got it, but they got wagons and put the girls in the wagons, the ill ones and we had to push it. But that was not so bad because the blankets were slipping from the hands, we didn't have gloves and it was very very cold. And one day they took the wagon into the forest, we didn't know what they did with them, they just left them there. They killed them there. And we were marching and marching. And still no food.

Can I just ask you, what were the girls ill with?

They never had typhus they would finish them off straight away because they didn't want to catch it. Malnutrition, mostly malnutrition yes. During the summer when we had to dig the trenches we had to throw the sand quite high with the spades, it was very hard work. This is why they were feeding us. We could only do so much. I think it was because I was such a delicate child before the war, I didn't eat much and whatever food I had it kept me going you know. Girls that needed more food, they couldn't take it.

Anyway one of the girls was on this wagon, a woman actually and somebody told her to get off the wagon because they knew what was going to happen. And she got off the wagon and she was going with us, we were keeping her. One day also this marching, I was on the edge and I fell in the ditch in the snow, they did not notice, because when a girl fell marching they killed her, that was terrible. That was called the death march you see. Which I found out afterwards, I didn't know, but that's what it was called.

I started to move and a lorry was passing and they picked me up, they were soldiers. And of course they saw the cross on my back, they asked me who I was, I thought I was going to the camp and I just fell. So I said, "The camp is still there, could you drop me there?" and they just threw me off, you know and I was back with them. I suppose the bit of rest picked me up I don't know. We walked for many many days without food, just snow.

One day we were sleeping in a barn which was in the middle of the forest, not far from a farm but that was in the middle of the forest and it was built from wood which had spaces between the wood. And what I could see and I was with my friend Bella. What I could see, there I knew, because in Poland they used to bury for their winter, potatoes, carrots, sweet vegetables, they used to bury for the winter with earth. I knew that something was there and we already heard bombing and shooting as we were walking. So I said to Bella, "It must be soon, that is a fantastic place to hide". Being the youngest in the camp, the woman buried me two yards deep and covered me with the straw near the woods, but I could breathe. And every night when we were sleeping in this barn the soldiers had bayonets and the bayonets were about half a yard deep you see and they used to go up to the straw to see if anybody was left.

Now my friend Bella she caught, she had to go back with them and I was left there. But I could hear from the other side that the woman is crying, "Please leave me..." This was the girl who got off this wagon, she was actually a woman. "If you want to kill me, kill me here, why should you kill me on the road?" She couldn't walk any more. So she was begging her, "If you have to kill me kill me here, why should I be killed on the road?" And that was actually the old soldier who helped me and he left her there.

So when it got dark I went over to her, now her leg was in a terrible state, black. So in the night I went over to her and I was putting snow on it and made it better. And with my bare hands I started digging the earth to get to see what's there. With my bare hands I got in because the earth was frozen, it was potatoes, so I got the potatoes out. I don't know how we had a knife. I don't know, and we washed the potatoes in the snow and we were living on the potatoes for ten days and we can hear shooting and bombing and nobody is coming. So we couldn't any more, our stomachs were bloated from the raw potatoes. And in every potato we found a different taste.

We walked to the village. Now my friend Irma, her name was Irma Weis, she was married, she had a little girl who was taken away from her when she went to Auschwitz, she originated actually from Germany but her parents came from Poland.

And that's why she spoke good German. But as the family originated from Poland they had to leave Germany and had to go to Poland because as you know in Germany people who were not born in Germany had to leave Germany. Or maybe she was also born in Poland, but anyway they were also living in Germany but they had to leave and that's why she spoke very good German. When we went out from this barn, we started walking towards the village, a woman was standing there, a German woman she was leaning over a fence and so I said to Irma, "Ask her if she could give us a bit of water, start with water, maybe she'll help us". So Irma went over and she said in German, "Could we have a bit of water?" So she looked at us and went in and didn't say one word.

So we start walking further and suddenly we smelled potatoes being cooked for the pigs. It was a big farm there you see. So I said to her, "Lets go in". And there were people working there, there were Poles also working there and they let us have potatoes. We thought we will have potatoes cooked, we never wanted to go back there you see, because now we've got cooked potatoes we can stick out for maybe another week and they will come. As we were putting the potatoes into our pockets everywhere the police came and arrested us, the German police came. I don't know if the people who worked there or the German woman sent for the police.

They arrested us and we start walking with them and in a town which was lower, we were just going down like a mountain. It was a main road and suddenly aeroplanes came and started bombing that town so these two policemen left us in the middle of the road and run. So what did we do, through the fields, we went back to the barn and we thought we would stay there as long as the potatoes are going to last us. We stayed there for three days and the farmer came with an alsatian and the alsatian came up and barked and barked, we had to come down. They arrested us again and they took us to another farm where the girls were.

The other camp of ours, some of them were there and there was a Pole and there were German soldiers. And the next day they came and took the girls away but one of the German soldiers and the Pole they hid us, me and Irma, I told you she spoke German. And they hid us....

Why?

I don't know. They hid us in the loft and all the other ones went. In the night they came and raped us, my husband doesn't know that. And they gave us food, they kept us. I really did not know a woman is a virgin to tell you the truth and blood didn't come out anyway I don't know, she was a married woman but I had never had a man in my life.

The next day they threw us out, we were on our own and we got to a place where it was a Polish camp, a working camp, but our luck the next day they were evacuating them again. I don't know the name of the place, I don't know nothing, I only know one thing, that one of the women noticed we had these crosses, we didn't want to tell them that we were Jews you see, so this Pole, one of the Poles who fancied Irma, she said, "Please don't say anything". And what he did, he got us cotton and needles and we undone the whole back of the coats and turned them over on the other side. We spent all night on it. And they took these people away, where they were taking them I don't know, probably Germany again.

We are in the German camp now and this man who fancied Irma, he told us "If they are going straight, you turn to the right in this road and follow me". And we did. And he took us to this woman there, to another place where the women were there and they had suspicions that we were Jewish. And they arrested us again, they called the police and they arrested us and the police were taking us from one town to another. As we got to a town, nobody was there because the German people were running away, they were afraid to be freed by the Russians. Because the Russians were raping them and they were afraid the women, to be freed by the Russians. And of course they were killing them as well because when you passed the Odra we saw the Germans floating.

But ehm till we got to a certain town where nobody was there and the German soldiers asked us who we were, so we told them that we were Poles, we were in a camp between the border of Poland and Russia and the Russians were coming and we were afraid of the Russians and we ran and the papers were left in the camp. And thank goodness he believed us. And they left us sitting in the middle of the town. So what we did, we went into one of the places and we took clothes and food and we started walking until we got to a place called Lieben, I know there is much more too it but... We were hidden by a German woman that was on the other side of the Odra, of the river, and the Germans were on this side and the Russians were already on the other side because they used to cross the river and they used to rape the women and we were really afraid.

Me and Irma were really scared to be in a place when no women were there. So we started walking and got to a place called Lieben where we went to a labour exchange and told them again the same story, that we were on the Polish, Russian border in a camp and we were afraid to be freed by the Russians and we ran, and they sent us to work to a farm as Poles. And ther we had to carry about a hundred buckets twice a day for the pigs and for the cows because the water was not working there, the canalisation was broken there, I don't know. And our backs were absolutely killing us, but we had food we were not hungry any more and we were there ten days and the Russians came.

And we were very lucky because ehm the colonel was Jewish you see, but we still didn't say we were Jewish because we had this terrible experience that the Russians came and went. They didn't have the order to take over, so they used to rape the women and go back. We were very pleased because they were finishing them off. Actually the Russians said to us whatever we wanted we could take but we were still scared to take anything from the Germans, we were scared stiff in case they found out we were Jews.

Do you know what the actual date was this time?

It must've been May.

1945?

Yes. And the Germans gave us a cart and a horse, I had a case of clothes and she had a case of clothes.

Where did the clothes come from?

The Germans gave us, because what happened, when the Russians came, they came all running to us, all the young women came running to us in case they raped them. We were helping them in the end you see. We had to, we didn't have any choice did we. If the Russians did not finish us off, they would finish us off. So as I said they repaid us by giving us a cart and a horse and we started driving back towards Poland. By the time we got to Poland we didn't have a thing, the Russians stripped us on the way, they took everything away from us. Until we got to a place called Lignitza which is now Poland and it was before Germany.

In Lignitza my friend got very ill, she was bleeding, I was running like mad to get a doctor and I was lucky, I was running, it was early morning and two Russian officers were going and I said, "Could you please help me?" I spoke a bit of Russian and I spoke a bit of German. Mind you Russian is so similar to Polish. They were both doctors, one officer was a colonel, one was a captain. I gave them the address and the next day they came and brought medicine for her and they were healing her and they brought us food as well. They were quite good, we told them we were Jewish you see. You could see them already, I could see they were not Christians, you could see they were Jewish.

And ehm then she got better but she couldn't travel, I went back to Poland to see if her husband is alive, if anybody of my family is alive and she was living in Lodz in Litzmannstadt. So the first stop, you see we didn't have much money and the travelling was terrible. I was in the trains and it was terrible and the Poles didn't like the Jews very much and they told anecdotes about Jews and my heart was thumping like a machine you know. They were anti-semitic.

How did you get any money at all?

The Russians helped us and when we were they in Lignitza the Germans ran away. We used to go to any place and get anything, we had the most beautiful flat, we had parties every day with a piano.

Where?

In Lignitza after the war. You pinch yourself and you are alive. And Russian soldiers used to come and a lot of Jewish girls were there.

Are you talking about the summer of 45?

Yes it must be summer.

So how long did you stay in...?

In Lignitza I stayed until I came to England. I'll tell you in a minute. And ehm we were just living from one day to another, we just didn't care. And a lot of Polish boys, Jewish as well some of them were in the Russian army. And I met a boy and I nearly involved myself, but I didn't, I'll tell you afterwards what happened. I went back to Poland and left Irma behind and.....

F97 - End of Side B

F98 - Side A

So I left Irma behind as she was not well and she wasn't able to come with me. My first stop was Lodz where I was in the ghetto and she lived in Lodz with her husband. And I went to an office where whoever came there used to put their names down. It was like a bureau, a Jewish bureau and you could check if anybody is alive.

Before I was waiting there, because they opened later than I anticipated and I met a girl who I was with in Pirshkow in the working camp. And ehm we were really hugging each other, "Oh we are alive," and all this. And there were three men standing there who she was talking to as well and she introduced me to them and she introduced me to one as Weiss. And as Irma was telling me such fantastic stories about her husband, I did not realise that was her husband, but I ask him, "Have you got a brother called Ignatz Weiss?" He said, "I am Ignatz Weiss," And the blood ran away from my body and I said, "Look I am with your Irma, Irma your wife is alive and we are both living together in Lebedzinski," and we were hugging each other and kissing and just crying.

So he was not able to go straight away but he sent a telegram to her and I said, "I'm not going home yet, I have to go to Alexsandrow to see if anybody is alive and to Lubraniec to see if anybody from the family is alive". Because when you don't see anybody being destroyed you think maybe God was somewhere, like he saved me, maybe he saved somebody else. So I went to the office when it opened and I didn't see anybody who I knew who was alive.

Did you ask the officials there? Did they have lists?

Yes, the lists were hanging on the wall and you could check it yourself. Jewish people put them together. They formed like an office there, organisation probably, I don't know.

Do you think the Red Cross would've done it or...?

I don't think it was Red Cross, you know my memory it's faded a bit. And I don't remember who organised this, but ehm I checked the list and of course nobody I knew was alive. So Ignatz, Irma's husband as soon as he finished his business then he will come to Lignitza which he did. And they looked after me like after a daughter. They were quite good to me, which I will tell you later. Then I went to Aleksandrow, I don't remember the train journey, this I don't remember very well. But ehm...

You don't remember if you were given help?

I didn't get any help whatsoever.

How did you get money?

First when we were there we used to get, as I told you we could have anything because all the Germans had run away from there, you could open your own business if you wanted to. It was no problem, the Russians were helping us with the food as well, afterwards it was an organisation, UNRA which they were sending food and clothes. I didn't need them any more because I got a job in Lignitza, I was working as a secretary in the town hall and Ignatz came and he was doing some business and then I was eating with them. And I used to get a soup lunchtime in the office and we used to get paid, but the pay was very very little. We used to get one thousand two hundred zloty a month and a pair of shoes used to cost eight thousand. But as I was with them, with a family I was looked after quite well.

Who were you working for?

Polish town hall, because Lignitza became Poland. They were now Poland, because Russia took a piece of Poland away so they took a piece of Germany and gave to Poland.

What sort of work were you doing?

Secretary, typing and I did not know shorthand. I did not know typing either because when the war broke out I had nothing, I didn't finish any schools, but I knew how to write you know quite good in Polish and slowly I learned myself. The mayor was a very kind man, a Polish man, I really don't know now whether he was Jewish or Polish because at that time one did not reveal their religion, because everybody was still afraid. I was afraid to say I was Jewish myself. I mean I had to when I had my passport done and all this, but ehm people were afraid yet. We were so scared to say we were Jewish, it was going through blood streams, the fear.

The secretarial work you were doing, was that to do with organising people who were displaced?

No no that was to do with the government.

Just the ordinary office work?.

Yes ordinary secretary because I did not have any qualifications. Anyway I was glad to get this job.

What about Ignatz Weiss, what did he do?

He was going to Germany and doing business. I mean I remember he bought her a dress, he bought me a dress, he bought her a watch, she bought me a watch. They were very very kind to me.

You lived with them?

Oh I lived with them till I came to England. Then from Lodz I went to Aleksandrow, there when I got off the train I met some people who I knew by their faces, but I didn't remember the names, they recognised me and they made a very very big fuss with me. That was the jeweller who my father used to deal with and his mother-in-law who had a bakers shop. And it was a small town and everybody knew me. So I stayed there with our neighbours who had a shop next to ours, they had a stationery shop, but it was books and newspapers, colouring books, all the books for schools. And ehm I stayed with them. They had two daughters, one daughter was a friend of mine and a son who was older. He didn't want me to go back, then the mayor of Aleksandrow called me and he asked me to stay, they would give me a place to live and I could do the secretarial work there, but everything was too painful for me.

Where we were living I was just passing I didn't even look. When I went to the neighbours, one neighbour had our paintings, they had our beautiful oil paintings, we had beautiful carved wood like a snake or an alligator, beautiful things, my father loved it. And ehm in another neighbour was our bedroom suite, in another neighbour was our dining room suite, it was breaking my heart.

I stayed there and then I went also to Slezewo to the little village which my mother came from. And my mother's sister lived there with her own three children and two sons from the first wife of my uncles. And ehm nobody was alive, I went to the gentile people who were their neighbours, they were very friendly with them. And they told me that my older cousin who was older by two years from me, when they come to evacuate them she didn't want to go and they killed her on the spot and so I thought to myself, what am I doing here.

I just walked back because it was only five kilometres. I walked back myself to Aleksandrow, I stayed overnight and I made my own way back to... Wait, I still went to Wloclawek as well where I was going to school and I had a lot of friends there. I had a friend which I was very close to Mira Kolska she's now living in Jerusalem, which I found out after the war. And as a matter of fact I also went in Wloclawek to this office where the people who come back find their names to know that somebody came to look for them and that they were alive. And I met Mrs Kolska which was Milka's mother, she was alive. They were, I think they were alive because they were living on Gentiles papers. And Mrs Kolska used to come from the same town as my father, she knew my father and my father knew her as well. So when I used to go to school in Wloclawek many weekends I used to stay overnight with Milka. Though she was a class higher than I or two classes, but we got quite friendly.

Then nobody was there alive whom I knew, or they were alive and they didn't come to Wloclawek to sign their names. But Mrs Kolska told me that Milka was alive and ehm her son was alive and they were living in Warsaw and she gave me the address of theirs. Which was very helpful, because when I went to Warsaw afterwards to see the Foreign Office for ehm coming to England, it was very useful to me. And then after all this I went back to Lignitza.

There I was looking for a job and Irma was getting better and I went to this town hall and I got easy a job. I was interviewed by the mayor and I got the job immediately. Working there helped me tremendously, I was meeting the Russians from Pulkownik, because Rokosowskis army was stationed there and I also met two reporters. One was from Sweden and one was from England. My English was not so good but I

spoke German and I asked for an interview with the English reporter. Thank goodness he spoke German, he didn't speak Polish. And I told him about my family in England, that my father's family was in England, my father's parents, a sister and two brothers.

Actually I did not know that the second brother was here, the older brother came here I think before the First World War because my grandparents and my aunt with her husband came after the war. How I know because, when my father came from Russia to Poland they were making themselves ready to go to England. Actually my grandparents did not meet my mother but my aunt who came later to England, she met my mother.

When I had the interview with the English reporter I remembered, of course I knew the surnames of my family but I did not remember which one was which, was it NW10 or W11 belonging to my aunt or to my uncle. But he was very kind and he took all the details and apparently he put in the newspaper here, which newspaper I don't know. They told me but I don't remember and people were phoning to my aunt.

But in the meantime I also met an American there and he took a letter from me because the post was not working properly there, so he took a letter from me, we did not know if the post would go abroad. In Poland was it working, like when you send a letter in a Polish town they got it but not abroad, we did not know. So he sent a letter also and my aunt received the letter. And I also told her that I'd met this young man who was in the Russian army but his father was alive, his mother died during the war, but the father was alive, they'd ran to Russia. And this young man who I was going with, he joined the Russian army and in the meantime when his mother died the father got married again, she also had a son because she lost her husband.

These were Jewish people?

Oh yes they were Jewish. I couldn't do that, my father would turn in his grave. And I told you, to save my life I wouldn't go to a Gentile. Anyway they were quite comfortable, the father was doing big business and they opened a shop in Lignitza, a grocery shop with everything in it. And the food was so scarce so really they were making a lot of money and they had cars which Siegmund the young man I used to go out with, he had his own car. And ehm Ignatz Weiss also opened a shop with materials. So I finished my job in the office and worked, first I was just... We used to work in the office till four o'clock, so after four I used to go to the shop, if Irma wanted to go somewhere I was in the shop. Because the closing times at that time I think was seven o'clock or eight o'clock I don't remember. But you stayed in a shop quite long.

And Siegmund was very very kind, he used to bring me the first strawberries there and chocolates and he really made a very big fuss, he was really in love with me. Then I start to get letters from England. Now the people I was staying with, Irma and Ignatz they said to me, "Look you don't even know what life is about, it's just after the war, he's your first boyfriend, don't you think you should go to England, finish your studies, you have a quite comfortable family, they will look after you. I think this is the right choice." And I listened to them. Siegmund until the last minute did not think I would go. So I started making arrangements to go and see them.

My aunt sent me papers and they had to also show how much they earned, if they had room for me to stay and they were very comfortable people and everything was in order. So I had to go and see in Katowitz, this was the Consulate. And they were trying to help me as much as they could but the money was running out, I had to stay for a couple of nights there, I had to go to a hotel and I started selling my clothes knowing that I'm going to England, I wouldn't need these clothes. And even material that I had from Siegmund I also sold, it was his father really who gave me it as a present. Of course I needed the money I had to be twice in the Foreign Office in Warsaw which I went to see my friend Milka.

I came to Warsaw very very early in the morning and I started walking there and it looked terrible, the whole town was in one shambles. Very little buildings left, so I

rang the bell and I went there. And a maid opened the door, I did not know that they were not as Jews. And I said to the maid that I was going to the Hebrew school Moraja with Milka. And ehm she took me in and they gave me a room to sleep because I was very very tired, it was about five o'clock in the morning. And then the next thing I know they tell me to get out. Sorry, Milka was not there. I think Milka was already in Israel. But she had a brother who also lived in this flat and they gave me Milka's room, I remember now and the next thing I know it was not her brother. The woman next door came to me and said "What are you doing telling everybody that you're Jewish and you're putting me in a jeopardy". They didn't even give me a chance to explain.

So I picked up my little parcel and I went and had to find myself somewhere a room to sleep. It was very expensive, so I was sleeping in a room where there was about two or three other people scared in case they should take my few pennies away that I've got. But everything was okay, I went to the Foreign Office there and the papers were arranged to come to England.

In the meantime in Lignitza the life was quite hectic. They were starting to open night clubs and we were enjoying our life to the full. Dancing to about three o'clock in the morning and by eight o'clock in the office. (Laughs) But we really enjoyed ourselves. When the time came to go to England I did tell Siegmund two weeks before that I had my papers and I was going. His father called me and asked me what would happen to Siegmund. I said, "I'm going to see my family it doesn't mean I'm going to stay there". But I wanted to see them if I had the opportunity. And in my heart I felt towards him like a brother more, I didn't even know what the meaning of love was. I never went with anybody. So he stopped talking to me.

But when the time came that I had to go to the station, he came he took my luggage and took me to the station. I had to go to Gdynia because I was coming by ship. We didn't say one word to each other. Just when goodbye he kissed me on my forehead and that was it, that's how we left. When I got to Gdynia of course I had my time when the ship was to go to London. So in the meantime I booked myself into a hotel, just a small hotel, as I said I sold my clothes and they tried to help me as much as they

could. And in the meantime the ship Baltic, something was wrong with it and they had to repair it. And I was in terrible trouble because you have to live and here we could not go away and they wouldn't let us on the ship and I'm running out of money.

I met a girl, when I was going to see how the ship looked, it was only a little ship only twenty passengers on it going to England so when I was going, one day I wanted to visit the ship to see how it looked and I met a girl there, a young girl, her name was Feigele, but when she came to England it was Fay. We took to each other, she was staying in a hostel and she was also afraid, she had more money than I did and they should not pinch or take it away from her because there were also lots of people in the hostel and I was not allowed to take anybody in my room. And one night when I was there by myself the porter got himself drunk and started knocking on my door and I got terribly frightened and didn't let him in. I thought, "Oh if I had Fay here I would be better off". Anyway one day I smuggled her in and we were staying, there was only one bed but we slept and also one day he was knocking on the door, we were scared stiff, I put her under the bed in case he broke the door. Anyway we were quite successful, it was you know all right.

Then we went one day to have tea or supper or something, we had a meal in a restaurant and I met a man who's daughter was already in England, a middle aged man and he was only too eager to lend me money that I should give to the daughter back in England you see. So he lent to me a few thousand slotis which came out three and a half pounds in English money. That time you see, we're talking over forty years ago that was a little bit but it helped me.

F98 - End of Side A

F98 - Side B

... and that kept me going with this money because after ten days the ship was ready to sail.

Can you tell me what year this was, was it 1946?

Yes 1946 I arrived in England, I think the 5th of August. And we travelled about five, six days I suppose, it was just dreadful, I was so ill because it was a little ship and...

An English ship?

No Polish ship. And here we made ourselves ready, what are we going to eat because we were starving still after the war. We were so hungry, I don't think we had any bottoms in our stomach. It was just tragic. I cannot tell you how hungry we were. And we planned how we are going to eat me and Fay. Oh my goodness me and here I am so ill, I was the first one to be sick and I never was sick, they used to chuck me from one cabin to another because they didn't want to be sick. I was so ill but managed to converse with some people, where we are going, what addresses and I was telling them what address was my aunts and what address I was living in, which was a very good address and quite comfortable and all this. While Fay was going to the East End.

Anyway after five days I think we arrived in London into the docks and the families were coming to collect us. Fay's uncle and aunty did not have a car, they didn't have a car and my uncle came with a car and so he offered to take the aunt and Fay and the luggage in his car but there was not enough room for the uncle and cousin who came

for her. When we got to Fay's uncle's place, they had also a shop, I don't remember what shop, but that was the East End of London in Cable Street, poor Fay she got white like a sheet, it was really dreadful. So my aunt looked at me she said, "Don't worry" in Polish, "Don't worry I live a little bit different". Because I felt terrible myself for her. Because they were writing to her letters, oh you will become a princess here, and all this and poor Fay was really dissatisfied.

And when I went to, I stayed with my aunt and uncle. I'm not going to mention their names because I had a terrible time with them. Though the house was beautiful and the front garden with roses and the back gardens with roses but my heart was bleeding. My cousins were very kind I must say. I suppose it took a little bit of time to get used to, to have a strange person in their home. And ehm...

Did you have cousins your age?

Yes one was two years older, one was my age. One was much older, she was married and one cousin was only sixteen and a cousin Joe was about at that time nineteen I would say. No he was younger than myself, I was nineteen when I came to England, Bessie was sixteen and Joe was I think seventeen. And then two cousins one was a year older and one a year younger than my age. Anyway when I was there they were very kind, very nice. They were introducing me to all their friends, my aunty and uncle. I think that they thought, as civilisation was going forward in England, in Poland it stood still, because my aunty would ask me "Oh did you have any cinemas?" or something like that. But of course when she left soon after the First World War there was no cinemas anywhere. Anyway I think that they thought they'd brought a girl from a camp, she can't speak and she can't count and she can't read.

And we had no maid, it was a big six bedroomed house with two bathrooms and three toilets and no maid. But what I could see was, one of my cousins who I was very fond of, she was the kindest one to me, she was doing like the housework and I was supposed to be helping her. But she was doing mostly the cooking and I was doing

the housework. And my uncle was giving me ten shillings a week. I was already, I needed heels for my shoes, we were wearing platform heels with cork and I took with me from Poland, two pairs. I was already walking on the cork, I didn't have money to repair it.

Then I had to find myself a school to learn English, so I was not allowed to go in the morning but I was going in the afternoons because I had to help them with the housework. So the ten shillings was just enough for the fares. So I remember when I came to England, my aunty took me to Brondesbury House where all the children of people coming from different countries, it was like a Jewish organisation there or something, I don't remember what it was. Everything to me was like a dream. I had to register myself there, but I remember where we got off the bus in that street, a sweet shop was there. I loved chocolates so it penetrated my mind that sweet shop. So I went by myself one day and I said I would like to learn English could they put me on to a school. So they put me on to the Charing Cross Polytechnic where I used to go and have my lessons.

Then one day before I went to school, as soon as I came to England I had to go to the Foreign Office so my cousin Joe took me there. And I dressed myself lovely, the sun was shining, they never told me take with me a coat or an umbrella or something, and whereby when we left the Foreign Office, which I was very very surprised when they took my details, they never asked my religion which I was not used to, because in Poland everywhere you went you had to tell your religion. So I said to my cousin "It's a fantastic country you don't have to tell your religion, it doesn't state in any of your papers who you are really". So that really made me feel better inside me, that I was not afraid who I was. And as we come out from this Foreign office it started to rain. He was kind to me he bought me an ice cream.

Anyway we got home eventually and then I was going to school in the afternoons and I met girls from Poland which I was very very friendly with. One of them is Rena Izabelak, her name was Litvak but then she got married. And we got ourselves quite friendly. Rena was in this fantastic situation because her father used to do business with Germany and so he used to go to Germany. I don't know if he used to come to

England but he had money in the bank here, so she was in this fantastic situation that she had a home because she got married soon after she come to England to her uncle, who lost his wife and a child. He was really the brother-in-law of her mother. And they had absolutely an open house so I used to go any minute I had spare time. And they shared their food because everything was on ration, Arnold was quite a capable man and always food was there,so it was fantastic.

While by my aunt I didn't have this luxury. I didn't know which one is butter, which one is margarine, they only put it on the table so I took a bit of butter and put it on the bread and my cousin would say, "You know Barbara butter is on ration we eat mostly margarine," these little things, so my aunt was closing the larder when she was going out.

She locked it?

She locked it yes. And little things like that you see, which was not very pleasant.

It wasn't a happy house?

No not for me.

Was your friend Rena from the camps?

No she was also on the Gentile papers, she was hiding herself. Her mother was alive so she came with her mother here you see and as I say there was money here which was fantastic for them. Anyway then this Fay started to work in a factory sewing so I said, "Fay I'm in terrible trouble, I have to earn money and I don't know how". And

she said to me, "Look I can find you a job if you want in a factory," I said, "Okay". So she met in the factory some people and she gave me an address of the man she knew was a presser in a factory. So I came to this factory in the East End, it was Phillpot Street I remember. And ehm I asked for this man and he said, "Oh yes I know, Fay was telling me about you," and he introduced me to the boss and I said, "Look I can hold a needle and I'll have to learn, you pay me what I'm worth and that's all, but I have to earn some money". And he engaged me and I was another week with my aunt.

So one of my cousins, my uncle had property, during the war he was sitting in London and buying property, streets, where did he have the money? He had a big garage in Acton where it was requisitioned by the government because they needed to make a factory for arms or whatever, I don't know and they paid him a lot of money. I think twenty thousand pounds which was a lot of money before the war. So he had the money and he was just sitting in London and buying out streets. People were running away and they didn't know if they have any value or anything, if they come back will it be standing, some of it was not standing but he had a lot of compensation after the war.

So before I went to do my job and before I spoke to my aunt and everything, my cousin took me once when she was collecting rent in Cable Street and that was really before we start working, before Fay started working as well. And she said "Look I'm going to collect some money in Cable Street, if you want to see your friend Fay you can go and see her". Because I didn't want to travel such a long way myself, I didn't speak very well yet. So I went with her and we were collecting rent in this Cable Street and we went to one house which was really dreadful and I tell you this story after about this house. (Laughs)

But anyway we went to see my friend Fay and she collected whatever she needed to collect and we come back home. Then I start mentioning gently that I found myself a job and that I need money for clothes and all this and they didn't say anything. I was not allowed to work yet in England, because they took me and guaranteed that I had a room and food and everything there. So I had to get up very early in the morning

because I had to be at the factory by eight o'clock. Before I went I used to make tea for everybody and gave them tea upstairs and all this and then went to work. Always two policemen were standing there and I always thought they were waiting for me, so the girls in the factory used to laugh at me but they were very very kind. They were so helpful, they brought me food and they were so kind I cannot tell you. And they taught me how to hold the needle and how to sew.

I started with one pound ten shillings a week, ten shillings was my journey and I had a pound for myself. And being in the factory as I told you, I sewed my clothes, so my uncle who was living above my grandmother... My grandmother had her own house and there was four floors.

This is a different uncle you're talking about?

Yes this is a different uncle. My father's brother lived together with my grandmother.

Where?

In Kensington, Blenheim Crescent. My grandmother was living on the first floor and my uncle was living on the second floor. My uncle also originated from Poland but he was living in France. When the war broke out, before the war broke out his wife and her son were still in Poland, he went to Paris, from Paris he came to England, then the war broke out. So the wife and the child were in Poland and he was in England and of course he lost his wife and his son. He was very kind but he didn't have anything because he came just from France you see.

And he tried to help me, he got me a coat, a lovely beautiful coat and then one of my cousins was getting married in January and he bought me a lovely black coat which I wanted for the wedding and my aunt gave me some material and I tried to make

myself a dress. That was all before I started going to work myself. After the wedding I started to work. When I started to work of course I was putting this coat on because I didn't have any coat. So my aunt said, "What are you wearing this coat for everyday?"

So I brought with me a little kind of jacket with a skirt and the frock was so big, 47 I start working, the winter 47. So there was this terrible winter and this man I was working for he felt really sorry for me so he said, "Look we can make you a coat here and you can pay out how much you want every week". So I thanked him very much and they gave me a coat there, a winter coat and I was giving him ten shillings a week. So he only took one first week and then he didn't take it from me, but he didn't want to make me... "Whenever you have more money, you give me," you see. Oh he was very kind, he also looked out for what food I had and he used to bring me some food.

They were all Jewish people?

Yes. Not all. There were two ladies working with me there together, they were not English, one was an elderly lady and she was an invalid, her name was Beattie and the other name I forgot, but they were both very very kind to me. They all were very kind to me.

Were some of them like you, from Europe?

No none of them. One lady was a Polish lady, she was married to a Pole but she came here to this country when she was a baby, a child. And this lady who was married to this Polish fellow they used to invite me over very often after work to have supper with them. They were really feeling sorry for me. I don't want to say anymore, I had a terrible experience with my aunt and uncle. Whenever something was missing she

used to ask me, like accusing me. And by the time she found it I was the one... You know what I mean, it was a terrible feeling.

My cousin, one of my cousins who was helping at home, she was very kind to me and she used to give me little gifts and all this and she loved opera and I loved opera and a couple of times she booked tickets and we used to go to Covent Garden right up on top and I paid her back for the ticket but once on a Thursday we went and we came home and we were so happy because it was lovely. I think it was *Il Trovatore* or *Tosca* because I saw both of them there.

So my uncle was sitting with his pals playing cards and he called me in his...

"Tomorrow you're not going to work because you have to help aunty with the Shabas". And you know Fridays they were delivering the work and it was the wages day, which I didn't have no money. And he didn't say to me "But here you've got ten shillings ," or something like that. And I was crying all night. So I got up first thing in the morning to try helping her with the cleaning and all this and my eyes were swollen. So my aunt said, "It is not such a tragedy that you don't have to go one day to work", I said, "But they're waiting for me, you know it's the delivery day on the Friday and the work has to be finished," because by that time I was getting better and I was getting three pounds a week.

I never asked him for any raise, whenever he was to give me another ten shillings a week... Anyway I explained to her, "Can I go out for ten minutes?" She said I could so I went out and I phoned to the factory crying that I couldn't come to work because my uncle told me to help out aunty with the Shabas. He said, "Don't worry, don't worry". And that Friday I helped her and after I helped her its after lunch, I put my coat on and I went to my Buba, to my grandmother because before I went to work...

I forgot to tell you, I used to go to my grandmother very often and I used to clean for her and I used to help her. She was a lady already ninety. Before I came to England my grandfather when he heard that he lost four sons, no three sons in the war he got a heart atack and he was eighty one and he died. But he left me a hundred pounds. Because he knew already that I was alive you see, but he didn't live to see me.

The hundred pounds was in England for you?

Yes. So I ran to my Buba to help her clean and cook something for Shabas, my aunty also gave me something to take and as I was crossing the road to run to the bus, my leg twisted and I sat on the pavement and sat and cried. So a lorry stopped, this time you wouldn't do that, and I explained to him where I lived and he took me there. And I was laid down for about a week with this leg, couldn't walk. But they understood at work, everything was okay and I went back to work.

But I phoned to my uncle, the one who was living with my Buba. His name was Ben, Benjamin and I said, I can't stand it anymore there, they won't let me go to work, they want me to clean the house and I'm going to take a room somewhere. So he said, "Look while you are here in England you're not going to take a room, you come and stay with us. Buba has two rooms, you can stay with Buba". I said okay.

On a Monday I was babysitting for my older cousin who had a little boy and I used to babysit quite often for her when I used to come from work, go to her house so she could go with her husband to the cinema or theatre or whatever. I used to bath Alan and put him to sleep and of course I had supper ready when I used to go to my cousins. That was the oldest daughter of my aunts also living in Willesden and her husband had a hairdressing salon. So uncle said, "You come and stay here".

At that time I was going out with a Polish fellow, already about two months. Not two months, I went with him about a fortnight and I said to him, "Salek I am leaving aunty and I'm going to move to my grandmothers". So he came and he took the cases for me and they were out somehow. Everybody was out that time and I just went. That was on a Tuesday. I was babysitting on Monday and on Tuesday I went. So they did not know where I was you see. So they phoned to my uncle Ben and didn't ask "Where is Barbara," but, "Where is this Moyt?" you know, girl, it's not a word in English. So my uncle said, "She is here and she is staying with us".

What does moyt mean?

Like, not a nice word for girl or woman. Anyway it didn't matter. So that's it. I had to go again there because I left the material my aunty gave me for the evening dress which I made myself. I left it because I didn't need it. I didn't want anything from them actually, I left everything, whatever they'd given me. So my aunt was a bit annoyed, I said, "Look I don't need this evening gown, you might need it for one of the girls again". On the Sunday before I left they had a wedding to go to and they used to take me with them to show off, they brought a girl from Poland, but I said, "No I'm not going". I said, "I'm sorry I'm not feeling up to this performance".

So I was staying with my grandmother but she was an elderly lady, she had a bedroom where there was two beds and she had a living room which was a part of the kitchen. And in the living room she had a put-you-up and I wanted to stay on the put-you-up, but she wanted me to stay with her in the bedroom. I said, "Grandma it's no good an elderly person with a young person, it's better if you sleep on your own and I sleep on my own". And my older uncle Salamon was living round the corner in Ladbroke Grove and ehm...

F98 - End of Side B

F99 - Side A

This uncle Salamon used to come every evening after work to my grandmother and talk to her. I didn't know what he was talking about. Now I mention also a lady that I used to work with. Did I mention the lady that was Jewish and married to a man that was also in the Polish army but he was a Jew, Fay?

Yes.

No, Fay was a friend as well, I had two Fays. The young woman who I used to work with, her name was Fay and she was married to a gentleman called Joe and ehm he was also from Poland, he was also in the Polish army under the British command and they met in England and they married here. They were also very kind to me and from time to time they used to invite me. And ehm one day he said to me, "Look we've got some friends and these friends met a young man while they were standing in the Foreign Office". Because his friend wanted to go to Poland or somewhere and had to have some papers. "And in front of him standing in the queue is a young man who is supposed to be very nice, he is from Cracow and we would like you to meet him". So I thought to myself, all right.

But in meantime already, I was a little bit tough with my grandmother because she wanted me to be early home when I went to this cinema came in quarter to eleven, at eleven o'clock she used to lock me out, she wouldn't give me the keys. She would for the front door but not for the flat and I was all night on the stairs sleeping. It was a bit tough and I got fed up. And I was corresponding all the time with the Weiss's, who left Poland and went to Munich where they were also waiting for papers to go to Africa, Ignatz Weiss had a sister there.

And I forgot also to tell you that after three months when I was in England, my boyfriend Siegmund wrote me a letter saying he wanted me to come back. And I was

crying and laughing, they thought I'd gone mad, my family. And we started to correspond and he wrote to me also that he was working for his father, he's got his own flat and the father even bought me a Persian lamb coat, his stepmother should not see it and all this. So I wrote him a letter back and I thanked him and all this and I was looking forward to seeing this and I was trying to get the papers to go back to Germany.

I did start for the papers to Germany because this 47 winter, Ignatz wrote to me a letter that I should send a winter coat for Irma. And I had to tell them the truth, that I hadn't got it myself to wear and I told him about the family, so he said to me, "Do me a favour, come back to us, what we will eat, you will eat and you go with us to Africa". But in the meantime I was writing to Siegmund and suddenly I'm getting a letter from his stepmother, that it would be a burden to her husband if I came now to Munich. They were also trying to get papers for the other two brother for America and I should wait till they go to America or Brazil and then come back to them. And another letter followed. And I wrote to him and I'm not getting an answer from him. Because the stepmother was going there with the maid to clean or something and they found the letters. So I thought to myself, I'm going back there to fight when I have enough here. So I stopped writing to him completely and he stopped the correspondence.

I'm telling you in meantime how I met my husband. So Joe and Fay said to me they would like me to meet this young man who comes from Cracow and that was just Easter time. So Easter we were invited to these people. Friends of theirs who I've forgot the name of. And I went to them because everybody was working as you know and Easter was the bank holidays. So on the Sunday I went there and this young man is there. His name was Edvard Stiller and all this. So then he took me home and he said to me could he see me tomorrow which was a Monday, also a bank holiday, so I said okay and ehm so we saw each other and I said to him, he wanted me to see him again on Saturday which Fay and her husband Joe had invited us both. But I said to him, "I cannot come because I am going to Birmingham to my cousin," which was

true. I had a cousin in Birmingham and they invited me for a few days. Because it was a slack time in the factory as well so I could take two days off.

And so when Edvard, he is my husband now, which he changed his name, I'll tell you afterwards. He went himself back to Fay and Joe for the supper, he went himself and they said, "Where is Barbara?" He said, "She's going to Birmingham," I never mentioned to Fay so she thought I had an excuse. So when I came back and I phoned them. She says, "Where were you, why didn't you come?" I said, "I went to Birmingham to Galinas, to my cousins". So she said, "Oh I thought you were telling him a fib because you wanted to get rid of him," So I said, "No he's really quite a nice man, I wouldn't mind meeting him again," "Okay," she says, "You come over tonight". And I had to write a letter that I'm meeting him on a Thursday in Marble Arch, Corner House there in Marble Arch.

You had to write a letter?

Yes because I couldn't phone him, he didn't have a phone. See he was living also in digs. And ehm they posted the letter and I went there and he was waiting. He was waiting for me and we walked around Hyde Park and all this and he proposed to me. I thought to myself, what shall I do, go back to Germany, go back with them to Africa, what do I know, what am I going to do. And I just played horses, because it's just like on a lottery, I didn't know him really. I'd only met him twice and that was the third time. And I said to him... He told me that his name is not Edvard Stiller, his name is Lolek Stimler, which we changed to Leonard in English because when he was in Russia and he had a time when he was terribly ill, he wanted to join the army and that was the only thing to get him better, to join the army. And as a Jew they wouldn't take him in, so he had to change the name and make himself as a Gentile. So during the war he was as a Gentile.

So we got engaged, I said I accepted him, excuse me not yet, not engaged yet. So I said I would like him to come and meet my uncle and my grandmother, so that was

Thursday so I made a nice lunch for Friday night. And my uncle said, "He's not a Jew", because he looked very gentile. So I said, "Look tomorrow I'm supposed to meet him, he's supposed to come here, I go to my friend Rena and I phone you, ask him something about Jewishness. And I go to my friend Rena and if he's not I'm not coming, I'm not going to see him. If he is I come back". So I phoned him, he said, "Yes you can come". And do you know until about five years ago Len didn't know why my uncle asked him that and I told him.

Anyway so ehm we got engaged, I took him to meet my aunt and uncle. I said that was a necessity because whatever we can get out of them, then we can get out. He had nothing, he had twenty eight pounds which he had from the army, he was living in digs and he bought me a little diamond ring off this money.

And we had the hundred pounds from my grandfather and of course my grandmother had a house and she wanted to share in three. Like for me, for the uncle who lives upstairs, the oldest son who lived round the corner, but he was working so hard on her and he said it should only be put in his name and the Uncle Ben's name. So grandmother said okay. "She is getting married she needs a place to live. Give me at least a hundred pounds for her, I've got the hundred that grandfather left and give me another at least one hundred pounds" So he said, "Okay I give her ten pounds a week." He was a gambler unfortunately my uncle, so he gave me the first three ten pounds, so she gave it to me and I put it in the post office, like I put the hundred pounds also in the post office because we didn't have any bank accounts.

And the second week he doesn't give her the money, so she said to him, "What's the matter Salamon?" So he started to shout, at that at that time it was the uprising in Israel "What is she doing here let her go to Israel, she can live also in furnished rooms" and all this. I said to him, "I can't go to furnished rooms because Len is doing tailoring and he wants private work to help ourselves out, we will have one day our own place. If he goes to a furnished place he can't hide the machine and all this". And he left.

Grandmother woke up in the night very ill, so I called Uncle Ben from upstairs, he calls Uncle Salamon at five o'clock in the morning, he comes in and the first thing he does is points the finger at me and says, "It's all her fault that Mama is ill, she should go to Israel to fight there, what's she doing here. Why does she disturb all our lives". I said, "Uncle I fought enough in my life, you send your children". And he had also three daughters and a son and it was just terrible now. I went to work with eyes like that. (Demonstrates)

And apparently Uncle Ben phoned to my aunt, to my rich aunt what happened. So they phoned me at the factory at about eleven o'clock one of my cousins, "Barbara, we've got an empty flat and we would like you to see it and you can have it". So I left the factory early, I was meeting Len at six o'clock at the station because I was going to him to prepare something to eat, to eat together because we'd no homes. Anyway then he took me back to Ladbroke Grove by train and went back himself. And so I said to her "Listen I will not mention the names again, I don't care if it is in a loft or if it is the cellar, keep this place for me".

So I went early from the factory and took the keys, they gave me the address and if you don't mind, it was the horrible place where I went to collect the rent with my cousin. My God if I had known at that time that I'm going to live there I certainly would've went back home, even to Poland, never mind to Germany. Anyway I accepted it because we were engaged and we wanted to get married, so they booked a wedding. My uncle asked, what do I want a wedding or a bedroom suite. What do I want a bedroom suite for, I thought I'd better have a wedding and have a few pounds. So they made a wedding and they invited all their friends, I had only a few friends of mine.

Ehm and my aunt said I should go, I also had a hundred and six pounds from the wedding presents and my aunt suggested that I should go for a honeymoon. I said okay, so we went to Westcliffe and ehm we were a half a crown on the boat. I bought about a dozen cards and sent everybody a card and then I came back home, that was our honeymoon.

But I forgot to tell you one story, when I was still living with my aunt, my cousin which I told you they had ehm hairdressing salon in Wolverston (Willesden ??)and she had a little girl of three. It was her birthday and I told you that I looked after them, babysitting. And ehm I took her to Lyons Corner House for tea and took her to Woolworths and bought her some bits and pieces for a few pennies. And the bus stop, we went back home and the bus stop where we got off was just where my cousin's hairdressing salon was. So she left me and she runs to her father showing what I bought her. And you know hairdressers years ago had cubicles and I ran after her, "Gdynia come back because daddy is working".

And I look in the mirror and it's my friend Bella with whom I was in Litzmannstadt ghetto and Auschwitz and Pirshkow. She is the niece of Bennets the photographer. You can imagine we jumped at each other. It was unbelievable and of course we were in contact all the time. Unfortunately when she was thirty nine she had a stroke and she was not able to talk. Her left side was all numb, her hand is still numb, she drags her left leg but... And she had also two boys, now they live in Edgware here, not far. Her husband is very ill, it's very tough for her.

But anyway I had to tell you this little story as well, because the world is very small. And that's why she is my witness if it comes to it, that I helped the girls with the food. When I was singing, funny when I first met her, we met in a crowd, "Come and sing" and I couldn't because I was so unhappy here in England I never sang and I completely lost my voice, I just couldn't sing. It's terrible what happens to a person when you are unhappy.

So we were living in that Cable Street for a year. I got pregnant after three months and my little boy was born. Harvey Jacob which was after my husband's father and my father. And we saved every penny that we could. I was working still in the factory until the last minute. Len got himself a better job because when I met him he was only earning about four pounds five a week, when he asked for a rise they only gave him ten shillings, which was not enough.

My uncle asked me thirteen shillings a week for the rent for this place, which I found out afterwards the previous tenants only paid ten and six. But never mind. I didn't need anything from them. My uncle Salamon never turned up to the wedding but I was happy. Len changed his name to a proper name, Leonard Stimler and I found out that he had two sisters in Israel who were in Auschwitz. And we start building up work very very hard, he was working until twelve, one o'clock in the morning taking private jobs...

What sort of work?

He was... His father was a tailor and he really did not know much tailoring. But in the army when he was in Italy he bought a pattern and started cutting and doing things. (laughs) So when we got married he took on and when he was going to Israel he was making him, for him three suits. It took him a whole month to make one suit. I can't tell you I was just going 'ga,ga', I was pregnant and I just couldn't sit there and think how he's pulling it and sewing it back on, oh golly, anyway... And he... Len is a very versatile man and very very clever, very clever he can mend a car and he can build a house and he can make a suit that is true. All the central heating everything electric he put up all of this... yah.

Anyway so we were living there for a year because ah... there were prostitutes and gangsters living in this house. Once the police came on Saturday morning when Len was... went to work Saturday because he was... wanted to earn as much money possible to save to get out from that, to buy a proper place to live, in a proper district before the baby is coming.

And ehm the police just opened the door and come in as civillians so... And I was just dusting getting up in the morning and dusting over the place. He appologised, I said "Look" he said "I am terribly sorry but you should keep your doors closed, you know what kind of people are living here?" I said "I don't". He said, "They are gangsters and prostitutes. I went downstairs in the basement and a man was ehm...

sleeping there with a few women, so you should, must keep your door closed, locked. Anyway I would like to see your husband".

So after work when Len came he explained to him what people are living there. Anyway we saved in one year, five hundred pounds with my work and his work overtime and he was already earning over seven pounds a week and...

You were working?

I was still, I was working till the last minute of my pregnancy.

Did you work in a factory?

Oh yes, yes but I was only working till four o'clock because it was getting heavy and summer... I had Harvey in October so through the summer I was really feeling ill and if... One time I was so terribly ill and my friend Rena sent her, she came first herself, her mother prepared some chicken soup and special meat for me, white meat to eat. And the next day she sends a woman who cleaned for her, she was very good to me and ehm we lived there in Cable Street for a year.

Before I had the baby we wanted to buy a house in Dalston, we had a deposit and maybe to buy some furniture but he was afraid in case... You know sometimes with the job if they are slack he hasn't got work and we are left without a penny with a child so we are holding on to it. But while I was in hospital having Harvey my oldest son, my first child. But then we found the flat in Hampstead and they wanted hundred and fifty pounds key money which was better and it was a one bedroomed flat so for the moment I needed only a cot so it was okay.

But it was very tough on me because Harvey was a little bit chesty and he was crying at night and Len was sleeping, it was not so easy for me. But we stayed there in the meantime and Len opened his own factory and I was... I was helping him, dragging Harvey with me every day then I put him in a nursery but he didn't like it he made himself ill and it was very difficult for me. And I had to help my husband in business, we had some people working for us already and ehh...

This was making clothes?

Clothes yes, yes when he was working on wages the manufacturer could see that he is everything in this factory so he used to give him a lift home. He said "Len why don't you open for yourself and I will help you". That's how we started in our kitchen. And then he took a small place in Mortimer Market, it's off Tottenham Court Road it doesn't exist anymore. We stayed there for the year and then we moved the factory to Greek Street where we already had thirty people working for us. I was not going in everyday not early in the mornings, much easier for me.

But I was putting still Harvey into the nursery and I met somebody and she was also sending the child to the nursery so they both went together and one was a little bit tougher than the other so he looked after Harvey. And Harvey was not feeling sorry so for himself.

But I've still forgotten to tell you. When I had Harvey it was a maternity home in Commercial Road because that was just around the corner from where I was living you see so that's where I was going to hospital. And ehm and I had as the milk was coming in I had a terrible pain under my left arm and that's supposed to be the milk or something. I forgot also to tell you that my period completely stopped and had to be brought on after the war and ehm everything was upside down you see in the system in the body, everything somehow didn't work properly. I mean I blew up I was so big people thought I was fat but it was not. My uncle took me to the doctors and the doctor said it was all baby fat coming out and "... when she gets married and has a

normal life everything... and she will lose the weight and that". This was true. After a fortnight I was married you couldn't recognise me I went to size fourteen in a fortnight it just ran away it might have been water I don't know what it was but...

Your bad diet?

Yes yes, my stomach was, I looked liked pregnant I really looked bad. Anyway so we were afterwards... So when I was in hospital that was about over three weeks because they had to operate. And none of my family came to see me, I was broken hearted only my cousin the one who I used to babysit, the husband came to the home with his brother and brought me a gift for the baby. Nobody came nobody sent me anything, nothing. They were not interested if I had a pram if I have any clothes for my baby nothing, none of them were interested. But my friend Rena she had a child which was nearly two years older than mine and knowing that I was pregnant she was putting things away and she gave it to me. And ehm when I got married she gave me lets say sheets, you know they were trying to build a home up for me. Because my aunt gave me a dressing gown for a wedding present. I needed the dressing gown like I needed a hole in my head. Of course I was going on my honeymoon to Westcliff on a cruise for two weeks.

Anyway so we lived there in..in ehm...in Hampstead for five years and building up a business. We start saving money and we put... When we were living there Len took out a policy for five hundred pounds in case something happens to him. And then when we saved money to put the deposit on a house. We bought a house in Neasden.

F99 - End of Side A

F99 - Side B

Did I mention that I lived five years in Hampstead? And then we build up our business and I was helping as much as I could. And we put a deposit on a house in Neasden, a small three bedroomed house. And ehm when Harvey could have his own room, I could put a bed in it for him, because still at five he was sleeping in a cot. And it was not funny what I did, I let one bedroom, the main bedroom. We were living, sleeping in the medium, in the second bedroom. And in the boxroom Harvey had his own bedroom. And I used to get two pounds fifty a week for this furnished room and off this money I paid out for his bed and I bought a little cocktail cabinet and a carpet. I had to carpet, I had carpets like fitted carpets in the two rooms and this money paid the loan I took I remember in the Williams in Kilburn.

What year was this now?

Eh we got married in 48. Yes Harvey was born in 49 and we were living in Cable Street in 50. That was 54, 1954 that was because my other son was born in 55, so must be the end of 54 or beginning of 55. It's May 55 I think it was because Stuart was born in December, yes and I fell pregnant that's right ehm... then ehm... I forgot where I stopped.

You were talking about ehm moving into this house in South Huddersfield Road and the bank loan and having little room.

Yes yes. It was lovely. It was not so pleasant to have people living with you but when you were in the flat... We had to share a bathroom and toilet with a whole family so, that was nothing already it was a nice young couple which the parents lived round the corner and ehm... And they stayed with us for a year because they were

also saving to put a deposit on a house and a house required a lot. So then I become pregnant which I really didn't want any more because Harvey was already five and we went... What it was, Harvey was chesty and he was under a private doctor and he suggested to me I should take him to Switzerland. I said "I can't afford", but he said "A change of air. If you take him to the seaside in the summer that will be fine". I said "That is okay then".

For Easter we went for like a weekend to Bournemouth and there we found a place in ehm... Boscombe with a family where I was supposed to stay a whole month with Harvey. Len brought us in the car, we had already a car... yes we had a car. And ehm he brought us to Boscombe and he used to come on the weekends by train and on the third weekend when I was there I became ill, very sick. So I said "It must be my liver because I am not used to fried fish and chips". You see we were staying with an English family they were very kind they were childless and they were looking after Harvey. I cannot tell you really... So they called a doctor and the doctor asked me "Are you pregnant?" I said "Wouldn't I know?" I would know anyway. So not realising, my periods stopped

Because your period had been irregular?

That's right, this is the truth. This was the point that it was irregular anyway. Once I had to go to the doctor and he gave me iron medicine because it stopped you see...anaemic. Anyway so I said "It's impossible, I'm not married yesterday or today I would know", so he left it dead certain. Len was phoning every evening, he phoned me on that Thursday evening. That happened just on the Thursday and as I'm speaking to him I just managed to say "Len do me a favour bring the car this weekend because I want to go home and I'm..." I can't speak to him anymore, I fainted on the floor. And so he phoned back to the people they spoke and they said to him that I had the doctor so he wanted the doctors number. So he phoned to the doctor and the problem the doctor said "I think your wife is pregnant".

I don't know, he came on Friday after work with the car, I usually used to stay till Sunday, but Saturday morning we were making the way home and I was ill all the way he had to stop every minute. I was not sick any more I felt bad anyway. On next Monday I still had the doctor in Kilburn because he was a Polish doctor and I was used to go to him. And I'm getting off the bus going in the morning to the doctor to see what was wrong with me and my friend who had on the corner a shop, Julie, she just comes out she says "Oh Mamma you do look pregnant". And she was quite a clever woman.

And I trotted to the doctor and he said "Look maybe it is liver trouble but maybe not, why don't you go and be examined by a Gynaecologist?" I said "Okay", so he gave me a private Gynaecologist. Then I thought, if I'm pregnant I'm going to get rid of it. So when I was examined by him, Len went with me of course to the Gynaecologist, he was waiting in the waiting room he said "You are pregnant six weeks, six weeks pregnant. And hundred pounds if it is in your home and hundred and thirty if it is here." So I said I would have to speak to my husband so I went for a walk with him, Len, near the surgery there. And he said "Look he said it's up to you what do you want to do, it's up to you". So I said "If I don't know when it happened, I really don't know and how it happened. So I suppose if we shared to have it, I'm going to go through with it". I went back to the doctor I said I decided to go through with it not have an abortion and that's what it was, Stuart was born.

What made you consider originally the idea you didn't want another...?

I couldn't take it any more. I knew that I was not, my nerves were bad, that I did not bring up my child properly, I didn't have no patience.

And do you feel that you cou...?

I felt inside me. Yes I felt that I make the child nervous he was getting eczema my older son and running to the doctors backwards and forwards he was under Great Ormond Street Hospital I just couldn't go through... But I thought, if God, I don't know when it happened God wants me to have another child I'm going to have another child. And Stuart was born. I made arrangements in Hampstead Maternity Home ehm Queen Mary's Maternity Home in Hampstead. They were very very good they were very nice because it was difficult to get in with a second child you know.

People have...?

Yes a second child, it was very difficult then I don't know how it is now but I was just lucky they got me in. I also had a place in the University College but then I know that they have to learn and you have to... but I just couldn't go through with it to be mucked about. You see I know it is not wrong, because they have to learn anyway, so the second choice was better for me.

And Stuart was born and I had terrible problems with him. He had on this side, I could see he had like a patch with blue stuff on it, I didn't know what it was, but after ten months I could see eczema on his hands. And when he had the first attack I knew it was asthma, but I didn't want to know it was asthma. I said "I am not going to go through life with another child like that". I was holding this child all night, his little body couldn't breathe any more and my husband said "You killed it, what are you doing? I have to call a doctor". I just didn't want to hear it, that he's got asthma. Anyway the doctor came "He's got asthma, he's got asthma he's very bad". They took him to hospital and he was better.

And I started to be, my nerves started to, I started to go out to cut myself, out to take it out on myself. What I don't know but I felt ill..... The doctor said I had to see a psychiatrist. I had to see a psychiatrist and he said "You have to go into a nursing home". So Len started to make arrangements for Stuart to go into a nursery somewhere to be looked after he couldn't afford to send me and him too. So the

doctor made arrangements for an ehm... do you call it a Council Nursery you know
a...

A council nursery, a creche?

Yes, and ehm the lady came to see me, or was it a gentleman! I don't remember. And they saw what a state I was in and they took Stuart in and ehm I went to the nursing home which was in Kingsley?

Kings Langley?

Kingsla...

Kings Langsley?

Kings Langley. And I was there I would be there about three months but ehm I had a truth injection and apparently I was talking all night and all day. And when I woke up I was in such a state my head everything was bursting I just I was in a terrible state. And they were writing what I was saying, taking their time because they didn't have tape recorders. And I don't know if I mentioned I was under Dr Bierer. When I felt better the doctor allowed Len to bring the children in to see me. That was I think about after a month or something like that.

And Stuart didn't recognise me it was a terrible, terrible experience I went through. He didn't want to come to me at all and I really felt terrible that my own child doesn't recognise me. And I start realising what I am doing to my family, to my husband. And a week later I spoke to Dr Bierer and I said to him, "I think I'd better go home because I can see that my child doesn't recognise me I am ruining financially my

husband as well". So he said to me, "It's the best for you to do what you think is the best to do. But you are not fit to look after the children, especially after the baby. Your husband has to have somebody to look after them". So when the next day my husband came and I told him, he spoke to Dr. Bierer about it. He said, "Make arrangements to get somebody" and we got a maid from Italy.

I came home of course and as soon as she came I had a bit of an experience. Because we had a girl coming and then she wrote a letter, where is she supposed to come to. A few days before we received a letter from her that her mother is ill she can't come. I was in a terrible state. I was sitting from eight o'clock on the staircase waiting until the offices are open at the agency. And I got hold of somebody in Finchley and I said, "If you've got somebody please keep them for me because I can't get my baby home from the nursing home unless I get somebody to look after him". So she says, "Fortunately I have somebody here who is an Italian girl and they didn't leave her any money or any food and she wanted to leave there". I said "Keep her there for me, I want her". And I quickly dressed myself and at that time I didn't drive but I quickly went to Finchley to the agency and brought the girl.

She couldn't speak a word of English. She was from the south of Italy, a real peasant but... I gave her lunch and quickly we went to collect Stuart. Before I had the girl I went a couple of times to see Stuart in the nursery. And he was just going with me because a lady with him had bought him sweets and an ice cream. But as soon as I brought him back and he saw the nurse who came in with the children from the park, he just left me and ran to her. He didn't want to know me.

Anyway I brought him home with the girl and slowly everything was all right and I was coming slowly to myself. I was feeling slowly better and ehm I had the girl only for about six weeks because we couldn't afford to keep a maid. She wanted more money and before she went we made arrangements for an au pair which was much cheaper. And I had the first au pair, she was a fantastic girl from Naples, a student, not far from Naples, but she was a student from a place called Vicoequeza. And she was really lovely her name was Elvira. And the life started to be more normal.

Unfortunately Stuart started to suffer terribly with this asthma business and he was really very very ill, he was taken to hospital and he was... First he started with eczema.

Where were you living?

In Neasden. And ehm then we started to get to know that people were getting restitution money from Germany and I was recommended to a Dr. Cohen who was a judge in Germany before the war. But he was here doing all the arrangements for people to get money. And my husband went with me to him. We phoned up for an appointment and I was there for about four hours talking to him, or maybe longer, all my experiences. I didn't mention everything because I was a little bit shy in front of my husband. It was a little bit difficult.

What year was this Barbara?

Ehm about 56, 57 I don't remember exactly. They were paying ehm from 49 I think or something like that. They were back-paying money. And it came out, first money was for working and being in the camps, which was eight hundred and fifty pounds in English money, after the solicitor took his commission. So my husband sold his car and we put together the money and we bought a house, a property. I was always very unsure, not ehm, I think the medicine was doing something to me, I can't remember.

We bought this house so I would be more secure. My husband's business was not secure because it was a seasonal business, when the season was there it was very nice, but when three months, we didn't have any work, all the money that we saved we spent again because we had to keep the people and pay the expenses of the business. But ehm so I always was very insecure and I said to my husband, "If we would buy a property and it would be a certain income", and if something, God

forbid, happens to him, I can always look after it myself, not realising how difficult it was and I couldn't do it. But he was quite good and he really carried on with his business.

For the first property I borrowed a hundred pounds from my cousin to buy some furniture and we were painting ourselves and we were scrubbing and washing ourselves and preparing the property to be let. And we still lived in Neasden. Then after a year we saved money, my husband put a deposit on a car, because it was very very difficult for him without a car with the business. He had to deliver work and he didn't have a car so he had to always take taxis. And of course going to work, this was very difficult for him. Sometimes he used to work until one o'clock in the morning and there wasn't any buses so he had to walk. It was very difficult for him. And most of the evenings he brought the work home and he used to work at home till very very late. My Gentile neighbour said to me, "It's a not a wonder the foreign people get on I've never seen anybody working like you". Because she couldn't sleep at night, she could see the lights in the dining room and lounge where my husband was working.

And that's how we built ourselves up. Then a year later came another bunch of money which was for loss of education and loss of health. And that was I think twelve hundred and fifty pounds, which we bought another property with. You see some people when they got the money they used to go for holidays, bought themselves a fur coat and a diamond ring and the money went. But we were thinking of the future, to secure ourselves. And coming from home where my mother was very tidy and had always a lovely lovely home, I was putting everything in my home.

So then we could afford, we saved some money, I sold my house for four thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds and we wanted to buy a bigger house because I found that the children had to have separate bedrooms, suffering both with asthma. And ehm so we bought a house in Harrow where it was five thousand four hundred. We didn't want to go over, to pay more than a thousand, to take another policy and pay more than about one pound or two pounds a week, because you couldn't afford to pay more. But I was quite happy, it was a beautiful, beautiful house. And we built on

there afterwards, because I had the income from the houses and then I have my own pension from the Germans, which was according to the index link was going up.

This was paid yearly?

No monthly I get a pension now. I still get a pension.

May I ask how much it is?

Ehm now it would be about three hundred and seventy pounds a month. I was costed as middle class according to my father's business and schools I was going to, which I had to produce witnesses for. And the school I was going to I told you where I was one Jewish child, it still existed, it doesn't exist now. But soon after the war I told you I went there and they could check on me. So everything was correct.

And you're still getting this?

Oh yes I'm getting... I was really checked by German doctors, the last time I think it was about seven years or eight years ago and they stopped checking me. I used to go every year to a German doctor and I had to be checked.

They were giving you a pension because of what you suffered physically?

That's right, mentally and physically. Mostly mentally, not so much physically actually. And ehm that's what I...

You say they stopped examining you and they are still giving you...?

That's right yes, because I think after a certain age they stopped examining me, which I think I was about fifty two, they could see I wouldn't get better. They can see my life story, how can one get better after all this life experience and the children were suffering as well.

When I used to take Harvey my oldest son to Great Ormond Street Hospital, where I had to take him every two weeks for examinations, and one day I didn't go because I have not been well and my husband took him. So they said, "Mr Stimler you are a tonic to your child". That meant I was the poison and he was the tonic. As I told you before I was not fit to have children, but I had them and I am grateful to God. And I have the grandchildren so I am grateful to God as well.

Then I started suffering with my back very badly, we lived in Watford Road for about twenty three and a half years in Harrow. And ehm my two sons also, Harvey was going to private schools, then he went to Buckingham College and he had a bit of difficulty in passing his exams. He got in for dentistry in the London Hospital but he didn't take life too serious I suppose. And the first year he just didn't pass and he had to leave, which was a terrible terrible disappointment to us. It's like throwing your future into the gutter but I was very ... My husband was very very disappointed, what could we do, we couldn't do nothing.

We tried to get him into Malta, to Canada but we just couldn't and ehm so he was doing physiotherapy but he was not so keen on it either and he started with jewellery. Which I had a friend who had a, I mean we still have the friends here in London, they manufactured jewellery. So I said to him "Henry do me a favour, take Harvey for a fortnight and see if he... because he's getting on now he's twenty and what is he going to do it's a terrible problem, I can't keep a boy of that age already". Anyway very very versatile Harvey is and whatever he looked at he could do with his hands. It was

fantastic. It was then a fortnight... he wanted to do everything in a fortnight. So my friend said "He wants to know everything in a fortnight", but after a fortnight he left and he went into.....

F99 - End of Side B

BRITISH LIBRARY NATIONAL SOUND ARCHIVE

NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Ref. No.: C410/004

Playback Nos: F94-100 inc.

Collection Title: LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Interviewee's surname: STIMLER

Title: Mrs.

Interviewee's forenames: Barbara

Date of Birth: 5/2/27

Sex: F

Date(s) of recording: 17/11/88

Location of interview: Interviewee's home

Name of interviewer: Jennifer Wingate

Type of recorder: Marantz

Total no. of tapes: 7

Speed: -

Type of tape: C60

CassetteNoise Reduction: Dolby B

Mono or stereo: Stereo

Original or copy: Original

Additional material: 1 photo (passport size)

Copyright/clearance: Full clearance

F94 - Side A

Born February 1927 in Aleksandrow-Kinjawski, Poland.

Only child of Sarah and Jacob Krakowska. Very much loved and indulged. Sent to kindergarten aged 4 years - nuns were her teachers. It was the only private school in Aleksandrow and she the only Jewish child there.

Nuns were good to her and told her to pray according to her religion while they prayed according to theirs.

She stayed there 5 or 6 years then had to take an examination for entrance to high school.

Went to a Jewish high school in a town called Wloclawek. Travelled there by train - the journey took one hour. Sometimes in winter she stayed with a family near the school. Lessons started at 8am and finished at 2pm. Became ill and had to leave school.

Talks of her early family life before school. Mother had 3 sisters and 2 brothers. One brother and his 5 sons all perished.

Father's family - 2 brothers and a sister and his parents had emigrated and were living in London.

Holidays were usually spent at Ciechocunek - a spa not far from Aleksandrow.

Her father had a shop where he sold furnishing materials.

She had a number of Christian friends who were very kind to her. She remembers the beginnings of anti-semitism and Jew-baiting there but says her father had a reputation as a very tough man so no-one dared touch her. Tells a story of her

father's reaction to the abuse he suffered from a drunken Pole and of her cousins running to her father for help at night when she was already in bed.

Mother was religious, father not. They kept a kosher house, lit candles for Shabbat, closed the shop and so on. She had to go to her non-Jewish school on Saturdays and this was disapproved of by some of the Jewish neighbours.

Father had joined the Russian Army when he was 20 because he liked the Russian language! He was 30 when he returned (on the outbreak of revolution) and his parents were preparing to go to England where one of their sons had already settled.

Father didn't want to take his family to Russia because of the behaviour of the Bolsheviks at that time.

When war broke out in 1939 their town was the first to be bombed. Every house had a cellar so people sheltered there. Their house was damaged by a bomb.

Describes some of her mother's family and particularly summer visits to her mother's oldest sister. This sister was married to a widower who had 3 sons and she had 2 girls and a boy with him. Not one of this family survived the war.

Mother's parents also lived in this small town called Sluzewo. Mother's mother died when Barbara was quite young. She cannot remember her. Mother's father used to visit them every weekend. Very religious man. Used to wear a 'yamulka'. Mother's youngest - and unmarried - sister lived with him. She recalls one weekend visit when he became very ill and died. She was sent away to friends but remembers that before he died her grandfather asked her father to look after her mother's youngest sister and so she stayed with them. She was like a second mother to Barbara - a fantastic and lovely woman.

Barbara had a Jewish teacher for lessons in Hebrew and Judaism.

END OF F94: SIDE A:

F94: SIDE B:

Only one synagogue in her town - a very old and lovely one. All the family used to go there on the High Holy Days. Her parents stayed all day on Yom Kippur and fasted. She used to come home at mid-day. Her Jewish friends would come round and they would all dress up in her Mother's clothes and put on lipstick and her mother's high-heeled shoes.

She had her own bicycle - a very prized possession - and was also able to take piano lessons and German and French lessons. Her father wanted her to have everything that had been missing from his childhood. She was, in fact, the 'cat's whiskers' in that small town.

Her parents never spoke Yiddish to her for fear she would lose her Polish accent.

Her father had managed to bring jewellery and precious stones from Russia by means of swallowing them. So he was very comfortably off.

She belonged to a Jewish-Zionist organisation and so had many Jewish friends as well as the non-Jewish ones from her school. Recalls a Christmas show at the school about Jesus and Mary which she thought very, very nice.

She identified very much with her school friends and even persuaded her parents that she too had to have a white dress when her friends went to Holy Communion. Says she was very easily influenced and thinks that is why her father decided she must go to a Jewish school.

She was there only one year when war broke out. She started to learn English there and also Latin.

Describes her return visit there after the War. No Jews in Aleksandrow or Moraja then of course.

Reverts to talking about September 1939 and the anticipation of war. There were pickets everywhere but most Jewish people were fervent communists. She thinks about 80% of the young people belonged to the Communist Party and were fighting the fascists alongside the working-class people.

She remembers that they employed a maid who came three times a day to clean after meals - a young woman whom she went to see after the war. On her day off she would take Barbara to her home where five people lived in one little room with two beds - spotlessly clean although very, very poor. Remembers eating soup made from sour milk which the poor people always made. Loved it, especially with a potato.

She thinks that she must have been a very spoilt and difficult child - a 'bad' eater she says and fussy about food her mother cooked. It was all kosher cooking and traditional Polish dishes i.e. chopped fish, chicken soup and roast chicken for Saturday lunch. Everything was prepared before Shabbat - a Gentile woman came in on Shabbat to light the fire.

Remembers having 'a crush' on a boy at the High School. He is a doctor now and lives in America. He used to buy chocolates for her which she thought lovely.

Refers to games they used to play as young children, ie Monopoly, snakes and ladders, draughts, shop-keeping, dolls etc.

She read books from the Zionist library and from the local library.

Talks of her cousin Itzchak who went to Palestine some 5 or 6 years before the war and believed in fighting for land rather than buying it. He and her mother had long arguments about this.

END OF SIDE B: F94

SIDE A: F95

Remembers the bombing which started early in the morning of 1 September 1939 - they were living not far from the border with Germany. Didn't realise how bad it was going to be. They all went down to their cellar. House was hit so they packed a few things and went out of the town to the fields - no bombing there. When Germans came father bought a horse and cart and they all went to her uncle's village, LUBRANIEC. The mayor and two other village representatives greeted the Germans with wine. They were all very scared and her uncle shut the shop and they all sat inside shivering with fear and wondering what was going to happen. When they felt it was safe they went back to Aleksandrow.

Father was arrested for making anti-Hitler remarks.

Her grandfather was a dealer in raw hides and the butcher with whom he did business (a German) responded to her mother's pleas and got her father out of jail.

The next day they saw the evacuation of many of the poorer Jews, including many children, and decided that they must get out of Aleksandrow. They went to her father's brother in Lubraniec. In addition their synagogue had been burned down either by Germans or Poles.

Her uncle was one of the oldest Jews in the town and the Germans used him to organise the Jewish workforce which they needed for street-cleaning, building sites, factory-work and so on. She herself was told to peel potatoes for the German soldiers. When she got home her aunt told her that her parents had been sent back to Aleksandrow though they returned to Lubraniec a little later. They continued to work there until just before Christmas placards appeared saying "all Jews who do not come from Lubraniec must leave". Father decided they should go to Warsaw where he had a friend. He sent her mother's jewellery and furs to this friend.

They had a terrible journey and stopped in KUTNO where Barbara had a school friend. They stayed with her family who were Polish. They were very kind to her and her family. They stayed for 2 or 3 weeks until they realised that other Poles did not approve and would report them to the Germans. Her father found a place for them above the station.

From the beginning of the war, she recalls, all Jews had to wear the Yellow Star and they had to have special identity papers. In most towns and villages they had to walk in the road, not on the pavement. They were often stopped and told to produce their papers. She managed to 'get away' with a certain amount of rule-breaking. She did not look Jewish. Says there were about 11,000 Jewish people there. She used to take off her Yellow Star and she used to walk on the pavement.

Describes a terrible experience when she was 14 years old and in bed with influenza and the German SS raided the home of the family (the Kronzilbers) with whom they were staying. She and her parents were separated and didn't see each other for about six weeks.

Early in May 1940 all the rich Jews of Kutno (including Barbara and her family) were rounded up and put to work in a tobacco factory. Recounts stories of men being shot in front of them. Terrible conditions there and also in a disused sugar factory which was used as a camp and to which they were all transferred.

END OF SIDE A: F95

SIDE B: F95

They were in the sugar factory for about 6 weeks - no food - absolutely starving. Father sold his wedding ring and was able to buy her a glass of milk and a piece of bread. From time to time food was thrown over the fences - she thinks probably because of the typhoid epidemic. Her mother's brother and his four sons were all in the same camp. The fifth son was in the Polish Army and she did not know what had happened to him.

Thanks to her father's brother in Lubraniec, to whom they managed to write of their plight, the German police came one day and released them. She refers to this disused sugar factory as a death camp and says that she doesn't think any of the other inmates survived. She describes the camp as Krapure Lager and says there were about 11,000 Jews there.

When released they went by a small train back to Lubraniec - shul burned down - rabbi sweeping the streets - Jewish people pushing wagons as there were no horses. All books taken from their houses and burned in the market place. Placards on the streets ordering all the men to go to certain places at certain times. The Germans were separating the men from their families. They never saw the father again.

Later all the women were ordered out at 10 o'clock in the morning and allowed to take only what they could carry.

They were taken to the Litzmannstadt ghetto where the Jews from Lodz had already been transferred. She and her mother lived in one room with a woman and her son. They had ration cards for food - bread, potatoes, soup. Nightmare conditions in the ghetto - people dying from hunger in the streets - skeletons everywhere. She managed to get a job cleaning in the children's hospital in the ghetto for which she was paid a little money (ghetto money). She also handed out soup, etc to the patients.

Later she was taught how to change dressings and wash patients and was promoted from the cleaning job. Describes injections given to children with boils. She slept in the hospital until she found a little room for herself and her mother not far from Marishinietz a walk of about half a kilometre.

Furniture consisted of a little cooker, a table, 2 chairs and 2 beds.

END OF SIDE B: F95

F96: SIDE A:

Recalls the day covered lorries came to the hospital and took all the children away. Says they were 'finished off' in the lorries. So there was no more work in the hospital. She went back to mother and eventually found work in a knitting factory. All workers in ghetto were given a card (or book) which allowed them to collect soup every day from certain centres.

She found work for her mother in a kitchen although her mother was physically and mentally deteriorating daily since Barbara's father had disappeared. She had become partially paralysed.

Barbara and about 20 of the women in the factory went on strike about conditions and they were arrested and taken to the Sonderkommando. They were taken outside the ghetto and put to work in a factory packing aeronautical instruments for the Germans.

Tells of various occasions when she received extra rations or help with caring for her mother, or got food without having to queue, because the young men in charge found her attractive. She always stopped the friendship as soon as he made a physical advance like putting an arm round her. As she says, she was only 14 years old.

One of these young men was a Director of the hospital and was able to get her mother admitted there and also gave her the necessary permit to get herself some shoes.

Mother was in great pain and her body covered with bedsores. When the Germans started evacuating people and she had to go to work she put her mother in the garden and prayed that they would not find her. But one day she had to leave her when two SS men came and that was the last she ever saw of her. She was taken to the wagons which were full of people

and where there was an uncovered barrel of water which splashed all over the place when the trains started to move. She did not know where they were being taken to.

END F96: SIDE A

F96: SIDE B

She arrived at Auschwitz - knew nothing about concentration camps. Women and men were separated - husbands from wives, mothers from sons - a nightmare. She got diarrhoea and was sick, suddenly. Young women supported her and gave her sugar to revive her as they went through the gates. She remembers the terrible cries and screams. She had to undress, be shaved, showered, and was given a dress - nothing else. There was no paper in the toilets so they used to tear pieces from the hem of the dress.

When she heard that people from Fort Radziwil (where her father had been taken) were in the ghetto she ran there to see if he was there. She discovered one of her uncles and his son, the latter with his eyes gouged out, thin as a rake. She was horrified. They told her her father had been taken to Auschwitz. Says she did not know what that meant. She asked them to join her and her mother and they would share everything. Her uncle refused.

She describes the block in Auschwitz where she was housed and the women who were in charge of them and who were 'kept' by the Germans, ie given clothes, plenty of food, etc .

Description of her cousin Henek's friend in another block there who befriended her and was able to bring her extra food and some clothes. He also told the woman in charge that she had a good singing voice. This 'saved' her she says and she was able to move from block to block as she was invited to sing. She sang Polish songs, Jewish songs, and entertained the Germans who were enjoying themselves with the women guards.

END F96: SIDE B

F97: SIDE A

Collapsed during one of the morning roll-calls - taken to hospital block - many of the inmates were Hungarian Jews - saying prayers - it was Yom Kippur. She could hear bombing from there. Later she says Mengele came and they all had to undress (1,000 of them) - he stood outside the block at the entrance - the other SS men were inside - and then began a process of 'selection'. She was taken to another block - more showers - clean clothes. Then taken by train (passenger, not cattle trucks) to a place called Pirshcow on the Polish-German border. A big farm there with pigs, cows, horses. Given bread and soup twice a day. Had to dig anti-tank ditches. Remembers the winter of 1944 and very deep snow and a long way to walk carrying their pickaxes.

END F97: SIDE AF97: SIDE B

While working in trenches remembers a young man passing who threw some tobacco and a letter saying he would like to save her and she should meet him later. She exchanged the tobacco for soup. She did not answer the letter - didn't trust the writer.

One morning in January all were awakened - told to dress - had to carry the girls who were ill - and were marched off through the snow - no food - eventually reached wagons into which sick ones were loaded and fit ones had to push. Sick people eventually taken into forest and 'finished off'.

After many days walking they slept in a barn not far from a farm and she arranged for a woman companion to bury her two metres deep and cover her with snow. She lived for some time on raw potatoes which the farmer had buried in the earth for the winter.

Talks of her friend Irma Weiss who was hiding with her. Eventually they both walked to the village - Irma spoke very good German and they managed to get cooked potatoes from the farm.

One day the German police arrested them and as they were being marched down the mountain aeroplanes started bombing the town below. The two policemen left them in the road and ran off. She and her friend went back to the barn and lived there eating potatoes for three days. They were discovered by the farmer who came with his alsatian dog and sniffed them out.

They were arrested again but were hidden in a loft by a German and a Pole who later raped them. Germans by now were running away as the Russian Army approached. Russian soldiers were raping the women. They managed to get a horse and cart and to drive towards Poland and they got to a place called LIGNITZA. Russians robbed them of everything but later they met Russian Jewish officers who proved to be doctors and who gave them medicine and food and helped them.

Barbara returned to Poland to see if any of her family were still alive.

END F97: SIDE B

F98: SIDE A

She went first to Lodz and to the bureau there and searched the lists made up by any Jews who remained or who returned there. She could not find any of her friends or family.

She went to Aleksandrow having got a job as a secretary in Lignitza Town Hall in order to make some money. She also helped UNRA who were sending food and clothes.

At Aleksandrow she recognised the faces of some of the people she saw but couldn't remember names. They recognised her and made a big fuss of her. She stayed with the people who had the newsagents' shop next to her father's.

The mayor of the town offered her a job and a place to live but she didn't want to stay - it was too painful for her. Some of the neighbours had paintings which belonged to her family, others had wood-carvings. Yet others their bedroom and dining room furniture.

She then went to her mother's village of SLEZEWO. No-one she knew had survived and she learned that her cousin, a girl 2 years her senior, had been killed on the spot. In WLOCLAWEK where she used to go to school, she found a Mrs Kolska, the mother of her close friend Milka. They had survived by living under false names and using Gentiles' papers. Milka and her brother were living in Warsaw. She was given their address.

She went back to Lignitza. Got a job in the Town Hall again - no trouble. Met two reporters, one from England who spoke German. She told him about her father's family in England - parents, a sister and two brothers. He took all details and put an advertisement in an English newspaper. She also met an American who posted a letter from her to her aunt in England. Her aunt sent her papers and she had to go to the consulate in Katowitza.

She went to Warsaw to see her friend Milka and was shocked to see the city in such a shambles and also to find that neither Milka nor her brother was there. Non-Jews lived there and told her to get out. Left by ship for England from GDYNIA.

END SIDE A: F98

F98: SIDE B

In 1946, 15 August. she arrived in England. Sea journey had taken 5 or 6 days - on a Polish ship.

Her uncle arrived at the docks to meet her in his own car. He also arranged to take her friend Fay to Cable Street in the East End of London where she was going to stay with her uncle and cousin.

Barbara herself stayed with her aunt and uncle. She remembers a beautiful house and garden with roses but says that they were not kind to her. Several cousins (all of them kind to her). 6 bed-roomed house with 2 bathrooms and 3 toilets but no maid. She had to help her cousin with the housework. Uncle gave her 10 shillings a week. She went to a polytechnic in Charing Cross to learn English - the money was just enough for her fares. She couldn't afford to have her shoes repaired.

She had to go to the Foreign Office soon after her arrival in England and was surprised that she did not have to declare her religion to get the necessary papers; unheard of in her experience. She said to her cousin Joe "What a fantastic country".

She attended school in the afternoons - met other Polish girls and became very friendly with one Rina Litvak who had married well and invited Barbara to eat with her whenever she could. Says her aunt was very mean with food and locked the larder when she went out. She realises though that this was a time of strict rationing in England.

Her friend Fay arranged for her to work for a presser in Philpot Street in London E.1. so that she would have a little more money. Her aunt and uncle were non-plussed because she had not yet been granted a work permit but they said nothing.

Work at the factory started at 8am and she was paid #1.10/- per week. Learned to sew and made her own clothes. Paid off 10/- a week for a winter coat made for her at the factory where she worked. This was in the winter of 1947 - extremely cold - heavy snow. Later she earned #3.00 a week and went with one of her cousins to opera at Covent Garden - seats in the gallery - remembers Tosca and Il Trovatore.

Left her aunt's house and went to live with her grandma in Kensington. Polish boyfriend helped her with her suitcases. She left without a word to her aunt and uncle. Her grandma = aged 90 - wanted her to share her bedroom with her. She objected.

END SIDE B: F98

F99: SIDE A

Problems living with grandmother. Locked out after 11pm.

Correspondence with Jewish friends in Germany and making plans to return there. Introduced to a young man from Cracow named Edward Stiller. Eventually they married. His real name was Lolek Stimler but he had changed it when he was in Russia to pass himself off as a Gentile. He had very little money - only #28 from the army. He bought her a little diamond ring. She had #100. from her grandfather and her grandmother wanted them to share her house.

They paid their savings into a Post Office account. Her 'rich aunt' offered her a small flat to rent in Cable Street. Her uncle and aunt arranged and paid for the wedding. They went to Westcliff for their honeymoon.

Lived in Cable Street for a year and son (Harvey Jacob) was born there. She worked in the factory almost until the birth. They needed every penny they could make. Her uncle asked 13/- a week in rent. Her husband earned a small amount as a tailor. Gangsters and prostitutes were tenants of the ground floor and basement. They needed to find more suitable accommodation. They found a one-bedroom flat in Hampstead - paid #150 'key-money'.

Her husband opened his own factory to make clothes and she helped him part-time. After 5 years in the Hampstead flat they were able to buy a house in Neasden.

END SIDE A: F99

f99: SIDE B

The house had 3 bedrooms and she rent one out furnished for #2.50 a week.

Became pregnant with second child. Decision not to have an abortion - boy born 1955. Strong views about child-rearing. Felt she made her children nervy. Her firstborn had eczema and needed periodic visits to Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

Second child - Stuart - born with eczema and at about 10 months had an asthmatic attack. Barbara had a nervous breakdown and her doctor recommended psychiatric treatment in a nursing home. Doctor made arrangements for Stuart to go to a Council-run nursery.

She went to a home in King's Langley and was there for about 3 weeks. Part of the treatment was a 'truth injection' after which, apparently, she talked all night and all day and notes were taken of her outpourings. Her doctor (Dr Brerer) allowed her husband and children to visit her when she began to feel better. Very upset because her son Stuart did not recognise her. Doctor's advice was to get someone to help her with the children on her return home. They got a maid from Italy. She could not speak a word of English but stayed with them for 6 weeks when she wanted more money and left. They then employed a student (Elvira) from Naples as an au pair which was cheaper. She was lovely and life became more normal although Stuart was very ill with asthma and eczema and was taken to hospital.

She describes the procedure for getting reparations from Germany (1956/7). A Doctor Cohen who was formerly a judge in Germany before the war helped her with her application.

They were able to buy a dilapidated property which they repaired and painted themselves in order that she could let it and have an income in case anything

happened to her husband and/or the business. Husband bought a car and worked very long hours to build the business.

A year later they received another lump sum from the German Government for loss of education and injury to health. This was #1250 and they were able to buy another property. They sold the house in Neasden and bought a bigger house in Harrow. She received a monthly pension from Germany of #370 for mental and physical suffering and was checked annually by a German doctor in Germany until she reached the age of 52 when they stopped the examinations but continued the payments.

Refers to problems of a career for elder son who, at 20 years, could not settle to anything.

END SIDE B: F99

F100: SIDE A

Elder son, Harvey, got engaged then 'disengaged' six weeks before the wedding. He finally married a lovely girl and set up shop selling jewellery in Mill Hill NW London. Details of their two children, Marcus and Tamara-Sara.

Barbara became ill again and attended the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases in Queen's Square for about 4 years under a Dr Kremer. She says he got her better mentally but she suffered an attack of peritonitis which set her back about 9 months. Her symptoms were always the same - talking non-stop about the past, upsetting her husband who also lost his parents and two brothers in the Holocaust and generally all her bad feelings about the past kept returning. She gets very irritable and shouts at her husband who is a good man and she regrets her behaviour. Also suffers pain from a bad back. Took pain-killers for many years then stopped for fear of becoming a drug-addict. Had dreams about her mother and the occasion when she was forced to leave her and was taken to Auschwitz. She does not dream now.

Because of her back trouble they had to move from the big house to a bungalow in Wembley. They sold the business.

Details of son Stuart's various jobs in the jewellery business and of arrangements to send him to Israel for 3 months. He stayed on a kibbutz. Is now living happily with wife and children in Edgware. She talks a little about an operation she had 15 years ago when she had a cancerous lump removed from her breast.

She feels bitter about all the terrible years of suffering and very angry about what happened to her parents and all those innocent Jewish people who disappeared. She thinks people don't understand what happened and not much is done to help them to realise the enormity of the tragedy. She is appalled by the signs of anti-semitism here in England and would kill herself and her children, she says, rather than let them go through experiences similar to her own.

END OF F100: SIDE A

F100: SIDE B

She thinks the young generation should be told in school about the Holocaust and that it should be part of their curriculum - after all it is part of history.

She has angry feelings about the criticism of Israel and says the world should understand that Israel has to exist. She is frightened for her grandchildren in the growing rise of fascism. She is grateful for the benefits she has received here in England but says Israel must exist for Jewish people. She and her husband had thought at one time of going to live there but decided against a permanent home there. She visits her husband's family there quite often.

Re-telling of the story of the 'death march' (after Pirshkow) and of hiding in a barn for a week or 10 days and of the farmer with the alsatian dog who discovered her and her friend Irma Weiss.

She finishes by saying how important it is - even though it is upsetting - for her to tell her story for people to know the truth and feels that this is the only time she has been able to tell her story properly.

Also mentions how shocked she is to learn, from TV documentaries, of other terrible goings-on in the concentration camps, of which she herself was ignorant.

END OF INTERVIEW

