NATIONAL Life stories

LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

FELA BERNSTEIN

Interviewed by by Robert Wiseman

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

IMPORTANT

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FlOl Side A

28th October, l988, Robert Wiseman interviewing Fela Bernstein.

Could I have your date of birth? Your date of birth as I've got it written down was ...

29th, no -2lst October, l927. It made me 6l last Friday.

And where was it that you were born?

I was born Poland, Lodz.

And your family?

My father, you want to know my father's name?

Yes.

My father's name was Abraham Zelig.

And can you remember any details about his life? Where he was born?

My father was born in Lutomisk, Lutomirisk, in Polish, Lutomisk in Jewish, Lutomirisk in Polish.

And do you know about his family?

My zeder lived ...I think they were murdered sometime during, I don't know when, '4l or '42, because its a kleinstadtl, a little village, and that's where they, they were clearing out to start with. My zeder, my father's father, he lost his mother when he was five years old, was a tailor, and he lived in this village, by this daughter with her husband and children.

What sort of family were they? Were they religious?

Very. Very. My zeder used to go twice a day to stiebl. Twice a day. He was such a oof gewiesener Jew, he was ...

Which means what?

It means, he was so religious. He lived for his religion. He was a very respected man, he was a very well-kept man, very elegant, very nice looking man, and he had a little Van Dyke beard, and he wore those pinched glasses like Roosevelt, he was a very good looking man, and he used to wear those Hardebeckers(ph), like those Anthony Eden hats, you know? And sometimes I remember, he used to come down town, in the winter, he used to come to the mikva. Though my grandpa was a widower of many many years, but he married a woman later in life, and that woman, she went to America, to her son. She went to America to her son in l935 and never came back, because she loved New York so.

So she left your father?

She left, but they never sort of legally broke up the marriage, and she never came back, but we were making plans to go to America, but it never came about, I don't know, for some reason or other, I can't remember so good, because I was only a kiddie then, but I do remember one day, being in the country, by my aunty, came a photographer, and we went out on the lawn, and he took a very big family picture for portrait, and this was sent to America, to her, and sometimes she used to send clothes for us as children. I still remember to this day, one day she sent a blue silk dress for me, and it had a cape, and it was the most beautiful dress that I ever seen.

Not a poor family, by the sounds of it?

My grandpa was a comfortable man, but he wasn't a giver. He wasn't a giver, you know. We could've done with help, you know, my family, my mum and father, sometimes a few zloties, you know, wouldn't go amiss, if you know what I mean, because he had it. He had a pot of gold.

Where did he get it from?

Because he, he was a tailor, he was a very good tailor, and he had the the farmer gentry, he used to make their summer and winter clothes, so he was always busy.

For the non-Jews?

Yes. And for other people when they came to have coats made or whatever, and he was, he was, and then, even my sister told me that he, he also went into partnership with another man, they had a grocery shop together in the village.

A Jewish man?

Yes. And, and life was very good, even as poor. It was happy and peaceful, and we never expected that such a terrible war's going to come upon us. And then of course, the War did come, and it devastated, it was a terrible catastrophe.

So, concerning your father, there was a lot, they seem to have been quite religious.

Yes. My father wasn't so observant, you see.

Why?

Because I think he, he was of more Socialist persuasion.

Socialist?

Yes, workers, workers, you see. My father worked, when my father was lO years old, my grandfather sent him to Lodz, to learn to be a shoemaker.

But he didn't send him to shul?

No.

Why?

But he had education, I think, like children have today, going to cheder, you see, but he didn't, because he went to learn a trade. My grandfather believed that, that his son should work, you see.

And not study?

No. He had hardly nothing, no education at all. It's just education from life, you know, you might say. And he learned the trade, and he remained, he remained in Lodz all through his life, and then he met my mother.

In Lodz?

Yes, in Lodz, he met my mother, because he was going through a neighbourhood, he was going to a friend, it was Shabis, you know, the Sabbath, and my mother was down in the courtyard playing with the children, like, you know, she was only a young girl, probably l5, and l5 in those days, children were children, not women like today, with painted faces, with mini-skirts and all that, you know! And when he went up to his friend, he ask, who is that, that pretty girl down there? Because she was a beauty. So his friend, "Ah, she is Fischl's daughter", my grandpa, my zeder. "She, oh, Fischl's daughter, you know, he's also a shoemaker like you." We come a line of shoemakers, you see, I understand shoes." So he says, "I'd like to meet her." He says, "All right, I'll take you upstairs." So of course, when he got there, they had a great deal in common. You see, my father was already, he was only what, about a year or two older than my mother.

So, about l7 he was?

Yeh, he was already a grown man and working, dressed up.

Not an apprentice?

No, he was already, he was a genius, my father a genius in his hands. He was the most wonderful shoemaker in the world, I can say. Of course, they had a great deal in common, and after a while, he kept coming more and more, until the day came when he asked, "Can I marry your daughter?" So he says, "Take her." Cos there was others in the house. It was, my mother was the middle one, you see, so there was, there was still daughters, and then two, I think, two or three sons, you see, because my mother's father had two wives. He was a widower when he married my mother, she had, the first wife he had five children with her, and he had five children with the second. They brought my grandmother, my mother's mother, to Lodz, from a little village, she was 2O years old, a young girl, she didn't know nothing, you know, a beautiful girl with pale blue eyes, natural blonde hair, you know, and he was already a middle-aged man with grown up children. And I don't think she knew,

knew what she was in for. But they did have a happy life, they were married for a long time. My grandfather died, he was 96, that's him over there, on the picture. I found that, the picture hanging above my uncle in Haifa. So I said, "Who is that?" He says, "Your, my father, your grandfather." I said, "I've never seen it." Because I have no, I have no pictures, I've got no documents to prove, to say, I can say whoever I like, I am, you see. "Oh", I says, "I'd like that." And when I looked closer, I could see my mother, my mother's high cheekbones, you see.

So your father came, not from a religious ...

Yes, oh yes.

Socialist, more political.

He was. Because I told you that he started to work at such a young age, that he had to go more Socialist.

Was he involved in organisations?

Well, he did belong to the Peoples', Workers' Party, the PPR they used to call that. He did.

There were meetings, he was involved?

Meetings, but not involved politically, you know, he didn't have time. He had children to feed.

This was a Jewish organisation?

No, even workers, Party.

So, so he was friendly with non-Jews also?

Oh yes, we had a wide range of friends, friends from where he was born in the village that were friends up till the War broke out, you see.

Was there any antagonism between the two?

Never, no. I never experienced this, because you didn't see it so much in the small villages, the sort of attitudes, the anti-Semite, it more comes from the city, the big city, you see. If they live in the villages, they don't see very much, you see, you come the city, your eyes get opened up.

But you remember your father, this is before the War?

Oh I do, I do. I remember, I remember, I remember being very close to him, and I loved him a lot, and I think he loved me too, because he used to give his time to me, and I used to, I used to sit on his lap and play, and he used to tease me, he used to rub his beard against my face, I can still feel it, and sometimes he would let me have a

drag of his cigarette! And yes, I think I was named after a favourite aunt of his, you see, Fegala. That's why I think I had, I had more from him than the others, you know.

And from your mother. Because your mother's side, were they, did they have political affiliations or were they more religious?

No, my grandfather was very religious, I mean, he was the, from the founders, the first synagogue that was built in Lodz, my zeder was involved in it, you see. No, they, I don't think there was Socialist probably, but my father did, my father was a Socialist.

And your mother less so?

My mother was, no, she didn't mix in politics, act in politics, you know, like today.

Her family, though, were they particularly religious?

Oh yes, my grandfather was religious, and I don't know so much about my mother's sisters, but we were sort of cosmopolitan.

Which means what, then?

I think we were liberal, if you ask me. Though we observed shabis, shabat, the high holidays.

You used to light the candles?

Oh yes, what, not so much going to shul, but at home, there was kosher, holidays were observed. My father never worked Saturdays or high holidays, but he was a Socialist, that's why I think he didn't go to shul. Not a Communist, not a Communist, no, a Socialist, a worker, like here, the Labour Party, the workers. So he was a shoemaker, a genius with his hands, he wasn't a big guy, he only stood maybe about 5'3" or 5'4", and he was of small features, and very good looking man. Maybe that's why I loved him so, because he was very good looking, you see, even then, as a child, you can tell, you know. My mother, my mother was the home, the kitchen, you know, everything, and she, she was more on the business side, she dealt with the customers, you know.

So she was working in the shop?

Not in the shop. At home. My mother had, my father had a, his work at home, he had a bench at home, he used to work for himself.

So how was the house? Describe the house?

Oh, very marginal! You mean the room?

The room?

I was born in one room, dear.   I took my daughter to see it. One, I was born in one basement room.

So the family lived in one room, your family?

Yes. But my home, it was spick and span, because my mother was very pedantic.

So how big was this room?

Maybe about here.

So that's what?   Five metres, six, seven metres?

Very small.

Square, more or less square?

Yes, yes, square.

Six or seven metres square?

Yes, yes. Very small. But in a few years after, when I was seven years old, we moved from there. We got, what do they call this when they put people out of their homes because of non-payment of rent?   What do you call that word?

You were moved to a different ...

We had to move, because it wasn't, it wasn't government sponsored, you see, everything in those days was private ownership, landlords, you know what I mean?

Was your landlord a Jew?

Yes.

But he was very tough?

One of them, because there was like, the property was handed down to children.

A block of big tenements?

Oh yes, there was a, they were very wealthy. One apartment the family was very nice, and they had a young son that he, he used to be at university. He used to love my mother very much because she was a person for the people, you know, she was always doing something, she was always busy giving somebody else a hand.

For the people in the tenements?

The tenements, and from other areas, she was so known in Lodz, she could've run for Mayor, you know, and we were, we were thrown out, I think for non-payment of rent, I suppose, overdue rent. That's how times were, you can't describe it. So poor, you know, the people, and especially when you have many children.

So this was, you were taken from this room, or this house, there was just yourself as the child, and your parents?

No, all of us children.

How many?

There was, there was three girls and one boy.

So there were six of you living in one room?

Yes, yes.

This was when you were seven?

Yes. And people here, you see them, on the television, moaning and groaning, they haven't got where to live, they might have lovely houses and everything, and lovely flats, and they still think it's not good enough for them.

This is about l935, when six of you were moved from one room.

Yes.

Did this room have a bath?

We had a cooker, they used to, you stood an iron cooker, and all bits of furniture, tables and chairs, and bench, and a dresser for the china, and keeping food, you know, it was a very big dresser on the wall, and the china used to be kept there, and my mother used to keep, in the cupboard like here, she kept the linen, you know, and a cooker, and beds and table.

And there was a bathroom outside?

We had a, we had a bath, you know.

Tin?

Not a tin, enamel, in white, a big one, and we used to keep it outside in the hallway, like where we lived, in the building, the flats, it used to hang on a hook for when we wanted to use it. And also the other bed that used to be put up for the night, had also been kept there, because there was no room for two beds. Only a very large bed in the room, and then also my father worked at home, so he had his bench there, and we shared, we shared beds. We sleeping with our parents, it's, I can't describe it, I don't know whether you can imagine it.

I can well imagine!

Yes, but we were happy. Come high holidays, my mother used to be busy preparing for the Yomtivs, and she used to cook and she used to bake, and she was the most wonderful cook and baker, and she used to send us kids to the baker with big tins of cakes and biscuits to be baked, because we didn't have the facilities at home big enough, oven, to cook such, such tins, so each kid went, you know,

A tin on their head?

Yeh, covered up with a teacloth, to the baker, to bake the cakes, because we couldn't bake it at home.

How did the baker lend you his oven? Did you pay him?

Oh yes. Used to pay, and he used to give you a ticket, like a raffle ticket.

Oh, so there were loads of other Jews going to the baker?

Oh yes, other people, yes, and he would stick on one label on the tins, and one label he would give to you, so when you came back, say in an hour, or two hours, or like Saturday, we used to take Friday, cholent(ph). Do you know about chulent(ph)?

No.

This was like a hotpot. You cook it overnight in the oven.

Vegetables and meat?

Usually I make, when I make, it's potatoes and meat and beans, haricot beans, barley.

And this is what you were eating then?

And this was a special thing, my mother would make it, mostly in the winter, you can't eat that kind of food in the summer, because it's too hot to eat cholent, so you also used to take it, so you see lots of people going Friday afternoon, carry, all done up, all covered up, and wrapped in paper at the top, with string tied up, and when you got to the baker, he stuck one label on the pot, and one you used. You used to pay so much for it, and this used to be done, because they never baked, in the Jewish bakeries, bread or anything, till Shabas came out, Saturday night, you know, at dusk, that's when they started baking again. But for Friday afternoon, because all the bread and all the hollers were already baked for the shops, you see, so while the oven was being kept hot, because they never, I don't think they ever switched it off, and while the oven was hot, they used to put in these cholent hotpots, like you make a hotpot here. But it's, it's absolutely delicious, you don't know what you're missing. You ask your mother, she'll tell you.

So this was before shabas came in?

Oh yes.

And did your father work over the shabas?

No, no.

But he was a Socialist, but nonetheless he observed ...

Oh yes, because my mother, you see, this was her part, that was her part to play in the household, to show, and to know everything about everything, you know, about Judaism.

Your mother knew all the details?

Oh yes, because from her family, from her mother.

But your father didn't?

He knew. He knew, because the background he came, but he didn't keep it.

So it was your mother who chose to.

Oh yes.

So if your mother hadn't been there, or if your mother had been, if your mother had said to your father, "What do you want to do?" Would he have said, "I don't want to have shabas, I don't want to have the candles. Let's have a normal day."

No, he never said that you see, because the background he came from, that was already instilled in him. Though his politics were different, but his faith was different too. His religion he was Jewish, but he was a Socialist. Politics is nothing to do with religion, is it? Does that intermingle?

Well sometimes perhaps, sometimes not.

No, but it wasn't in our lives. But that part was my mother's, but he would not interfere. And he wouldn't have laid down the law that you mustn't observe. We did, because we lived in a community that you were, that you had to uphold it. I lived in a very Jewish community. In my district, you saw more Jewish people than Christians.

Well, how were they dressed, for example? How did you know that someone was a Jew, or wasn't?

Well, the very Orthodox you could tell, but the Liberal, like us, we were dressed like all them, my father didn't go with beard and pairs, he was clean-shaven, and my mother didn't wear a sheitel, like her mother. My grandma, when she married my grandpa, all, she changed she had to wear a sheitel, she had to wear what they call a

perrouque. But my mother didn't, because she was very modern, loved theatre, loved cinema.

Were all these things available in Lodz for your mother?

Oh yes, it was a wonderful life, it was terrific. Dancing, my mother was a terrific dancer.

She used to go dancing with your father?

Yes. But he didn't, because he was a country boy and he couldn't dance, so she left him sitting there with his mates, and she danced with all the other mates, you see.

They used to go with Jewish friends or not?   Just Jewish friends?

Mostly, mostly Jewish, Jewish friends, but also Christians, and we have, we had neighbours as well, Christian neighbours. Our caretaker was Christian, Catholics. She was a widow with four, yeh, four children, two sons and two girls. As a matter of fact, I found one when I went back home.

To Poland?

Yes, because I made my way.   My daughter was surprised that I could find my way about. I said, "I was running these streets for years. That's something you don't forget. I could see them in my sleep, in my dreams." But that was not the first place where I was born, because in l935, we moved out of there, we got evicted, right, evicted, and so, of course, because there was some payments, some rent not paid, because my father didn't earn millions, and ...

Where did you move to?

So we got thrown out, all our belongings, they came from the landlords, because there were three partners, like, they all lived in the same building, they had beautiful homes and everything, and they took all the furniture out in the courtyard, and we went to the country for the summer, that was in the summer, so we went to the country where my father came from.

You went back to your father's home?.

Yes, nearer by, not the same village, but a village outside it, but it wasn't far to go, if you know what I mean. It's like you, say, from Chingford to Walthamstow. You could walk it, to each village.

Why that village? Why did he choose that?

Because his family were there, his father, my grandfather, his sister with her family, and there was other families, like, let's say from my father's mother's side, sisters with children, because they all come from that particular provincial town.

That was also another Jewish neighbourhood?

Oh yes, yes. And we hired some, like a bungalow, like a two-roomed bungalow, with a little kitchen and a hallway, it was, as you come in through the door, for the summer, by a farmer, they used to let cottages out, like they let cottages out here for people on holiday, and we stayed the summer there, and my father worked there, for people that wanted to have work done, shoe repairs, and before that, before we came back to town, my mother went one day to town, and she could see, she was trying to find rooms, and she found rooms at no.... I was born at no. 3.

Can you remember the name of the road?

Yes. Why, you want it? In Polish, it's, now they call it, in Polish it's Jedynastego Lystopada. And now they renamed it, because what it means ...

Yes, so this is where you were born, what you've just written down.

Yes.

What did it mean?

The street?

Well, it's llth November, in English, and I think that was the Polish Independence Day, I'm not quite sure. I know they came marching through that part, that street, that's why they named that street Jedynastego Lystopada, because it was llth November, and, and up till 7, we lived at no. 3, and when we got evicted, and when this young son came home, because it was summer time, from college.

Whose son?

The landlord's son, the good one, not the bad one, and he found out that we had been evicted. He was ever so angry with his family, because he liked my mother very much, from the time he was born, we lived there so many years, and he was trying to persuade my mother maybe to stay on, you know. She says "No", she says, "I've already made a break, I think we'll move." So we went to live in the country for the summer season. It was a wonderful summer.

This was during your vacation time?

Yes, that was, that was in '35, of the summer, because when we came back, you see my mother, we had to come back, because we were all going back to school, you see. My brother wasn't at school yet, he was only 5.

So you'd got one younger brother?

Yes, and I had three older sister, I had one, my sister

End of FlOl Side A

FlOl Side B

One younger brother, one elder sister who's now in Haifa?

No, she's in Israel. My sister lives in Safad, in Israel. She has been, do you know about it? She's been in Israel since l949, in January l949, when they were resettling the refugees from the camps, in Belsen, so she went with her husband and her two babies, to Israel, and she's been living there ever since. She wouldn't move out of Safad, because the climate suits her, you see. And that's her son, one of her sons. And her daughter was recently here, she's only gone, Sunday will be two weeks they flew home.

And so all of you were, during the summer time in l935 ...

We were in the country, yes. And I had an older sister, four years older than me, Chana, she perished, we don't know from where she is, well, she was taken out a time in, from the ghetto where they used to clear certain, they made vacant the prisons, and they, they had transport people, they had to come voluntary, on a promise that they were going to a different work camp, which wasn't true, and if people didn't go voluntary, they started doing it with force, so they came in, and they made like, raids, and I don't know what year that was, whether it was '42, or '43, they made a (INAUDIBLE), and no life was going on in the ghetto for a week, because they came every day, or so, they came to different streets and different districts, to clear out the people. You had to come down from your homes, and stand in the street, and they would make selection, and afterwards, when life came back, like, let's say, after the curfew, you could see people are missing, your friends, your neighbours, your relatives, your elderly parents, young little children under lO, babies, but we were in the hiding, me and my sister, and my little brother, and a neighbour's two little girls, and this neighbour's younger sister, because she didn't have an arm, she lost an arm in an accident in a weaving factory, where we lived just opposite, in a big factory, she was weaving, and she had beautiful long hair, and she caught her hair in the machine. She was wearing her hair loose, and so she caught her hair, and she was trying to get out, push, push herself out, so she caught her arm, and her arm was crushed in the wheels, so of course, they took her by ambulance to the hospital, and they had to remove her arm. And because she was with one arm, because if the SS and the Gestapo would have seen it, they would have taken her up on a transport, you see, sooner than in '44, so we were in hiding, and these, opposite our buildings, there were empty buildings, where they didn't use them, and they used to keep bales of rags that they used to bring for this factory. Well, it was from the people that ran the ghetto, you know, the officials, like a government was set up.

A Jewish Government?

Yes, and we also had a President, his name was Hyam Rumkowski, and he led the ghetto, he was the President. They chose him because he, before the War, he, he ran the Jewish Orphanage, so he knew about management, you see what I mean? So they gave him this job, and then they formed a police force, Jewish police force, they formed a clerical force, they formed firemen, you know, there wasn't many fires, but you had to have a fire ...

This was in the ghetto was it?

Oh yes, yes, later on.

So, just going back for a second, when you were in the summer, how different was it being in the countryside?

In the city?

No, because you moved to this provincial village in the countryside.

That was wonderful, wonderful countryside, I wanted to go this time, but I didn't have enough time, and that would have meant at least two days, you see, two days, although it wasn't far, it was only l9 kilometres from Lodz, but it would have taken time, you know, you just can't go and have a look and come back, so it would have taken at least two days, because finding my father's, going to the cemetery to find his grave, which I had no knowledge, no information, I slightly from my memory remembered where, I knew the place, the cemetery's name, but I didn't know exactly where, because my father died in the winter, where the snows will come up to the waist, when he died, we, my mother and I are the only two that went to bury him, she wouldn't let my little brother go, and my sister, this one in Israel, my sister Mania, her name is Mania in Polish, Miriam in Jewish, she couldn't go, because she was suffering from malnutrition, and she was terribly swollen up, and she couldn't walk on her feet, and it was a very long way to walk to the cemetery.

When was this?

My father died, he was, he was 46, I think it was in '42, '43, something like this, one of these winters, I don't exactly know, and we were the only two that went, and I slightly remembered where. I knew it going somewhere on the right. And when the caretaker took me there, he was going on the right, he took me right, and I've got it now all written down on a piece of paper, the number of the grave, and the avenue, and which grave and everything, but there is no sign of him, except the piece of raw earth, because there was no tombstones put up during the War, there were no, there was no, how would you say? Well, they didn't make tombstones, because it was a different time of life, but they used to stick in a piece of wood to mark the grave with the number.

This is a Jewish graveyard?

Oh yes, a very well known, one of the biggest in Lodz, but it's very delapidated, and very overgrown, so when I, when I wanted to know where it is, I had to go to the Burial Society, and luckily I found it, and they, I went up there, and I told them who I am, why I'm here, could they help me. And I never, in a million years, would have believed that they would have all the records of all the burials, of all the people that died, you know, till '44, till the liquidation, because the liquidation started some time in the summer, I'm not quite sure, it was May or June, because there was a lot of people to shift out from the ghetto. And he says, "Yes. I can't see for you now,

because I've got, I've had operation on my cataracts and I can't see so good." He said, "The operation wasn't successful." He said, "There's another man, he might be here tomorrow. Can you come tomorrow?" "I can't", I say, "I have limited time", I said, "I'm only here for a week and it's already gone ..." Cos the first day I went to the cemetery, and when I went to the caretaker, he says, "No good you come, because if you can't give me a number, and the avenue, then I can't find it for you." So he says, "Go back to the Burial Society, on" oh, what's the name of the street, around the corner where I was born, you know, and "No. 76, and they will give you all what you want to know." And so we came back again, so another day wasted. So the following day we went to the Burial Society, I had picked up a taxi outside the hotel where I stayed, in a big hotel in Lodz, the Grand Hotel, it's been standing over a hundred years, and when you walked in, you could see how splendourous things were before the War, with all these, with gold painted and marble, marble staircases, marble fireplaces, and nymphettes in the dining room, and a parquet flooring, with a band. Every night we had dinner we listened to music and could dance, but we didn't because my daughter and I, I mean, it would look a bit peculiar, wouldn't it. So we sat and had our dinner, and it was very pleasant, and very courteous and very nice, and when they hear that a traveller has come after such a long time, a lifetime, close on 5O years, they're overwhelmed, they want to know, they ask questions, you know, and are very friendly, and gave us wonderful service.

In the hotel?

Yes, beautiful hotel, and (POLISH HOTEL NAME) just around the corner from where I come from, in the main street, it's, in high numbers, what was it, 76, 78, something like this, and I wandered off, where was I? Where was I?

When you were in the summer, when you were in the countryside in the summer, and then you said that the son, the son of, the one who was at university,

Yes, but my mother, yes he was, because he liked her very much, and she didn't let herself be persuaded. I think she wanted a break, you know, because there was wet walls, and my mother suffered with rheumatism, you know, because there used to be like a guttering, and it used to sit and rain, and used to dampen, like here, imagine here was the room, and this was the window, and the wall used to get wet, and I think my mother began to suffer with rheumatism, so she says, "Make a break." So we went to live at no. l8. Still in the same street.

So you moved back into the same street?

Yes, we came back from the country, with a wagonful of belongings, all our furniture and everything, like you see the refugees, you know. And my mother got rooms in No. l8.

In the same block?

The same street, but not in the same block.

New landlords?

New landlord, his name was Schwartz, a bastard.   A really, really bastard.

Why?

Well, he was a very, very, well, he had power, you see, he, he was a man of substance, he had property, you see, he had houses, he had two lots of houses, buildings that I know of, and he had a draper's shop, in, just down the next street, because I lived in the main centrum of Lodz, and it was like, imagine, imagine Piccadilly, and the streets winging off, you know, four streets like this, like Regent Street, down to Piccadilly, you know, and he had a very big prosperous draper's shop as well. People used to come from all over to buy linen there, to buy curtains, to buy certain trimmings for tailoring, you know, they were very very rich.

But your room was more or less the same?

It was, it wasn't down below, we moved up, we went up on the fourth floor, with no water, no electricity. The water had to be brought in.

Up four flights?

Aye, Aye, yes, yes.

And what was the room like?

Larger, larger. Much larger room.

Double, triple the size?

Yes.

Like the size of this whole ...

No, no, no, no. Maybe up till about, from the window to the end of the mirror, a little bigger. It was differently shaped, it was more longer than deeper.

So it was about l2 metres by 6 or something?

Yes, it was, it was already much bigger, and on the fourth floor, no water, you had to bring water up to your, to your rooms. No electricity.   When we first moved in, we used, I remember, kerosene lamp, but after a while, my mother went to the electric company, and we had electricy drawn, so life was getting a little bit better. And then my, we lived there, when we came back in September. I started school, I remember the first day my mother took me to school.

So you had an elder sister?

My elder sister, they were all in school.

Did you go to the same school?

No, we all went to different schools.

Which school did you go to then?

I went nearer home, I can't remember, I've got it on pictures, my school, but I can't remember the name of the street,

What sort of school was it?

An ordinary school.

A local? Non-Jewish School?

No, only Jewish children. In Poland you went to segregated school.

By law? So you didn't have the choice?

By law, yes, because it was a Catholic State, you see, the Church, and we went, although we had a Christian schoolmistress, and some of them even Christian teachers, I had a Jewish teacher. My first three years in the primary classes, I had a Jewish teacher and she was wonderful.

But all your friends would be Jewish?

Yes, boys and girls, to a certain age it was mixed, and then the boys were sent to another school as they got bigger, let's say the age of, well, you know, when they start getting interested! You know, I think about lO.

So from about 7-lO, you were in a mixed Jewish school.

Yes, used to sit together, not separated, boy and girl, boy and girl, like you see some of the old schools in the films, the country schools, if you've ever seen them.

What sort of classes did you have? What subjects?

Well, mostly was reading and writing, arithmetic.

Did you read ...

No, not religious, no, they didn't teach us. Only iff you wanted this sort of education then you had to go to a Fromshul. A special school.

But you didn't?

No. Because my parents believed that we should mix. It makes you more, more open, I think. It teaches you to know the other person, you see, how the other half

lives, something like this. Yes, they believed in mixing, and there I spent up to the War, from '35 to '39.

So from 7-ll, or so?

Yes, till l2.

Did you have non-Jewish friends at this time?

Yeh, I used to play with non-Jewish children, I used to play with this girl that I found. When I went back to number l8.

Yeh, they were living there then, also?

Yes, she, up to the War, she was living there with her mother and her brothers.

So, in this tenement that you were living in ...

Yeh, she's still there, but she's only now on her own, she's lost her sister, her sister died a few years ago, she was only 36, of heart complaint, and another brother, the youngest brother, she had a simple brother, I was told that when the Russians came in, he, he went, he dressed himself up in a German officer's uniform, because he was simple, and they thought he was a German officer, so they shot him, and she's got an older brother as well, but he lives in a different area. And when I went to no. l8, I couldn't remember her name, I only knew her Christian name, when we played as kids, so I saw some ladies sitting on a balcony, in my entrance where I lived, so I went upstairs, I said to my daughter, "I'll go up and ask them." But some of them were already new tenants, not, only about 2O years they'd lived there. But then another lady was coming down the stairs, and they said, "Oh, she might know, cos she's lived here since the middle of the War." You see, when we were thrown out of our homes, and put into the ghetto, in l939, in l94O they closed the ghetto, the ghetto was finished, it was all built, you know, the walls, and everything, and the fences, and they shut it off with big gates, so all the properties stood empty from the Jews, so they could have the pick of the best homes, so this girl, this girl that I was friends with, Janka, she's my sister's age, she's 62 now. She moved in, in a beautiful home that our neighbours had, on the ground floor, and in the front they had a grocery store, their name was Gottlieb, I still remember the name, Gottlieb, they had a grocery store in the front, and they lived in the back. That was their flat, a very big flat they had, so she, when the properties got empty, when we went into the ghetto, so some of these people that remained, the Christians, they moved into all these flats of the Jewish homes.

They were non-Jews living in the same tenement, when you were living there before?

No, only the caretaker, because it was a very prosperous and rich neighbourhood.

That you moved into?

At no. l8. So was no. 3, because all that part of Lodz, was very, big business and big workshops and factories, and the Jews occupied it.

So how did you get to meet non-Jewish children?

From the neighbourhood, kids. You know, they used to come in from other neighbourhoods to play with, you see, and mostly we used to play with, not very many, let's say, from the other block, the kids, the caretaker's children, you see, and sometimes you used to see some kids, when you used to go down to no.l6, the bicycle rink, in the summer they used to have a bicycle rink, so for a couple of pennies you could hire a bicycle, and the man that used to mind the stall, let's say, he would call out, "You're number is up, come in with the bike." So there was lots of children of both religions.

But there was no trouble between them? You were young enough ...

No, no. And in the winter, they made it an ice rink, and in the winter, kids used to go ice-skating. And music used to play, and used to skate like you see here, and it used to be wonderful, and I spent some wonderful years, till the War broke out, and when the War broke out, they marched in, everything went upside down. They started on us, first they, they started throwing out the people from their businesses, their shops, it wasn't allowed to shop, you were, you couldn't obtain no food, there was queues, used to queue for bread, and you used to go out in the middle of the night to queue, and they always used to send me because of my colouring.

Why of your colouring?

Cos I was fair, I had blue eyes, I had a small nose, so I didn't look Jewish, you see, so that was my advantage. So we used to stand in the queue, and the SS used to walk, and they looked, and they could see a face they didn't like, they'd sling you out the queue, and I managed to get through all these, I used to go queing for bread, I used to go and queue for this, so I was the queuer.

Were there queues before the War?

No. Oh, life was wonderful.

You could afford anything?

Well, if you had the money, oh yes, if you had the money, you got everything, there was such luxury, there was such luxury life for, for the rich, and for the people comfortable, and if you ....

And you were comfortable at that time?

Just before the War, we began to really live a little, because my father was doing work, for an outdoor worker, and we used to work night and day in the seasons, and this man was very ambitious, very good at business, and he could, he could sell his

stuff abroad. You know, he could export, I think they used to export to Belgium and to France, you know, and we used to work night and day.

You used to work, or your father?

My father, my mother, my sisters, we helped.

What were you doing?

We used to take the, when the stuff was made.

What stuff?

We were making sandals for the summer season. When they were finished, we used to pack them in shoe boxes, and my mother would tie up and make bundles of five, five pairs, and we didn't go by bus, or by car, or by coach, we had to walk it, and it was quite a distance to walk to my father's boss, and we used to unload the work there, and sometimes, we might go late at night, in the middle of the night, you know, to deliver work, and in the winter my father would, the winter he would work for summer, and summer he would work for winter, so in the summer he used to do winter boots for the winter, in the summer, and that's how it was, seasonal work.

Your father was working in this room on the fourth floor?

Yes.

At his ...

Yes, and even managed to employ somebody.

Who also worked in this room?

And lived with us. And shared bed with my father, because we were all getting too big to sleep with our parents, you see, so we would have put-u-up beds, so it was like a bloody lodging, you know, to go to bed, very cosy.

Who was this person that came?

This person was a young, a young boy, a young Christian boy, that, that worked for a friend of my father's, and he was a very good worker, he was a young boy, and his name was Strepan Kapusta, Strepan Kapusta is Cabbage Kapusta, in Polish, and he worked with us for a little while, until the War broke out, and he was called up for the Army, because the War, and he didn't want to go, and he cried.

How old was he?

I think he was about 2O, or 22.

When the War broke out?

Yeh. He wasn't from Lodz. He came from Strykova, Strikif in Jewish, Strykova in Polish. And he also liked my mother a great deal, that's why she managed to get him away from the other place where he worked.

Sorry, your elder sister, was she living also with you?

Oh yes. Yes, she was a schoolgirl.

And did this young boy take an interest in your sister?

No, no. No. No, it wasn't done. It wasn't done like that. What, in the same place? No, no, she had her own friends, her friends from school, the boys and the girls, because my sister, my older sister was coming up to about l6, l7, the oldest.

Would she have courted non-Jewish boys?

It wasn't done.

It wasn't done to court non-Jewish boys?

No. There was, there were marriages, but far and few between. It was a terrible stigma.

To have a child who married a non-Jew?

Yeh.

So even though your father was a liberal and a socialist ...

It wasn't done, it wasn't done. To each his own, yes, to each his own, you see. No, it wasn't done, no. Who she even went about with from school, or from the neighbourhood, boys and girls she knew it was different, but there was no, no marriages, first of all she was too young, she was only l6, or coming up l7, something like this, I don't know, you see, she was the oldest.

But did no one take, were there no non-Jewish boys who took an interest in her?

Oh yes, yes, they used to like very much the Jewish girls.

Why?

Because, I think, they maybe were better dressed, and were pretty as well, well, my older sister was a real beauty. I think that's what, and they thought that all Jews were rich, you see. They had this idea, but no, not everybody was rich, you see.

So there was no possibility of this boy, Cabbage, who came in to work ...

Kabutza, no, no, because he was going out with some of the maids that were in service in the buildings, because we lived in a building with very very rich people.

With very rich people.

Oh! But I can't tell you how rich. They all had businesses, factories, you know, they had.

These were Jewish people also?

Yes, yes.

So this boy, Cabbage, he was going out with a girl.

The maids, the Christian maids, girls that come from the country, in service. And he would go out with them, you know, he would date, one particular one he was dating, and when the War broke out and he was called up, and he didn't want to go, he cried, kissing my mother's hands, because she'd looked after him. She fed him, well, cleaning, he had to clean himself, bath himself, she used to go and buy his clothes.

Your mother bought his clothes?

No, he earned, he earned a good living working for my father. You see, my father was an outdoor worker, but he, he employed him, because he needed him, there was lot of work was going, and even sometimes the children, the times that was getting better, my father even worked for Bata, you know Bata? The shoe people? Yes? They're actually a Czechoslovakian firm, but they, they had shops and factories in Poland, and my father worked for them a little while.

Was it your father who paid this boy?

Oh yes. The wages, yes. What, all the work that we done, he paid them so much, he paid them, like piecework. How many pairs of sandals per day. Say he done 2O pairs of sandals, so let's say he got, say, 5 bob for a pair of sandals to make, and he earned a very good living with us, and he got elegant, and he started wearing smart clothes, and he was a good looking scheigitz, Christian boy, you know, had pimples, I remember, but he was still good-looking, and when he went away he cried, and he was standing there, kissing my mother's hands, because he was like a son to her. My family did know from all this, you sew and you ...

<u>End of FlOl Side B</u>

FlO2 Side A

I mean, we are such an old family, we, we probably hundreds and hundreds of years in Poland, so many generations from us, from the very first Jews that came into Europe, you know, when all that trouble was going on, when the, when the Palestine? It wasn't Palestine, it was Caanan, at first, Palestine was called Caanan, when the Jews came out after the destruction of the temples, they were running everywhere, weren't they, that's why they all us "The Wandering Jew", we couldn't settle in one place, but thank God we're now settled in one place, and we will never be moved from there, you see? NEVER in a million years, we will, we will kill, we will die, never get us out of Israel, of eretz Israel. And ...

But you were saying, there was no, did you ever have any idea, you know that Jews ...

Yes, yes, of course.

Was there ever any ...

Very small, I heard sometimes, they used to say, I dunno, I don't know where they got the ideas, the kids, the non-Jewish kids, (SPEAKS IN POLISH), "Jews to Palestine", that means, you know, but it didn't make such an impression I didn't understand it.

Because you were young?

I was a child, and I did not understand what it means, but I never heard, in my home, in particular, ever any discussions, ever talk about Jews and Gentiles, you know what I mean? So of course, I wouldn't know it, I only found it out when the War broke out, when the Nazis marched in, what they started doing with us, and then I started wondering, "What's all this about. What are they doing? Why", and they said, "Because you are Jewish." We are Jews.

And when you were at school, even though some of the teachers were non-Jewish, was there any ...

No. No, no, no ...

They never mentioned anything in school?

No, there was no animosity, there was nothing like this, because they were strictly schools for Jewish children, and there was no, like, to make any difference between non- and Jewish, they couldn't sort of, how do you say? Put the Christian children up against us, cos there wasn't any, so we didn't experience any anti-Semitism in school, you see. But there was, there was, from the people, but they, they were attacking different kinds, you know. You know, they were attacking the rich, you see.

The rich Jews?

Not, they were jealous, let's put it that way. They were envious. I mean, they used to drink everything away, yes?

The non-Jews you're talking about?

Yes. One of ... my father never had a drink in his life. Smoking yes, he was a terrible chain-smoker, night and day, but drink, never. Came Yomtov, Passover, Pesach, we'd have wine, we'd have Seder night, you see, we used to have all this. My mother used to work the whole night when Yomtov came in, Passover came in, she worked all night, making, preparing and cooking and baking, for all the Yomtovs.

For Yomtov?

For Yomtov.

For all the Yomtovs - Simchat Torah, Chanukah and Rosh Hashanah.

Well, Chanukah is not a holiday that you need to bother about, you know. Chanukah is not a religious, really.

But was it a family ...

Chanukah we light candles, well, I don't do it now, because there are no small children, but I've still got the Chanukah candle from Israel.

But was there a meal?

Oh yes, oh my home was always open, the door was always open for people to come in.

Do you remember relatives from the small countryside places coming in?

The only, the only one that mostly came was my grandpa, my zeder, because he used to go to the Mikvah, once a month, but he didn't stay with us to sleep, he went, he went to sleep by his cousins at no. l3, because they were very comfortable, they had a very large flat. And I remember one night, one Friday night, my grandpa lost his way in the dark, because he wouldn't put no lights on, because I'm talking, he was already getting on for 7O, and when the War broke out, my grandfather was 74, and he walked into a different bedroom, and he walked, and he was getting in his cousin's bed, and she made a big scream.

There wasn't a ...

No, my grandfather's cousin was in bed, and was sleeping, and he came out, probably to go to the toilet in the middle of the night, it was Friday night, and that remained a big joke in our family. The way zeder went into cousin's bed, you know, because in those days you didn't discuss things like that. There was no talking about sex or things like that. It was a different world.

So what were the topics of conversation? Because now, on a Friday night, people would discuss, you know, politics, and ...

Politics, yes, politics, yes, all sorts of politics, and all kinds of different things, you know, and family life, neighbours, the door was always open by us, neighbours would come in for a chat, and my mother and father had quite a large crowd of friends, of mixed political ideas, and meaning, and they would come and sit and talk, discuss, you know, and my mother was always busy doing something to give them to eat, in the kitchen.

What sort of food?

Well, my mother cooked a proper Shabbuser dinner, she cooked fish, she cooked carp, sweet, you know, do you know about carp? She'd cook the chicken soup, lockschen, she would cook compote, you see, we didn't eat like potatoes with meat and things, if we ate potatoes we didn't eat soup, you know what I mean? So if she made chicken soup for Friday night and Saturday night, and even if my mother wanted to cook something on a Saturday, she had to lock the door so no one would come in, because our door was always open. My mother used to like cooking things fresh, so if she liked to cook a lockschen fresh, so if she cooked them, she would lock the door, so no one could come in, maybe a neighbour next door, just happens to pop in, because it was all sort of hidden, you know, because people used to keep up, keep up with the, you know, the religion, your, your Sabbath, and your Old and New Years, and Yom Kippur and Suckah, we used to make wonderful Suckahs in the yard, and let's say two, three families would make one, because our courtyard where we lived, was very big, and some, if they had a balcony in their flats, they would make a Suckah for themselves on the balcony and bring out the table. If we didn't have a balcony, so we would make Suckahs in the courtyard, and a few families would sit and eat together, and the family would bring down their own food, you know. And it used to be wonderful, because we used to go and buy the stuff to make the Suckahs, used to put those, the green, those branches like they have from Christmas trees here, and we would dress up the Suckahs with flags, and with coloured paper.

What flags?

Jewish flags.

The Star of David?

Yes, and also we'd buy coloured paper, and cut strips, and would make chains, and would hang up fresh fruit, like bunches of grapes, it used to be wonderful.

And was there a Rabbi who came in?

No, no, no.

Just a community?

Just the community, the family and neighbours, you see.

There wasn't any religious element to it?

Yeh, of course, because there were prayers said, men, the men, they sit and make, the whatyoucallit? The Kiddish, and the blessing, and the moitzes, and the chollahs, and the, you know, when you cut pieces up and you make prayers over it.

And at Passover also?

Passover that was indoors, at home. Passover was indoors, in your own home, not in the street. But we always, my mother always used to invite a guest.

So what happened at Passover, for example.

Passover we would have Seder. When Passover came in, my mother lit candles.

And you had ...

Oh yes, not me, I didn't, because I wasn't taught in that, but ...

It was read in Hebrew?

Yes. Looshen Koydish. That's ancient Hebrew, not modern Hebrew like today. Bits and pieces is sort of mixed in with the modern Hebrew, you know, Hagada, and we used, we would sit through the whole seder.

You wouldn't understand anything though?

Yes. Not what was played, but we knew what was going on, you know.

But normally, when you were just speaking with your friends, what you speak, Yiddish?

Yiddish and Polish, and in school we were only allowed to speak Polish, not Yiddish. But at home, yes. With our family, with my mother and father, and even my sisters, but with my friends, like in the buildings, we used to speak Polish.

Why? Why not Yiddish if they were mainly Jewish?

Because it's like you're living here, you're speaking English, you're not speaking Yiddish are you. Even with your friends, would you be speaking anything but English?

No, but I mean, if you were living with Jews, and they all spoke Yiddish, wouldn't it have been more normal, in a sense?

No, it wasn't, but we spoke mostly Polish, and also I had these Polish Christian children that I used to mix with, you see.

Did you ever invite them over for the Passover?

No, but my mother always used to send a package to the caretaker. She used to send matzos, and this girl I was telling you about, the only one that I found, by the time we finished with her, she spoke better Yiddish than I did. She used to come up sometimes, I would ask her up for a meal, and because my mother was always cooking, not for six, but for lO, you know what I mean? Because she always knew there would be somebody coming in. And Passover, for Seder night, we always used to have a guest. We had a man, a Jewish man from Germany, a refugee, that had to run away from Leipzig, he was also a shoemaker, that's how my parents met him, working by somebody. His name was Fritz, Fritz, I still remember, and he was alone, because he had to run away from Leipzig, because the Gestapo was coming after him, because he was a little bit on the pinky side, so he came to Poland, and of course, he was on his own, so of course, my mother took pity, was sorry, I mean, how could you let a man on his own, especially Passover is such a lovely and joyous holiday.

Homosexual, you mean?

No. No.

Pink as in Socialist?

Yes. Commy. Not a homosexual, no. He left, his daughter came to England a couple of years before the War, you see, they sent children from Germany, refugee children to England, like I came in '45, but he eventually, when, when he start coming into our family, he befriended a lady in our home, a very beautiful woman, she was having problems with her marriage, her husband was a pig, he was beating her, and now and then she would come with dark glasses because she had a black eye, and she had a boy of l6, and so she befriended him, got very friendly, and the three of them ran off to Russia.

To Russia?

To Russia. So, I don't know any more what happened after that. But he used to come ... Pesach time, time for Seder night, and he was very learned in Jewish, he used to make, sometimes my father would give him the honour to, to preside over the Seder, and he was ever so good in it, we couldn't believe it, we thought that the German Jews were such atheists, you know.

Assimilated, you mean?

Mmm. Assimilated. How would he, but when he opened the Hagada, and he was making the Seder, we couldn't get over it.

Why did you think that of the Germans?

Well, they used to say so, I dunno, I don't know why. Because they were so assimilated, and the German way of life, that they considered themselves more German than Jewish.

Which the Poles, which your family didn't. First you were Jews and then Poles?

Oh yes, oh yes. Although my father served the Army, was a soldier in the First World War and a veteran, but he was still Jewish.

First?

Your faith is Jewish, your religion is Jewish, and Polish is your nationality, you see, but the German Jews weren't like that, because that came to prove to me, some years later, when they were sending out all the, the last of the German Jews from Germany, and they shifted them into the Lodz ghetto, and we went to see what these people looked like, so there was a very big area outside of town, like a big field, so they brought them into this field, and they came with all their luggage, and with food, and I remember standing there and they were eating, and my saliva was dripping from my mouth, because we were so starved, and they were still in the best of health, they looked marvellous, they came with their belongings, and, and they used to say, they couldn't understand why they ended up in the ghetto. They said, "Wir sinden keinen Juden, wir sinden Deutschen." - "We're not Jews, we're German." And they had young sons with them, in the uniforms, they fished them out from the Army, they used to inspect them, and they used to look, if you were circumcised, you were a Jew.

So did all, come l9, come '39 when the ghetto was built ...

Well, well, they, first when they marched in, was the most horrible day of our lives when they marched in.

How different was it? I mean, were your parents expecting it? I mean, on lst September, at the end of August, were they expecting something to happen? Did they tell you?

Well, we knew that the War broke out, because we were still in bed, and my mother said, "Kinderlei - children, I think we're at War."

But you were about l5 then?

No, I was l2. '39. And then, then there was a lot of propaganda, the Germans was giving a lot of propaganda, and then they said, when they were coming in, and well, the War was won for them and lost for Poland, I mean, they were in Poland within a week.

What sense did you make of all this? Cos you were young.

I couldn't understand it. I couldn't understand.

What explanation did your parents give you?

They said it's just War. Poland's at War with Germany. But who understands these things? I wouldn't understand, I mean. And when it, when it happened, finally happened, then one night they were giving out propaganda, they were going to drop gas.

Who's "they"?

The Germans, it came over the radio, that they were going to drop gas on us, so there was terrible panic. So we went into our neighbours, these people that had the large grocery store, had a very large flat, and they were very good neighbours, very good friends of my mother.

Yes, they were Jews?

Yes, Jews. Gottlieb. And we, we stayed with them, we even slept in their flat, and a lot of people gathered, and making preparation to deal with the gas.

Why did you move into their flat, then?

Because my father wasn't home any more, because there came propaganda on the radio, they said, when they march in, they're going to shoot all the Jewish men.

So where was your father?

So my father, one night, in the middle of the night, I remember, with a bunch of men from the buildings, they dressed, and they made their way on to Warsaw, they ran to Warsaw, they thought they will be safe there.

They said goodbye to your mother?

Oh yes, they said goodbye.

And they hopped it to Warsaw.

And they hopped it, they were gone a little while, and Warsaw was terribly bombed, because the propaganda was to get all the people to Warsaw, so they can kill them off in one swoop in the bombing. So my father was gone for some time.

He went with a dozen, or lOO of Jews?

Oh quite a few men from the block, because we lived in a very large block of flats, and they went one night, in the middle of the night, they all went, because they said when they come in, they're going to shoot all the men, and then another thing came about, my little brother, he got so scared, he heard somebody saying when they, when they come in, they're going to shoot off all the boys' fingers, the children, you know, in there, and he got so scared, he thought it was true, he went and hid himself, and we couldn't find him, we looked and we looked, and we searched everywhere, and when my mother went into our home, he was laying hidden under the bed.

He was running away because of the propaganda?

The propaganda they were going to shoot off all the boy's fingers, the Judenfinger. And children, you know, I mean, little, he was only what, lO years old.

So school stopped?

As soon as they came in it stopped.

Did you have a curfew?

Yes, there was a curfew, up to, up till we went into the ghetto.

Which was when?

l94O, May lst, they closed the gates, all the people from outside the ghetto sites, was in the ghetto, and they closed ...

And you were in there?

Yes, we were all transported, we took our belongings, our beds.

Into the ghetto?

Yes.

Was that far from where you were living before?

Quite a little way by foot, quite a little way by foot, and we went to live with friends, people that lived already in the ghetto area from before the War, very good friends of ours, and we went and lived a little while with them, we had all bedded down on the floors.

You took all your belongings? You took everything from your ...

Well, we took the beds, we took our bedding, our linen, our clothes, kitchen utensils, we didn't schlep, we didn't take tables or chairs or wardrobes, there wasn't any cupboards, we left all that behind, we only took the beds, and then one day, we had them stored somewhere, by some friends, and somebody went and pinched one of the beds, one of the wooden beds, probably wanted to use it for fuel, for cooking, to make a fire.

So between the time when the War, September l939 when you were l2, and everything began to happen...

Everything began to happen, it was the atrocities.

Between that time and May l94O ...

Yes, the atrocities, they started.

So what happened?

First they started as with the people that had businesses, you know.

People you knew?

Yes, shops, they said it was forbidden to shop by Jews, and there was no fresh goods coming in, because ...

Your father was still away at the same time?

No, he'd come back already.

How long had he been away?

He was away about three or four weeks, and he was in a terrible bombardment, he nearly one day lost his life, he got caught in a building that was bombed, and the only thing that was left to a wall, was a staircase, and everything below him was, what you call like an emptiness.

A big hole?

Yes. And, but he managed to scrap down.

And so he came back to your mother and family?

Yes, and when the bombardment stopped, so he made his way home, because he had to walk it, and it's a very long way, I mean, it takes two hours from Lodz to Warsaw by train, can you imagine how long it takes by foot? Because there was no transport, and they were bombarding and shooting, and the planes came down so low during the day, that they were mowing the people down on the highways, the refugees.

But there were no guns or bombing in Lodz?

No. Because they wanted to leave this in one piece, because it was vital to them to have this city for them.

Why?

Because it was one of the biggest industrial areas, and also they must have been planning that they were going to separate the city, and make it into the Lodz ghetto, and you need an area, you see, and if it was all bombed, where would, where would they put the people, you see?

So ...

They bombed Warsaw, but they still ...

They were coming into Lodz?

From Warsaw, from all the surrounding provinces.

People came into Lodz?

They came in, they, they, when the ghetto was closed, not before. Not before the ghetto was closed in l94O. After l94O they kept bringing in transports, for the Lodz ghetto, but then they used to sift them out, and they now and then, they would, they would make transport, they used to take people away, and to this day, I don't know where they got to, you see. But up till that time, we were in Lodz, and after a while, it sort of normalised a bit, but you couldn't, you couldn't get nothing for your money, you couldn't exchange your zloties into marks, for the Jews it was impossible, this is what I know, this is what we couldn't do.

Sorry, just before you went into the ghetto?

Before. That was in '39 before Christmas. At Christmas time we were already making tracks for the ghetto, people were already trying to find lodgings.

You were told that you had to go to the ghetto?

Yes, there came orders. It came orders through, you know, they used to stick billboards out.

They said, "All Jews go to the ghetto"?

Yes, and we saw it being built.

New tenements?

No, no, no, old tenements, the old city, there was the city there, but of course, we were very overcrowded, because you took out this lot from here, and put already in a lot where peole already lived, if you know my meaning. So of course, now and then, they had to sort of sieve, and then they had an order that you could volunteer, so they had all the people volunteer, thinking they were going to different places to work, but now I know different, because I've read all about it, where they ended up.

A volunteer? There was a poster that was put up?

Yes.

What did it say?

It sid, "To volunteer, to come for work, on transport, you're going to new places." But it wasn't so.

And they ended up?

They ended up in, in the first camp, not far from Lodz, they set up, you saw it on the movies didn't you, on the Holocaust movie, yes. That was the very first place where they used to kill and gas chambers.

This was ...

They used to gas the people in the, in what looked like ambulances.

At the end of l939?

That was already in the 4Os, in '4O, '4l, you see, we did not know about Auschwitz, we didn't know it. Auschwitz wasn't built, it was originally built for political prisoners, and so was Buchenwald, and so was Dachau, for Communists. He wanted to, he cleared, he cleared the country, Germany, of the Communists, Hitler, you see. And then he started on us, he started on the Jews.

And your father's family, the family who lived in ...

They still lived, they lived, they still lived.

They didn't move?

No, they didn't, but what they did, they took them to a place, and they cleared them all off.

Where did they take them to?

They took them, I think, in where they lived, in the market place, and they shot them all out.

The end of l939?

Yes, that was already in, probably in mid '4Os, cos they remained there. We went into the ghetto, but they still remained there. Up till l94O, they were still at home in the province, and then we didn't hear any more from them, they all perished, except I've got one, one cousin that survived, because he and his father were sent to work in camps, and my uncle didn't survive, my uncle died of starvation, in Dachau, and only my cousin survived. He's in America, he went l946 to America, so there's very few of us are alive. There's three from my father's side, us three, and one uncle from my mother's, her brother, there's only four of us that survived.

So in l94O, you'd moved into the ghetto?

Yes, because, because it closed, they closed it.

What happened to the Jews who weren't in the ghetto at that time?

Well, let's say the some that were hiding, if they caught them, terrible things happened to them, either they were hanged or shot, or sent away, but most of the population went into the ghetto.

And your father at the time, he was still involved in politics?

No, no. That was all finished. What?   You know how Hitler hated Socialists, didn't he, Communists, any, no, he wasn't, the mind wasn't any more for this kind of preoccupation, for politics.   My family were broken, my mother was broken, my father was a broken man.

Broken? What do you mean?

Psychologically.

By the knowledge that they had to go into ...

Yes, with the, with the Germans what they got up to, because up till l94O, in the ghetto ...

<u>End of FlO2 Side A</u>

FlO2 Side B

Your parents were, you said they were broken by it, how did you know? How could you tell?

Well, you could tell how people go about, the way they react.

How was it different?

Well, it was we were living under constant fear. Constant fear. And you couldn't obtain nothing, you couldn't get no food, you couldn't get no coal, and it was winter, and you needed to warm your house, and there was nothing, for the Jews it was impossible, unless you had very good Christian friends.

How many Christians were there living in the ghetto?

No, no, that wasn't the ghetto, that was before. I'm talking '39-4O, you see. The gates were still open, you could still come and go, to May lst. It came an order that May lst, it's going to be closed the gate be closed, and they had soldiers, German SS used to stand on duty. They stood in little duty, sentry boxes, yes?

Were you given an identification pass?

After a while, I remember one day we were photographed, they came and took pictures, but that was a long time after, I was already working, and they took identity like, like convicts, you know, like short pictures, just like of your head, more or less, you know, and we were given identity cards, we did have identity cards, because when we were in the ghetto, rations, they had to distribute. You see, they started to organise, organise some stability, some life, you know, they had to have people to run it, you see, and who was educated, and you know, who was in the know, protecture, influence, you know what it means? You could get yourself one of these nice jobs.

Did your father have one of these jobs?

No, my father was in the, the early years in the ghetto, he worked for somebody, like for himself, repairing shoes, you know, making mens shoes, repair, make new ones was impossible, there was no materials to make new shoes, but you could, from old ones, you would take parts off, you'd take the leather off, and you would repair shoes that were still wearable, you know.

Did your mother work?

No, not at the time, no, that came, I think, in the year, much later. The first winter, the first winter, the first year, '4O, we did not work, and we spent practically the whole winter in bed, because it was cold, we had nothing to make the room warm with, because we had already moved.

Six of you?

No. Five of us, my sister had gone by then.   My sister, my oldest sister Chana, she went across the wires, into the, to the Ayrian side.

I don't understand, what is that?

Ayrian?

Yes.

To the Christian side. Outside the ghetto.

How did she manage to do that?

Well, you could get through to the wires, to the fences.

So your sister escaped from the ghetto?

Yes. She went and lived on the other side, and she lived there for a little while, and then somebody informed on her that she was Jewish.

But did she look Jewish? Or did she look like you did at the time?

She was dark, but she could get away with it, you know, and she lived on the other side, and she was all right for a while, with her friends, she had Christian friends, yes, she had non-Jewish friends as well.

She was about l7?

No, she was only about, maybe l8, l9. Somebody informed on her and she was arrested, and she went to trial, and she received a prison sentence, and she was sent to, I don't know where, I can't remember where, but she went to a womens prison, a real tough prison.

Were you in contact with her then?

No.

When she left?

No, we didn't know nothing, we didn't know where she disappeared to.

So how did you get this information that she went to trial and then to prison?

After when she come home, when she was released after her sentence.

So how long was she in prison for?

I think l8 months, and then she was sent into the ghetto, and she spent some time in prison.

What did she say about that?

She, she, she was so bright, that she was even made trusted, you know like you see on the films, you know, and she had plenty of food, and the day they released her, she didn't realise that she is leaving her prison cell, because when she come home and she saw how there was no food, how we were, all thin and starved already, by that time, there must have been around l94l or '42, and we were already starving, you know, we were dying of starvation every day of the week.

What, your friends, or your people you knew?

Yes.

Who died?

Yes, but we were also very, what you call this? Very thin.

Emaciated?

Emaciated, yes, I was looking for that word, because, because we lived on hardly any food.

What would be the daily ration?

Oh, we used to get so much of bread, a piece of bread, let's say a quarter of a pound used to be your ration.

For the whole family, or for one person?

For one person. And then you used to go to the kitchens, you could get maybe a half a pint of soup, but it was some soup, because who worked in the kitchens they had the best, you know what I mean? We had thin, the thin ends of the soups. But when it normalised, when industry was set up, then food came in from the outside, and there was co-ops created, and you had ration books, and if you were already at work, when you got a job, you used to get paid, used to be Jewish money, can you imagine? Jewish printed money, it was printed in the ghetto, because it became so industrialised, the ghetto, you see, and I, I, the first winter of l94O, didn't work, we stayed in bed practically the whole winter.

Your father also, or was he working?

Well, he was working, but we didn't. We was only kids, but later on when they set up industry, more, I, I started to work, and I worked in the straw factory, where they make ...

This was '4l?

Yes, something like that, where we made straw boots, you know the guards, the soldiers that stood on guard, in the winter they used to stand in these straw shoes, so their feet wouldn't be cold. So the first year that I worked in the straw factory, and my sister worked in the other department of the straw factory. She plaited, from straw, like plaits, and from these plaits you made boots.

Were you paid for that job?

Yes.

By whom?

We were paid, well, well, the people that run the ghetto, like, the Government, there was a system.

They were Jews?

Yes, it was all Jews, except there was the final control from the Germans you see, because they used to come in, and they used to come and look and control, and see where everything is going well, production is being done, and so we used to earn a measly few, few, I don't know what, marks, let's say, it was marks, and with that, you managed to get your rations in the co-op, and every month, you used to go and get your rations, you see, so it was already, they'd done away with the soup kitchens, because normal life came back, you know, because already you work, everybody was already working, there were certain, after I finished in the straw factory, I was allocated to the dressmaking factory, so I used to work in the dressmaking and the corset department, used to make corsets as well, one department, one department dressmaking, and my mother used to work in another factory, in a different area, she was in tailoring, she made the, she was a machinist, she was sewing Army coats for the German soldiers, that was their job. And my sister still worked in the straw factory. And that's how we went through the four years working, and living in the ghetto.

Up until when?

Up till the liquidation, till the final orders came for the final solution.

Can you remember when?

Well, it was in the summer of'44, I don't know exactly what, people were already beginning to be taken away, transports, and they're beginning to clear out the neighbourhoods, the districts, the streets, buildings, and, but up till then, up till '44 we lived, like ghetto life.

How different was that from the life you lived before? I mean, were there organisations, Zionist organisations, political ones?

No, no, there could be in private, you know, people that might have a little prayer room, but they knew each other, but there was no such things.

Did you keep shabat?

No. There was no such thing, because it was, they were horrific conditions, there was no food. How can you celebrate shabat when you don't have to eat? We had to eat potato peelings.

There were no candles?

No. We were lucky we had electricity, and then they, they used to cut it now and then to save electricity. Used to be for hours and hours, some nights we were just sitting in the dark, you see. You'd get a candle for lighting, but you didn't use them for shabat. But there probably were people that were still observing. But we didn't, we had other things on our mind. We had survival on our mind. Where we get a crust to eat.

Where did you get a crust to eat?

It was impossible. It was impossible to get anything, only what you got on your rations, and when you ate that up, you eat it up in two days, whatever you got, and the next, the next three weeks, you absolutely starved to death. You eat it in a week. Used to get a loaf of bread, per person.

For how long?

For a week, you see. And you ate it up in two days. Let's say it was a round loaf, maybe a kilo, maybe a kilo loaf, and you ate it up in two days, and after that, no more till the next ration.

What else did you get with the bread?

They used to give us certain things on the ration, they gave us a little sugar, a little jam, there was no butter, there was oil, oil that was not refined, you know, like, for cooking oil, there was, it was ghastly, it was black, and margarine sometimes, and sometimes they used to give us this ghastly stinking cheese, there was no eggs, there was no milk, there was no fruit, there wasn't even plenty of vegetables, and in the winter, it was very scarce, because summer vegetables is only in the summer, and in the winter, if we got potatoes on the ration, we would bring them home, and keep them in a sack under the bed, and they would get frozen overnight, and then they would be frozen, and they would thaw out, and so you had a room full of water, the floor was washed at the same time, and the potatoes was no good, you couldn't use them because they was soft, because they'd gone squelchy, so you ate peculiar tasting potatoes, you've never tasted anything like it, sweet potatoes, horrible, you know, but we still had to eat it, because we couldn't throw it away, but we had like, the winter months was the worst time of our life, because there was no fresh food coming in, let's say like, carrots. They used to feed us on swede, you know I have not eaten swede, you know, that vegetable kohl rabi, I haven't eaten that since the War, I couldn't eat it, because if I eat it, I'll be sick, I have this obnoxious feeling about it, because it was horrible. We had to cook this in water, just to fill our stomachs up,

you know. And they used to send in cabbage and beetroots, potatoes, we didn't get a lot of potatoes but we still got, in the summer season, when there is vegetables about. But in the winter, we used to live on this, I don't know what kind of coffee it was, it was made form a corn bean, burned, you know, roasted, and that, when you cooked it, it had a coffee flavour, but it was terribly obnoxious, and sweeten it with saccharin, not this modern stuff we get now, and all the time I used to feel sick, bilious, as I was drinking it, it made me feel sick in my stomach, so I used to drink plenty of that to fill the stomach, you see, to take that emptiness away. And only the piece of bread on the ration, some days we would live, on a piece of bread, and this ghastly bean coffee.

No meat, nothing?

We used to get, in the good days, we would get horses meat.

When were the good days?

Well, when they used to send in, we'd get on the ration, a piece of, of horse's meat, so let's say you got a quarter of a pound per person, so if you went to the butchers, and of course, you had to queue for hours, and fight like a dog to get in, so if you went for a family, and after, when my father died, there was four of us. So let's say we got one pound. of meat, so they would bung in a half a pound of bone, you see, and so this kind of meat you could only mince it, and my mother made those funny dry beefburgers from the horses meat, because you can't eat horses meat like you would eat a cooked, boiled, or stewed or fried steak, because it's too hard, though it's clean, very clean meat, the horse is the cleanest animal, you know, but you couldn't eat it because it's too hard.

Nor kosher?

Of course. You talk about kosher, you're talking about times, it was, it was Domesday.

Yes, so what were the froomers, I mean,, what were they doing?

They didn't eat it.

Did they give it away, or sold it?

I don't know, I don't know. I mean, I've known my neighbours, they caught a dog, and killed the dog.

And ate it?

Yes. Yes.

What was your mother's attitude to all this?

We, we, wouldn't eat anything like this, not dog, anyway. We used to go without, and my mother made these beefburgers, you know, fried on a dry frying pan, because

we didn't have the fat, or mincing potato peelings, and making nine, ten, without anything and it kept sticking, and by the time you'd finished, you had crumb latkes.

We were talking about latkes.

Yes, yes, because we had to find, from anywhere possible, to find something to fill ourselves up, because the worst part was the winters, the winter months, you see.

What sort of social life was there?

Nothing. Only neigbourly social life. There was no cinema, or theatre, or music, if they did, then I didn't know of. There was very little of that. They tried to create, I think, something, but then again, they, they used to make laws that every now and then, that you had to give up your things, you know. One time would be, when they started, the people that had furs, you had to come to a certain place and give up your furs. And then they would want for you to give up your musical instruments, so you had to go to the place, and give, give your instruments away, and besides, they used to come into your home, from now and then, and used to plunder, you see. I mean, even in l939, before we went into the ghetto, they went like, district to district, and they went into people's homes, and whatever nice they saw, and good, they even used to take down the crystal chandeliers from the flats, they would go to the wardrobes and take all the good clothes, and all the good linen, and if there was silver, or there was paintings, or there was good carpets, tapestries, because in Poland there wasn't so much wall-to-wall carpet, as rugs, because most homes were wooden floors, the parquet, you know, the expensive homes had parquet flooring, but the poor people had floorboards, you had to scrub your floors clean, you know, every Friday, my mother would have a woman, a charlady, and she would come and scrub the floor for a few zloties. And when the times was getting good, when my mother could afford a charlady or a laundry woman to come and do the laundry, so my mother wouldn't have to do it, because she used to suffer with lumbago, you see, and she had to be very careful not to strain her back.

Was there, there must have been so many illnesses, especially in the ghetto, it was so cold, you didn't have the food.

Yes, there was, you mean illnesses?

Yes.

Well, the most prevalent illness was TB.

Yes, so what happened?

Starvation. Well, these people used to die, and that's what my father died of.

In the ghetto?

In the ghetto, yes.

So what happened to someone when they died?

Well, we, they used to inform the Burial Society, and they would, and they would come and collect him in a wagon, like, you know, in a caravan, a large black hearse, and he would be taken to the cemetery ground, and ...

Which was outside the ghetto?

Yes. And like on the outskirts, it was very big, the one I know of, the one I went to, was one of the biggest in Lodz, but there's two or three others, smaller ones, I've been told, and he would receive, they would just bury him, because when we informed the Burial Society, the man came to the house, and my mother knew the man, and he was ever so surprised that he had to come and do the ritual washing to my father, and he done that in the house, we had to leave the house, the kids, because we, we had to keep my father in our rooms till we could arrange, because so many people died, I mean, the, the whatyoucallit, the hearse, you forever used to see them riding around the street, picking up people, it was like working piece-work, you're forever all the time, you couldn't escape it. There wasn't a day gone by that you wouldn't see the hearse flying around in the neighbourhood picking up people.

Who were dying of what? TB and starvation?

Mostly of starvation and TB. And there was very little other. There was, there was only one recorded case of cancer. And there was one murder recorded.

Do you know anything about the murder?

No, there was a man playing cards, and somebody was cheating. They must, they couldn't have been very nice men, they must have been the low lifes, like those gangsters you see today, who, card players, and one picked a knife and stabbed him, so that was the only murder committed. Lots of suicides, ever such a lot of suicides.

Was there a main, the people who did commit suicide, were they young and old?

Young, young, young, young also, not just old. Young, a lot of young people, a lot of young people committed suicide.

Did you know anyone personally?

No. What I've only heard and what I was told, and heard, but, and there was a hanging, because this man tried to escape from the ghetto, and he took off his, his Star of David sign, and him and his son, they went, and managed to get on the outside, and they boarded a train, and when they were asked for the fare money, reached in the pocket, so he, he pulled out his Star of David, with written on it, "Jude". Of course, they were right there on the spot arrested, and they were brought into the ghetto. I didn't go to it because it was, it was a night in the winter of l94O.

It was a public affair?

Yes. They brought him to the market, before the War, used to be the market place, they used to be the market for butchery, there we used to go and buy all the meat, like wholesalers, of course, there was nothing like this during the War, so they used this place, like for hangings, or whatever, and they brought them in, and they were both hung. But I was told, because at that time, that winter, I spend my winter in bed, keeping warm, I didn't go out at all. Cos you didn't have the energy to stand up. We were so emaciated, so starved, that we couldn't walk, us young children. So I only know of it, and heard through the grapevine, as they say, because it wasn't far from where we lived.

And you were about l3 or l4 at the time?

Yes. In '4O, the first winter, '4O, no, I wasn't even that, about l3, something like that. I was l2 when the War broke out, so I was l3 coming up to l4, and they were, they were hanged.

So what sense were you making of all this?

What sense? I wasn't making any sense. We were absolutely, you could say, you were mentally paralysed, you know what I mean? We were put through such, such things that whatever happened, we accepted it.

But did you think, "Oh, well, it'll only go on for another year, and then we'll return to normal life." Or did you think ...

No, I never thought that this is going to end. I lived in hope, I wanted to see the end, I wanted to see the end of the War, I wanted to be free. I wanted to know how this is going to turn out. What is going to happen? But I never thought it would end. I thought we were doomed. We were doomed. It was only a matter of time before we would all die out, of starvation.

That was what you thought?

Yes. We were such starvation. I was particularly lucky because I was never a big eater as a child. I mean, I could run around all day long, without eating, and it wouldn't bother me, and if I came home and asked my mother, I would call up to her, "What are you cooking today for dinner?" And if she says she's cooking liver, "I won't come." Because I didn't like it.

Not in the ghetto, though?

No, before the War. So in the ghetto I could cope a bit with starvation, you see. And also I wouldn't tell my mother "I'm hungry", because I didn't want to upset her. Because it cost her in, in, in health, she used to get so upset when my sister, she was a big eater, and my little brother, he'd say, "Oh, I'm hungry, Mum, I'm hungry", and you know, he would moan, and I could feel that it's, it's breaking her.

Because she couldn't provide?

No. Yes, so I kept shtum, I kept quiet, and I wouldn't do that to her, I didn't want to upset her.

And your elder sister, you said she was a big eater?

Yes. My, my sister Mania, the one in Israel, she was like a house, when she was a kid up to the War, she was coming up to l4, just l4, she was still in school, she was like a house! She was so beautiful.

In the ghetto this was?

No, that was up to the War. In the ghetto she lost all that weight because we starved so. And she went down to a real skinny, and she, she swell up from malnutrition, she was swollen.

What medicine?

Nothing. What medicine! No medicine. We didn't get, there was nothing, it was not possible. We were not provided.

Was there any kind of traditional medicine that your mother knew of?

We had nothing, not even nothing for if you cut your finger, you couldn't even get a drop of iodine. The world stopped for us. So if you were ill, you had to be ill, and just, and do you know what they say about starving the germs? There must be a true saying, because we definitely undernourished the germs, in our system, because, literally, we starved to death, every day. If I went to bed, I wasn't sure that I would get up, that I wouldn't die in my sleep. We went to bed so hungry, we used to, well, you've seen it, didn't you, you've seen the skeletons.

So what happened to your body?

I got very thin. Very very thin. But, being young, you know, though I was thin, I was still maturing, I was blooming, you see, you know what I mean, I mean, I know, if you excuse me, I didn't menstruate.

Because it was ...

Mmm. I didn't menstruate until after the War, I was l8. My sister stopped.

That was because you were starved?

We didn't have the vitamins. We didn't see no fruit, there was no fruit, we had very little sugar given on the ration per month. There was no eggs, there was no milk, there was many many things that you need to eat, and meat, there was no meat, horses meat. We got a little bit, once a month, on the ration, and most of the time it used to be a fight to get into the butchers, queues, and queues for hours, and then you would queue for hours, and then they would come and tell you none had been delivered, so you stand queuing half the night for nothing. That's why, though I was, I was thin,

but I was still developing, you see, I had to grow, even without eating. But I, I definitely, I, oh, I must .

<u>End of FlO2 Side B</u>

FlO3 Side A

We were talking about you were working at the same time in the straw factory, but you weren't receiving any food.

It was very little, we used, we used to get like, a prescribed soup in the factory, you see.

At lunchtime?

Yes.

How long did you work for?

I worked for not a long time, maybe a year or so.

Per day, I mean, hours?

Hours? Well, it was very long hours, maybe more than eight hours, maybe lO or even more.

And all girls of your age also?

Girls of my age, yes. I was in the straw factory for a little while, and then when, when they stocked up, when they had full stock, they stopped us for a while, and we were transferred, and then I went into the dressmaking, and that's where they taught me to use the machine, and I worked in the dressmaking, making ladies dresses.

And the dresses were sold outside the ghetto?

Oh yes. That was the for the German population, the population outside the ghetto, and then they shifted me after a while, and I went into the corset factory department. Then after that, they shifted me back to the dressmaking department, and there I worked till, till, till we went to Auschwitz. You know, it stopped, work stopped because the factories began to get lesser people, because people being sent out, you see, and so a little while, I, it stopped work, I did nothing and we were preparing to go into hiding.

What do you mean?

Well, we, we, my family, my mother and I, my brother and my sister, and friends, we, we were in hiding, we went into hiding, like Anne Frank.

Where were you hiding?

At a friend's home. They had like a shed, in the yard, and we went in there at night, one night, because we knew our area where we lived in the ghetto, was getting emptied out, so we went on the other side, still in the ghetto, on, in a different part,

and we went to my mother's friends, and we all made like a, a plan to go into hiding. These friends and another neighbour with her children.

Who's idea was the plan?

Well, I think it was, you see, my father was already dead by that time, by '44, my father was dead already, about two years, so it must have been my, my mother's friend's husband, the man who made the plan, and we had a neighbour that was in the Jewish Police Force. He and his family, he had built on a wall, a secret wall into one room, the end of a room, and he put his wardrobes flush against the wall, cos they were hiding in there, the old parents, because they had a chemist down below, in the street, they were chemist people. So there was the old gentleman, and the father, and the grandma, and this policeman's young wife and his baby, they had a baby, and he built this wall. And they had one of these very large wardrobes, four doors, the Continental style, and he put it against that wall, like at the end of the room. And he hid them, and he was a uniform, because he was a policeman. So he locked us up. So we all went in there one night, took all our belongings, because they were coming nearer to our district, you know, the clearing out. Every day, they come into a different street, and all the people had to come out of their homes, and used to load them up on lorries, or in parts where we were, they used the trams, because there was a tram running, so they used the old trams for transportation. So we went in that place at night, and in the morning, we only lived at night, because there was nothing going on, because the Germans were out the ghetto, they were not there at night, but during the day, we laid like mice, because we could hear what was going on.

In hiding?

Yes.

What was the place you were actually hiding? What was it like?

It was a, let's say, in the front, there used to be shops. And in the back, they had like the backs of the shops, imagine, you know? But they were like wooden houses, wooden sheds, and it didn't have no windows, it only had a door, and he locked it, when we went in there, there must have been at least a good dozen people.

In that area?

Yes. Or more.

How big was it?

Or more. Or close, close l6-l8 people, I think, in that room, in that shed, because it was a big shed, because it was from shops.

As big as this?

Yes, yes, yes, because it was from shops. In the front there were shops, they were the back.

A big area?

Yes. It's not there any more, because when I was in Poland recently, we went by the area. The house is standing there, everything the square, the big church, the big Catholic Church stand there, see, that area hasn't been touched, but a lot of the ghetto was demolished.

So, the church, there was a Catholic Church in the ghetto?

Yes, but it wasn't in use, because there was no Christians in the ghetto.

So what was it used for? Nothing?

It was used like a storage, they used to bring bales of rags from outside, we didn't know what they were, you know, we didn't know that these clothes belonged from people that they were killing off, but the people that worked there, for sorting, knew, more or less, cos they found letters and pictures in the clothes, and, and treasures. They found a lot of gold and diamonds, and, and dollars, you know, money, in the clothes that people had thrown in. A fortune was found in those old clothes, we didn't know, and they kept that Church like a stockroom, and a sorting place, but it wasn't a, but now, now, I went by, the Church is open, and it's, it's active now, people go to Church now a lot, in Poland, they've gone back to, to the Church, you know. In Poland it's 95% Catholic now. So we, and this was in a square, you see, and opposite the Church we're in this big corner house where my mother's friends lived, and they had this shed in the back, so we all arranged, took food and water, and we didn't cook there, we had to eat our food dry, because before the hiding, one night, my mother was a very bad sleeper, so she sat by the window where we lived, and opposite was our Co-Op where we used to get our rations once a month, and she could see something going on funny, because, you know, the movement of people at the ghetto was already started. What it was, some people knew more, and they came to this Co-Op, they broke down the door, and they plundered all the food. By the time my mother noticed fully what was going on, more or less everything was already gone. She still managed to get down and grab a few loaves of bread. So we had this bread in hiding, so we didn't cook, because we didn't want to make any sign that life is there, and during the day, we lay like mice.

With the other people?

Yes. There was, there was three neighbours, and another gentleman, a neighbour, an old Jewish man, I still remember, with a beard, and he was a very good friend of my mother's, and a very, a very clever man, if you wanted to know, he would know what to tell you, because he knew the Torah, he was, he was very ... from always praying, and he was with us as well, we gave him sanctuary. So there was like three families with children, and there was a baby, there was a small baby amongst us, and when they were going by in the streets ...

You had to cover it's mouth up?

So he wouldn't, wouldn't cry, cos otherwise we'd have all been shot on the spot, but we managed to hide for a week, only for a week.

Was there ever any talk about killing the baby? Cos there's a film ...

Oh no, no.

There's a scene in a film, I can't remember which it is,

I know. I know, you mean, I know which one you mean, the film, no, no, couldn't do such a thing. No matter how you, you suffered, and how bad things got for you, you couldn't do that, you couldn't do that. And we were hiding there for a week, and gradually they came in closer to our district, you see, and they came by and we heard activity, and we wouldn't budge, and we were so nervous, the old, not us, because I was, but the older people, my mother and the friends, you lived on, like on a, on a volcano, you think you're going to blow up any minute, because your stomach is so full of nerves, from fear, you know?

But you must have been like that also? Or not?

No. I, I, I tell you, I wasn't conscious so much of it, I was only a young child.

l3 or l4?

Mmmm, we were not so like children are today. Children are much different today, more knowing. And they were coming to our district, and they're emptying out the building, and the Gestapo is standing in the street, with dogs, the trams are ready for our building, next door building, clearing out, and we still lay there in the quiet, and we hear all this going on, the shouting and the yelling, you know how they used to shout.

You weren't nervous at all, you weren't really aware of what was going on?

No, I was, if I was, I, I, I don't, I don't remember being, because ...

In this hiding, was there anyone else your age?

No.

There was your elder sister?

My elder sister, my younger brother, and the other people's, the other neighbour, there was their girl, and there was their baby, and my sister's, my mother's friends, the young sons, the two boys, they survived as well, but they lost their father in Auschwitz, and their mother went with my mother as well, in the selection, and they live now in Belgium. They live in Belgium, because some years ago they came to Germany, and my sister met them, so they live now with their family in Belgium, they never went back to Poland, the two, the two boys, and we're still laying quietly like mice, and they've taken the people away, they're all, put them on the trams, they're

going away to a, to a place to hold us overnight, before taking us to the railways sidings, because we didn't go to the station, it was all in sidings, so no one could see what they were doing, and it's getting quiet, we think everybody's gone, we can hear the trams, chug, chug, chug away, but there left standing, on the opposite side, by the Church, the Gestapo and the SS. And a neighbour of ours, she came out of hiding, she was also hiding with her daughters, she went up to her rooms, she was starting getting busy, I suppose she wanted to cook something to eat, and when she made a fire it smoked, cos it was summer, make a coal fire, she opened the windows, so they could see there was smoke coming, so of course, they know there's people still there in the buildings. They come rushing back, and dragging them out the building, then they come back in the courtyard.

Which people did they drag out?

This woman with her daughters, from upstairs. You see, she thought they were gone, and her windows was in the back of the building, so she couldn't see them in the street, they could see the smoke coming from the roof, from the chimney pot, yes? So they came back, dragged them out, they came back in the courtyard, from the main door, from the gate, and they start ripping down the sheds, and the very big, the iron bar going across with a big lock, and they ripped that off with, with crowbars, and of course, when they come in, they see us all there, laying and, you know, hiding.

You were discovered?

We were discovered.

When was this?

That was on the day that they, the day before they shifted us off to Auschwitz.

Can you remember the date?

No, I can't remember the date. We were near enough from the last ones. Our area was near enough cleared out. After we gone, there would be no more to, to round up. We were sort of the last.

Why, why, why didn't the other people go into hiding?

Many more?

Yeh. Why didn't everyone else?

Well, you see, there was quite a few in hiding, I found that out when, when, many years, when I left, when I went to Israel, and my sister was telling me, that her friend, this Frania, she was also from hiding people, she survived the ghetto, but later years, later on, she came into Germany. From Germany they went to Israel. But there was about 7OO or 8OO people were hiding. And we were amongst those people, and when they come in, they had these big, I don't know what it was, truncheons, or wooden sticks, they made us come out, "Laus, Laus."

Did you know what was going on?

Oh yes, it was terrible, I could see they were beating everybody. They were beating everybody.

Did they beat you?

No. He said, he beat all the grown ups, you know, whacking them, he says ...

Who's he?

The German SS man.

He was screaming in German?

Yeh. He screamed, "Kinder wischlagen nichts."

You knew German then?

Yes.

How did you know German?

Well, I learnt from what I heard. He says, "We don't hit children." No, but they put them in the gas chambers. So all these grown up people out, and I remember, he hit my mother across the head here.

With a baton, or something?

With a baton, a lump of wood, I don't know what it was, and he hit her across here, caught her behind the ear, and I, I still remember, she was bleeding, you know, and we all went out in the street, and we stood like, outside of the buildings, and one of them was strolling up and down, and looking at us lot, and he says, "Who's the oldest Jew here?" So of course, he saw this man with the beard, he took it for granted he's the oldest Jew. "You the oldest Jew? Was that your idea? About hiding?" Whack, whack. He hit him so. I don't think that man arrived in that, in that point where we stayed overnight, in one piece, because I didn't see him any more after this. After we were all gone up on the tram to go to this place, actually, it was the prison in, in the ghetto, but the prison was first of all cleared out, they cleared out the prisons, the sick people in the hospitals, were the first to go. I saw scenes, I can't tell ou, I lived across from one of the biggest hospitals in Lodz, and we lived very high on the fourth floor, and I could see everything that was going on in the, in the courtyard of the hospitals, you know. When they come in they took the sick ones out, they slung them on the lorries, you know, on military lorries, that was before that, and they went into the mortuary, and they took the dead, from the mortuary, and slung them amongst the weak and the sick.

From the hospital?

Yes.

Was there medicine in the hospital? Were there doctors?

There were doctors, yes. There was very very primitive medicine.

What sort of medicine, can you remember?

Well, you couldn't cure TB, that's good enough for you, but I don't know what they had. It wasn't, it wasn't much, it was more or less, they take people in, I think to be away from the others, to rest them.

Yeh, quarantine.

Yeh, something like this. And I remember standing one day by the window, when they were clearing out the hospital, I could see he had a baby in his hands, he took the baby and slung it on the lorry. A live baby, from the wards, and then they, they cleared out the mortuary, with the dead, and they took them away, I don't know where. They must have taken them to outside Lodz, in that first place, Helm, Khelmcol, it was called, it's not very far from Lodz, maybe under 2O kms. or something like this. There was, but they set up the first, the first crematoriums. They used to gas them in the, in the, in the lorries, not in the lorries, but they looked like they were ambulances.

Yeh, so before the time when you were discovered in hiding, actually before the time you went into hiding, you were working in the straw factory, without food, without medicine, and the family with your mother and your sister and younger brother.

Yes.

Because, was there no kind of social life for you at all? Did you not have friends, and you could meet in the evenings or whatever?

Oh yes, well, we used to go mostly, first of all there was a curfew in the ghetto, you see, so you couldn't go out late hours. But you could sort of creep through from house to house, go to neighbours.   There was no radio, because these are the first things we had to give up in l939.   It came an order, we must, and also people that had pets, dogs, cos they put them all to sleep or whatever. You had to give up your radio so you wouldn't be able to listen to the news, and you had to give up your pets, your dogs, not so much cats, because cats is a free, a free soul, isn't it, he can, he can get out of any captivity, can't he, a cat, but dogs yes. And there was a very heartbreaking situation. I remember neighbours having to give up their lovely pets, you know, they considered like children, like ... so there was no radio, yes? No cinema. No dancing. Who was interested in that?   We were only interested to have something to eat. Where all you worried was about food. You were pre-occupied, you were, you were in a delusion of grandeur, all you dreamt about, and all you talked about was food. Who needed culture? Who needed music? Who needed beauty?

But, if in the evening time you snuck around to your friend's house, what did you do there?

We, well, we kids, we played. In the summer time we played in the streets.

What sort of things did you do?

We played hopscotch, and going about, mooching, you know?

What's mooching?

Well, going from street to street, and looking here and looking there, you know. And playing in the street, we played with stones, you played with all bits and pieces that you had. But then again, I started to work and all that stopped. But before I started to work, even when I worked, I, when I used to come home from work, because we used to start early, you see, and had to finish earlier, because the streets had to get ready for the curfew, we had a 5 o'clock curfew, you see.

This is in the summer?

Mmmmm. But, you could play in your own yard, behind the buildings, where no one saw you. But, but no social life, nothing, no pubs.

No, I didn't mean that sort of thing, I meant entertainment.

No, only friendly entertainment, people conversing. People dreaming of when all this horrible time's gonna be over and when we'll be free.

Did some of your friends used to write, or paint at the same time?

No, no, I didn't, no, I didn't have ...

Keep a diary?

No, no, I don't know of anything like this, no we didn't. And the home friends where I lived was little girls, they were much younger than me, I played with them. I played with my brother, you know, but the people that I worked with, I, I didn't meet, I didn't mix with them socially, you couldn't, because you see, you couldn't go out for an evening, because of the curfew, you had to be back, you see.

And there must have been people from different classes?

Yes.

Very rich Jewish girls?

No, there wasn't such thing any more.

But they had come from a rich family?

Oh yes.

Or very froom families.

Oh yes, but you know, these people didn't last out so good as people that are used to struggling, you know what I mean. Because if you're used to struggling, and I think that's why I survived, because I wasn't used to, to, to splendour, to great things, to wealth, so if I didn't have it I didn't miss it. You know what I mean? I mean, today would be different, oy, without the telephone? Without the bathroom? I won't consider this, because this is a new invention. But the telephone, or certain things, or something properly to cook, on a nice cooker, you know, I mean, my momma used to cook by coal in the summer, in the winter, and in summer she used to use Primus stoves in our rooms because you couldn't light your ovens to cook, because it was too hot, you see, so my mother used to use Primus stoves when she used to cook. On milder day, on cooler days, I want to say, she was able to cook, but in the high summer, like July, August oh! We used to sleep with our doors and windows opened, because we were not bothered. No one, no one came to harm us, that was before the War. No one come to steal nothing, cos we didn't have nothing to steal!

Yeh, I mean, was it, other than there being a curfew, was it generally safe to walk around the ghetto?

Yes. Yes.

There was no violence, there was no fights?

No. No. There was nothing like it, because no one that really had in the mind of such things, you see.

Did you know of any attempts, did you know of any kind of ideas of resistance?

No, there was no resistance at all. There was no resistance because after, when they created work, when it stabilised, and 99% went to work, from the age of l0. I mean, when my brother start working, let's say in l940, or maybe a little later, he was already l2 years old or so. He worked in the, in the wood factories. Where he worked, they used to make wheels, wooden wheels. I don't know what for. And also they made certain kinds of furniture. I remember they were making boxes. I don't know what they made the wooden boxes for, but he was in a department, they were doing wheels, making wheels. They could've been using these wheels to make anti-tank machine guns, you know, they had wooden wheels, yeh? And he worked on that, and sometimes when I used to work, we used to finish early, I would go to his factory and pick him up, and we would go home together. Or sometimes it was necessary, when, as I said, when things improved like, and things came into the ghetto, food, because we were become very productive. There was every industry you wanted, that was going, except for steel. Steel wasn't being made, because that could be made into armour, couldn't it. Well, that wasn't made, but you had clothing, shoes, my father worked in the shoe factory. And everything, every kind of, carpet weaving, clothing, from every description, and all kinds of things was being made,

but no steel, there was no steel foundries, because we could've made guns, couldn't we.

But did you ever hear of any trouble, or fights between young Jewish boys, say, who had pieces of wood, and would try and clout German soldiers?

No, no, nothing like that. You couldn't, because the soldiers, if it wasn't necessary for them, the Gestapo or the SS didn't come into the ghetto, because it was self-run. It was like, it was like a state within a state.

So what was the relationship like between ...

Let's say like here, the Council.

But the relationship say, between some rowdies, the Jewish workers, and the Jewish policemen?

Well, because if they did, there was, I think, a strike, going on, but in the end, it was squashed.

By the Jewish police?

Yes. It was squashed. You see, because once you withheld food, you haven't got the strength to strike, so that was squashed very quick.

So the police were hated?

Of course.

Very much?

Because they were the well-fed, we had people walking about looked like skeletons, emaciated, what you say, swollen from malnutrition. People were ill, people had TB, that, starvation, that was the biggest illness. That's the biggest one that people died, like flies, you see. And, but to start trouble, no, and we had a man that ruled the ghetto, the President.

What was his name?

Hyam Rumkowsky. He perished in such a horrible way, I was told, when he got to Auschwitz, when they cleared the ghetto. He wanted to show the populants, the people, that he is of equal, so he went with his family as well. When he arrived in Auschwitz, I was told, and especially there was people from before, from us, he wanted to show off who he was. So when they found out who he was ...

Who's they, the Germans or the Jews?

End of FlO3 Side A

FlO3 Side B

So when, the leader, Rumkowski ...

Yeh, Rumkowski, when he arrived in Auschwitz with his family, so he wanted privileges, so he said ...

From the Germans?

Yeh, and from the Capos that worked there, the ones that have been in Auschwitz a long time. Oh yes? So when he said "This is my family", he tried, so they might save them, you know. From what I heard, that they, they, they shoved him in the gas chambers alive. They burned him alive, like they used to do to, you know, to witches? In the olden days. So he, he perished as well.

In the ghetto he was hated also?

Oh, he massed great wealth in the ghetto. He was a man over 7O, but he didn't look a day of 5O. He was well-dressed and well-fed.

And his family too?

And his family too. And you could tell who's got good jobs. You could tell who was working in the Government, you could tell who was working in the Council. You could tell who was a policeman, and you could tell who was a fireman, and they had special Co-Ops, so the privileged ones, had special cards, they used to go into these lovely shops and be able to get things, but it wasn't for us. Not for us, only for the privileged classes. They hanged, one day, the Chief of Police, because he amassed such wealth, he had two homes. He had a home in town, and he had a flat, like a villa, outside down, in the country, like, let's say, and somebody went and informed on him, and when they went into his home to search, they found, they found pounds of gold, pounds, what he amassed, and the food stored in his home, would last him lO, l5 years. And he was caught, and he was, he was tried, and they brought him in one day.

Who's they? The Germans?

The Germans, the Gestapo. They brought him in on a, I remember, on a Mercedes, on an open car, and they hung him very nicely.

Publicly?

Yes. Because one thing the Germans couldn't tolerate, they robbed and plundered and murdered, but they couldn't tolerate if somebody even as much as stole a potato. They wouldn't tolerate thieves. If you stole something your life was on the line.

So, the Jews who ran the ghetto, were they considered outcasts by the Jewish population?

Well, they were not liked very much.

They weren't, people didn't socialise with them?

They didn't, because they were the better classes.

And lived in a separate area of the ghetto?

No, not necessarily, no, no.

So, one might be your neighbour.

Yes.

But you went, you went out of your way to avoid him almost?

Yes. But we didn't have these sort of neighbours, not in my neighbourhood, because I more or less lived further away from the centre of the ghetto, I lived on the outskirts, on the end where we could see, from our houses, we could see the wire fences, you see, I lived, I lived in a very nice area, with empty fields, and trees, trees in the streets, in the avenues, and in the summer it was beautiful, only because of the weather permitting. But you saw such people walk in the street, is, they were near their death. They were so, they were skeleton type.

Who were the people that were chosen? How were they chosen, do you know?

I don't know. I dunno, I, well, I think they must have, they must have put out notices to people that have particular professions, what they can do, you see. They were very clever people, they were intellectuals, they were very clever people, very talented. We had doctors, we had nurses, probably dentists as well, I never needed the dentist so I never went. I had perfect teeth, not now any more, I mean, but I mean, I was even, in Ravensbruck I was complimented, when we were selected, I was complimented for my teeth.

Some compliment!

He said, "Ich habe noch niemen gezehen sohnen zahnen." "I have never seen such teeth", he said, cos I was very young then, l7? This was just the beginning, like, well, we'll come to that, Ravensbruck, that's another story.

So back to, you were found in hiding.

Yes.

You were pulled out of the hiding by the Germans ...

Yes, then they, then, then he, he was angry, he was like a raving lunatic.

Do you know who he was? Was he like the Chief of Police of the area?

No, no, he was the Gestapo. And, and he was like, like a mad animal.

How did he look, can you remember?

He was angry, he was, he was throwing his stick about, and whacking this poor old gentleman, and he was a very long-standing friend of my mother for years and years, he was a widower, and he was a very clever man, you know, highly educated in Torah and all that, a clever man, you know. And he was belting him along, until we were all made to go up on the trams, and we went for this ride, not very far.

With other people that had also been ...

Yeh, all the people that were in hiding, all the people that we were in hiding, we were all hauled out from the, from there, and everybody got a good whack across their heads.

But not you?

No. He said, "We don't hit children." They only put them in the gas chambers afterwards, and we went on the trams and made our way to the prison in the ghetto. Maybe a quarter of an hour ride by the, by the tram. And we got out there, and we were sort of, get up, we were laying like amongst old buildings, in the prison, and in the courtyard and in the open, it was still summer, you see. It was September, September, early September, and we stayed overnight, and we had left some food in the flat upstairs by friends, we left a bag of potatoes, so my mother said, "How about?" My mother had a way of dealing with me, in a nice way, if she wanted something from me, or to do something, she had this very nice way of asking me.

Your mother was about 35 or so?

No, 4O. My mother was born July 28th, l899, because I've got it now on my Birth Certificate, and er, I can't tell you the reaction of my sister when I send her this, because she couldn't believe it. She couldn't believe that these things, that we'd be able to find it. I thought that the Germans, at the same time as they was killing us, I thought they were destroying all our heritage, you know, our culture, and everything, though they burn shuls and Synagogues, and they burnt all our books, and they burn Sefer Torahs out of, but it still remain, there was still something remain, you know? There's still today, in Poland, so much left in the old, little Synagogues in the country, like in the country parishes, they say, because I've got a, I've got a whatyoucallit, a brochure, if you want to go to Poland on holiday, I got it from the Polish Agency in the West End, and it shows you the Judaekia, a brochure where you can go and see all the remaining Jewish synagogues, Jewish culture, Jewish theatres, Sefer Torahs, books, all, minoras, you know the candlesticks where you light, you know, loads of it. And no matter how they, they tried to, to destroy this, but something still remained, you know, it wouldn't let go of it. But it wasn't used much, because people were afraid, in case, in case somebody even, we had informers in the ghetto, that informed to the Germans, for something, for payment, you see, and you

were afraid to do certain things, because your life was so on the line.   You see, it was nothing, I mean, life was cheap.

So there's, you arrived, from the tram, where you were sleeping for the night, and your mother's trying to persuade you to go and get the potatoes?

Yes, to go back, she says, go back, it's dark now. There was a board in the fence loose, and I was so thin and tiny, that I could get through, and I made my way back by foot to where we lived, in darkness, there's no life, it was a most frightening atmosphere, the, the, the town gone dead. You know, like the ghost cities?   I got up to the building, I found the potatoes.

And no one was about?

No one about but me, oh, when I think about it now! Oh, I, I'm scared, I'm so scared, I can't tell you! But at that time I wasn't. I made myself go back, I got to make a fire, if I'm going to cook these potatoes in the jackets, I need fire.

You made your way back to?

To the house, where we was taken out, went upstairs to the flat, they lived upstairs, my mother's friends. Got the potatoes that were there.   I need water. There's no water here. I've got to go to the other building. Come down, I go to the other building, I bring water, I make a fire, I boil the potatoes soft, I drained the water off, put them in a bag, and I made my way back to the prison, through the fence.

How long did it take you?

It took me some time, because I had a long way to walk.

With all those potatoes?

Yes. I got back there in the middle of the night, and the following morning, they marched us to the sidings of the trains, and they loaded us up, so many people in one wagon, like cattle, cattle wagons, not modern, you know, trains, and lots of people in there, people that already been waiting in the prison to go on transport, and us lot.

And you had already eaten the potatoes?

Yes, we had eaten, we ate them all in the middle of the night, when I got back there, and, and when they came for us in the morning, they march us off to the railway sidings, they filled the wagons up with us, with our few belongings, and they put some, they put a bucket for a toilet, they put a can, like a big can with water, and the wagons were all spread with straw, and they close us up, and there was a lot of people inside it, and it was hot, because it's September, it's still warm, and it's closed up, and there's only this tiny little window with bars, so you can imagine, the stench, and people are only human, and you have to do the human functions.

This is inside the cattle cart?

Inside that, and laying on the, on the boards, the straw, and my mother said when she saw this, this atmosphere, she said, "I don't like it", she says, "I think," she says, "this is the end."

Had they told you where they were taking you to?

No, we didn't know.

So, just the next morning they said, "On to, on to the train", and you got on.

Yes.

And that was it?

Yes.

How many of you in one carriage?

Oh, there must have been, probably lOO people.

In one carriage?

It was murder. And of course, the train started moving, it took some time, because we were going through the night, and we didn't arrive till the morning, and people have to do all kinds of things in this bucket, if you pardon me, and of course, they, it's not very nice and pleasant, and of course, they want to empty it, but the window's only very small, like this, and has those bars, iron bars, and you empty the bucket while it's in motion, so of course, what with the wind, the wind going, so it all blew back, so it made a terrible mess, and a terrible stench, and I could see right there and then, that people are behaving like animals.

What was going on?

Because at least they should've, should've tried to control themselves, you know what I mean? I mean, all right, so you do, you do a wee wee, yes? But I have to laugh, try and control yourself having your bowels open, in public, with old people, with children, you know. So, of course, it was a terrible journey, and we travelled through the night, and we arrived in the morning in Auschwitz, when we pulled in to a, to Birkenau.

Did you know, before you arrived there, did you know anything of Auschwitz?

No.

Well, did you know then it was a town, anyway?

No. Nothing.

Had you heard of it?

Nothing, nothing at all, never. Not me personally. We didn't know, not even the people we were in the wagon with.

So when you were coming up on the track, could you see out of the window?

No. No. Because there was no windows, there's only this tiny little window at the top of the wagon, that's why it was so difficult to dispose of the bucket. No, but we saw nothing, because it was all like you see, wooden, so you couldn't, you couldn't see nothing, not until they opened the doors to let us out, and we came in where it was opened, it was like open fields, the beginning of it. Not until we started on the march where they took us to the bath. We were going through the compound, and then I noticed, I saw the people, the people behind the wire fences, the inmates that were already there.

So the train stopped.

Yes.

Outside the compound?

Outside, in Birkenau.

So they opened the doors, and what happened then?

We all had to get out.

You all rolled out onto, was it a platform, or was it grass, can you remember?

It was like a, like a verge, you know, it wasn't a platform, it was more like, like in the open, like sidings, like in the railways trains, you know, it wasn't a platform.

And all the people up and down the train, all the Jews were getting out?

Everybody had to come out, aussteigen.

Had anybody died, can you remember?

I don't know, not in my wagon, not in my wagon.

So people just rolled out on the side?

We had to come out, and when all this was done, the train moved away, and, and then I saw, we had to line up, we had to separate, to separate the women one side, and men on the other side, but my mother didn't, she stayed behind us, she didn't want to go with us, because she knew she had a child, and he would be taken away from her, and she wouldn't let him go, she wouldn't part with my brother, so of course, she went

with all the children, with all the old people, and with all the mothers that wouldn't part from their kiddies.

So there were three lines, there were the women, the men, and the women who wouldn't part with their children?

Yes. Yes, you see, and then they selected us.

Which? Who's us?

Well, my group, our group.

The women?

Still with the women, the women were with us, let's say, and they sort of wagged their finger, this one on the right, that one on the left.

Did your mother tell you to stay in that group?

No, no, we didn't, we all stood together. We thought that, you know, we go together.

But not your mother?

No. But my, we knew that, because after a while, they were yelling to let the children loose, and she wouldn't. But when I turned, when I passed by this, the selection, there was the Mengele there and his henchmen.

How did you know it was Mengele?

I was told, you see.

Who told you?

When we got into the, into the compound, in the block.

Someone had said to you, "That was Mengele."

Yes.

Had you heard about him when you were in the ghetto?

No. Never.

So what was your reaction when someone said to you, "That was Mengele?"

Well, I took it for granted he was just some Gestapo officer, you see, and, and when after a while, when I got into the, after we come out the baths, we were shaven and given clothes, and marched again, we walked on, we was, well, I didn't, I didn't make no bones about it. My sister was thirsty, so she went over to some girls who was

working in the ditches, by the fences, and one of them gave her a drink of water, well, she, she got loose from the column.

Your sister?

Yeh. And we're marching off. And I said, "Where is she, for Heaven's sake? Where is she? Where is she?" And I could see her, she, she's still there, and when the SS women saw her, they stopped the column, and "Kommen hier", "Come back here", and she gave her the biggest hiding of her life.

What happened?

She hit her. She hit her so violently because she came out of the column, because we were marching like five in the column.

From the railway to the baths?

No, after the baths, we were already out of the baths.

What happened at the baths?

Well, the baths, we had to take our clothes off, and leave everything as it lay, and we come to the barriers, and give up what we had, jewellery, or whatever, I didn't give up anything, but I didn't have no jewellery.

What did you think was going on?

I really don't know. I wasn't conscious of anything. I know this is not good. But see, I said, "This is not right." I knew it wasn't, something very very funny going on here, why do they do these things to us? We went through the barrier, and we went in that, it's like an ante-room, and they start shaving our hair off, with clippers.

Women?

Yes, also women, from the Kapos, not the SS women.

Yeh, Jewish women?

Yes. And we went through a shower room.

Sorry, just on the Kapos, how did they treat you? Were they rough? Was it as if you were an object on a conveyor belt, or were they fairly sensitive?

No, no, they were very bad to us, they were very violent. They were forever letting their hands fly, hitting you. They were not, they were not kind, because they were also suffered. It came like a, from load to load, from, how should I say? from group to group. The ones that were longest there, and there were some that got there, had come in terrible times to Auschwitz, they come there when there was no light, there was no water, lived like animals.

The Kapos?

All the people, the Kapos, these were already the graduates! You see. And they were really nasty to us. But you had to watch yourself.

But there were no men around at all?

On the other compound, on the other camp. I only saw the men that come to work in the toilets, you see, and they worked in the baths, they were in the bath there, they were in the steam rooms, and I saw these men, and I says how, and they were standing by the windows, and I says, "How can I take my clothes off with them standing there?" And some people had no, how do you say?

Modesty?

No modesty. They don't care, but I still felt, I still felt, I'm human. I was shy, I was ashamed to show my naked body off.

But as you approached the baths, when you were, it was demanded that you take off all your clothes ...

All our clothes, leave everything behind, then you went to the boxes, there was then big crates.

They gathered your clothes?

No. The clothes was left on the floor, and they, and they made you put all your valuables in this box. I didn't, I didn't have nothing. But there were people that did, and I could see there was a fortune from transport coming, transports coming all the time.

Were people talking? All the Jewish women, were they talking at this time, or was there a real silence?

Silence. There wasn't, there wasn't, no, everybody, everybody stood and behaved as, as life was cut out of you suddenly, you see, because this wasn't a normal thing to take place.

So you could see what was happening, the women in front of you having, you know, whatever was happening.

Yes.

And you were kind of stunned into silence?

Yeh, we were, we were stunned. When we came out, we all looked like, like mad women.

They gave you striped pyjamas?

No, I didn't have that. That didn't come until I went to another camp.

Well, what were you given to wear?

First, they were given from the clothes that they had prepared from, probably from other people, the worst of the clothes. And they were, they'd gone through steamers to kill the bacteria, to kill the lice or whatever there was in the clothes, and they gave it back to us. And after we had this quick run through shower, they shaved our hair, and I think I remember they poured something on us, some disinfectant or what.

You were still with your sister at this time?

Yes, we were together, we always together, we never left each other's side, you know.

Were you crying at all?

Yes. When, when the first time I started to cry, when we got into the block, and I ask others, when can I see my mother? So they said ...

Who's they?

Girls that were before. The ones that worked in the block. The Kapos, and the Block alteste. She was a higher Kapo, she was a nasty bitch, she was Czechoslovakian.

Not Jewish?

Yes.

She was Jewish?

She was from Czechoslovakia. Big fat ... she used to come out, and she used to get angry because she could hear girls talking or whatever, and she, her sleep would be disturbed, because girls were sitting about and talking, and she'd come out half naked in her bra and knickers, and especially if she had a man there, because men could come in. The ones that knew how to go about it, and had men on the quiet.

You mean the Kapos?

Yes. And especially if she had a man there and she was, pussies, and if she was disturbed, so we would cop out, and so she would come out and run wild, and shout in Czech language, that she's going to beat us so that our blood will run from us, in Czechoslovakian, in Czech, because I understand a bit, you know.

Were there other non-Jewish women there?

No, where we were was all Jewish, but there were blocks, non-Jewish, girls from Warsaw.

What sort of girls?

Well, they had all particular reasons. I don't, some, some might have been on a criminal charge, maybe a thief, or maybe you refuse to go to work, all kinds of reasons, but I met this one, she was very nice, and she, I went to her window, as we was marching, we stopped, so we were by this window in the block, so I asked her if she could give me a drink of water, and she gave me a drink of water, and when I arrived later on in Belsen, she was there, cos she was working in the kitchens, she was a Kapo. She didn't remember me, but I remembered her. I says, "Do you remember?" She said, "I do remember," because it was only six months or so, it wasn't years, but she didn't remember me what I looked like, because at that time when she saw me I was bald, and six months later, I already had some hair.

Did she have some hair?

Yes, hers grew back, because she's been in Auschwitz a long time.

So it wasn't constantly shaved off every few months?

No, No. Only, only the first time you arrived. That was my experience, you see.

So after the showers, you were taken to places where you had to sleep?

Well, we went on a march, they marched us for some time.

Where to?

Back into Auschwitz from Birkenau, and allocated a block, a block was standing empty for us, because they probably already emptied that one in the day, and all the rest already went into the gas chambers, because that was going on all the time. They used to come in, the Gestapo, the SS, and do selections, so that block was standing empty, and we were allocated this empty, groundless, earthy type floor, that when you sat on it, all in the nude, without any clothes, only what we wore on the top, and no shoes, the earth was damp, it was wet.

What time of year was this?

That was September.

So it was getting cold?

Of course, in the night.

And the earth would freeze? Get frosty?

No, not frosty, but cold. Cold, very cold.

End of FlO3 Side B

FlO4 Side A

So, your first night when you arrived, you were taken into Auschwitz and given a block.

Yes, well, after the bath, after the baths.

Barely anything?

Barely anything, just top cover, I had the jacket, this jacket, this old big jacket and a skirt, but no underwear, no shoes, shaven, near starvation, there was no food, because this, this, this thing was taking a long time, all day, and right into the evening, dusk was already falling, and we got into this block, and, and some time very late, pretty in the middle of the night, we received a portion of bread.

I'm interested in this first 24 hours.

Yes, a piece of bread, a portion of bread, and soup in a bowl, no spoons or nothing, but as we were sitting five in a row, like, how can I explain this? Like they would line up soldiers to stand on parade, we had to sit behind one another, so if they handed the bowl of soup to the first, so this one had a sip, put their hand in for something, it was a largish bowl, filled to the top, to last for the five.

I see. So you shared it amongst five of you.

Ah ha. This one had a sip.

Passed it on?

And passed it on, and then if there was more left, you had another sip, and this piece of bread, and getting a drink of water was like asking for diamonds, there was hardly any. And then in the mornings they gave us this repulsive coffee, not sweetened, and that's how life started. That was starting my life in Auschwitz, this kind of procedure, you know.

But the first night, the very first night when you were there.

It was terrible to me, I realised.

You were sitting with your sister?

Yeh, yeh. My sister was very cold.

What were you thinking?

I was thinking that I knew, because they told me, I asked, "Where is my mother? And when am I going to see her?" And so they said to me, "Do you remember when you come in and you saw those big chimneys?" I says, "Yes", they says, "Well, your mother went there with your brother."

A Kapo told you this?

Yeh. Your mother, you'll never see your mother again, your mother's gone to the gas chambers, to the crematorium.

She said "gas chamber"?

Yes.

And what did you say?

I didn't know what she was talking about. I knew I saw chimneys with smoke going out, because those chimneys, they had many crematoriums in Auschwitz, because they couldn't, one wasn't enough, because there was too many transports coming in.

But I presume it looked like a factory?

Yes, like I go by here, the laundry factory, in the Ainslie Wood Road, I can't bear big chimneys, I can't bear chimneys, when I see big chimneys, it's doing things to me.

So did you think she's gone to work, for example? Did you think, "Ah, my mother's got new work to do?"

I don't know. So she said, "Well, your mother has gone to the crematorium."

You thought maybe she's working there?

I says, "What's that?"

She says, "Well, they burn people there."

Of course, I started to cry, and I cried, and I cried night and day, which I was also reprimanded. I nearly got a good walloping from the Kapo because I was crying all the time. I cried, and I cried, for the whole time that I was there, in Auschwitz, and I didn't eat, I didn't sleep, I didn't go to the toilet, I was like a zombie, and I was feeling that life was going out of me. I couldn't breathe, because I was, like you would say, I was fasting, I didn't eat, and I didn't sleep, and I constantly cried. And then one day, I felt very bad, very ill, I felt that my chest was going to sort of collapse, I couldn't breathe, so I suddenly stopped, and I started to eat, and I was sort of making recovery from the ordeal, from the time that I was crying night and day, and then I worried also about my sister, because she had a weak bladder, and if you pardon me, Robert, she kept wetting herself, you know what I mean? And I was afraid they might take her away from me.

So in this first night, for example?

Well, we settled down to this kind of goings on, this, this madhouse, this, and some of the girls were very inconsiderate, they were talking nights, talking, talking, talking.

About what?

I don't know, all kinds, I can't remember, Robert, it's 44 years ago.

What could one find to talk about?

It's amazing, it's people that was strangers. They were probably talking about their lives, maybe about their husbands, they were young women that had husbands, you know what I mean? There was women that still looked good, young, and they could have husbands with children. They must, they'd probably given up their children, took, they took the children away from them, and they were talking about this, all kinds of things. And they were definitely not, and most of the conversation used to be about food. Mostly was food, because we had such four horrendous years of starvation in the ghetto, I mean, you, you, I can't even tell you in so many words, I'm not going through each day, my life each day in the ghetto, it was, it was a miracle, each day, to live it through, you see. It's only bits and pieces that I'm telling you, bits of snaps, snapshots of my life. I mean, even the horrible things that was done in the ghetto, and the people forever dying, you know, it became like part of life, like the undertaking, the carrying of the dead was like a factory, you know, you know? Like a factory, it was part of the trade, because so many hundreds and hundreds of people used to die overnight from starvation, TB, that was the biggest killer.

In the camp?

In the ghetto. In the camps, well, in the camps, we had more or less controlled, because where I ended up in the last, in the working camp in Millhausen, we were in ammunition factories, and that's where they already gave us a little bit more to eat, you see. The food was a little bit more, but of course, we also didn't get the best, because the ones that worked in the kitchen, they were stealing the best, if you know what I mean. I mean, the day when the Gestapo come to inspect our camp.

Which camp?

Where I worked, in Milhausen, in Germany, we come away from Auschwitz, when I was selected, we had to go through Ravensbruck first, you see, and before that, we passed by Dachau, and our good fortune was, they didn't have the room for us, so the, so the SS men on the wagons, on the train, on our group, was quarrelling with the Kommandant from the Camp, and he says, "I've got no room, I can't have these women coming here, you'll have to take them somewhere else." And that was our good fortune. Because I told you before, Robert, I wouldn't have been making you a cup of tea today, and sandwiches, if, if I ended up in Dachau. Dachau was a regular death camp. They didn't, they didn't, they didn't have a crematorium or anything like this, but you just died there, from starvation. It was a waste camp, what they called. And then from there, he had to start up the train, and take us somewhere else. So you, they took us to Ravensbruck, we arrived in Ravensbruck, and we got off there, in the middle of the night, in the dark, and they're marching us from the railway siding into the camp, in the dark, and you can't see where you're going, because it's blackout. We arrived there, and we stopped, practically by the gate, there was a big field, and we

were left sitting there till the morning. In the morning it was nice, and the sun shine, it was shining, and I had a bare shaven head, and I got, caught the sun on my head, cos when was my head bare? So I got near enough sunstroke, and I was in a terrible way, I thought I was going mad with the burning, and the fire. And towards the day, they found us room in a block, and they allocated us with gipsies, and they gave us what for, those gipsies, and every bad things the gipsies did, we would suffer for it. The blame was put on us.

Where were these gipsies from?

They were from, they were Polish gipsies, Hungarian gipsies, you know? All the gipsies he rounded up, in Europe, and he put them into Ravensbruck, and they were a nasty lot. They tried to steal a girl one night, in the middle of the night, her clogs, because when we came out of Auschwitz, when they selected us, they dressed us, you see. They gave us different clothes, and they gave us clogs, boots. So the girls were sleeping with them on, in case somebody shouldn't pinch them. So one of these gipsies, and we were all asleep, and one of these gipsies went over to a girl, and tried to pinch her boots, so, of course, there was a terrible to do, and there was fighting and screaming and yelling, and everything, and we woke up, you know, when you wake up in a screaming, you don't know what's going on, do you? The SS women come running, and who's punished for it? We were punished. So the following morning, we had to stand on punishment, on our knees, all day long, on our knees, for punishment. We had to kneel, we had to kneel all day long.

Inside or out?

Outside, on the compound, and there was a gravelly, gravelly path.

In the sun?

No, that was later when we stood on punishment, for the sun, they allocate us this block with the gipsies, and while, during the day, I sort of took a stroll, and I went behind some buildings there, and I came to a, the mortuary, and I look in, and I see a body laying on the table, and there's been a post-mortem made, done on it, and I can see that the whole front is open, and they sort of reaching in, it's like, you know, when you pull out all the innards from a chicken.

Is this the first time you'd ever seen a dead body?

Well, I'd seen my father, but, but it didn't worry me, you know, because my father, I wasn't afraid. I wasn't afraid for my father.

But at this time when you saw this post-mortem ...

Oh! It scared the living daylights out of me!

You just happened to peer into this window?

Yes, I was just strolling down, you know, I was looking what's here, what's there, you know.

On your own?

Yes. You know, it wasn't far from where all our girls were sitting and waiting. When I saw that I nearly died! I've never seen anything like it.

You saw some men reaching into the insides?

Yes, there was, they must have been two doctors, they were in uniform, but they wore white coats, and they were pulling out, like, from the body. They were doing a post-mortem, and I ran for my life, and I never went round looking again. And then we're allocated in this block, and the following day, that same night, one of these gipsies is trying to pinch one of the girl's boots, and it started, turmoil. I've never experienced anything like it, especially when you're woken up from your sleep. Because we was laying four on a bunk, two here and two there, so we were sort of fitted in with the legs.

Legs to the head?

Yeh, like sardines. Have you ever seen sardines laying in a tin? Well, that's how we laid, four girls - me and my sister, and our friends, the two of us.

You always went with your sister?

Always everywhere, we never let go, everywhere. And, and we were punished the following day, we stood, we stood all day from dawn to dusk, we stood on our knees, kneeling for punishment, and we were there a little while, and then they, they selected us there, because they wanted some workers in the ammunition factories. So, an order came, and we were selected, and we went through all day medical examinations, and who was only perfectly fit, and had all the, all the bits and pieces in the right way, and, because they tried to separate two sisters, because she had a little bit of a club foot, a bit short, and they wanted to take her away, but the girl cried and begged, and said, "Look, she can walk, she can work, that's my sister, don't take her away from me." So they, they let her pass, and that's where, and we stood all day, in the nude, and it was cold already.

You didn't have any clothes?

No. Everything was always done in the nude.

Why?

Because they wanted to look at everything, so that you didn't have a speck, maybe you have a hump, maybe you have a growth, maybe you had something on your body, you see?

And this was for the selection?

Mmmm. And we stood all day long because there was a lot of us, there was, I think, 5OO girls. We came on transport from Auschwitz, 5OO girls and young women, you know, to me all girls, and we stood all day in the nude, for selection, and there was these German SS doctors inspecting us. And that's where one of them said, "Open your mouth."

Men or women, were they?

Men. "Open your mouth", and that's where he said that he's never seen such teeth, when he look into my mouth. That was like the last, they sort of, rolled you around, and looked and pick up your feet, and try to do this to your hands and your arms, and they looked in your chest, well, I wasn't, they could see all my everything, because I was only a tiny little girl, and you stood like this the whole day long, pinching your face to give you colour. They used to do that.

Why?

The girls, to give you colour, to look good.

To look healthy?

Yeh. To look good, and, and I've always had perfect skin, you see. I didn't have to do this, because I've got it natural from my mother. My, my sister, no. My sister's of sallow complexion, you know, but I've got very high colours. And we were, and all this procedure took all day, to dark, and we went into baths, we had baths, which was a pleasure, because it was the warm water. They gave us some fresh clothes, some fresh dresses, the striped ones, you know, and, and clogs, wooden shoes, boots like, and they walked us out of the bath in the middle of the night, and it's freezing cold, and you, you haven't got a coat, you haven't got nothing to cover your head, and you, you really froze. And then they gave us something to eat, something, a bit of bread, and they took us on the march, and they marched us again, in the middle of the night, in the dark.

To?

To the railway sidings. And this took us, I don't know how long we travelled, but it wasn't a pleasant journey, because it got hot during the day, our wagons are closed, we have no water, we're gasping for air, and I don't know, some luck that we survived the journey. And night again, when we arrived in Milhausen, it's night again. So they get us off the trains, and load us into local conveyance, in to the trams, and the windows are blacked off, inside the electric lights is working, but with curtains, with those shutters, and you're not allowed to, but we can hear, there's life going on in the streets, there's people there, even in the darkness, and they took us to the camp, it was, it was at the edge of town, in the forest. And there was these big ammunition factories were built there, in the forest, so you couldn't see it. Even the planes, they were looking for them to bomb, couldn't find them, you couldn't see them amongst the forestry. And when we arrived at night, they, at first they, they took us into the civilian canteen, because the things was not ready for us, you know. In the morning,

they, they filled the blocks up with bunks, with beds, and in the morning when all was done, they took us out of the canteen, and allocated so many people into a room. In my room there must have been, four, four, four lots, that's three bunks, used to stand like, two by the walls, and two like this. So there was three, I was on the right, last on the last one, on the third bunk.

At the top?

Yeh. So there was l2 girls into a room. And then we remained a little while, till they, they were deciding what to do with us, because we were going into the ammunition factory for work, and the Kommandant from our Camp, he said he is going to undress us, to get rid of the striped dresses, because we're going to work among German civilians. So we got ordinary clothes, like dresses, we got a coat, we had different shoes given, we already begin to get some underwear, you know, and one day, they march us to work, to the factories. When we arrived there, we come into the factories, the civilian workers, the technicians, the engineers, the clerks, they looked at us, with shaven heads, they thought that we were mad. They were sort of, you know. They never expected anything like this. But we settled in, they started showing us what we had to do. At first it was very subdued, because we were strangers, we didn't know them, they didn't know us, so it took a little time till the atmosphere warmed up. And then ...

This was when?

That was in Milhausen, in Milhausen, Tiringer, and there I was for some months, until they, they started to, to liquidate the camps in Germany. You see they thought they'd be safe, if we're not in Germany, they think they're safe, no one will know what they'd done, so they tried to transport us all into Belsen.

And from Belsen?

In Belsen, in Belsen was a terrible thing when we arrived there. And when we arrived there, in, in like, in the end of the winter, still snow, still, I think, around February, still snow, very deep snow on the grounds, we arrived after a long journey to Belsen, and when it was daylight, and we come away from the wagons, there was wagons standing filled up with men, men transport, and they all looked like skeletons. I saw terrible things in Auschwitz, but in Belsen it was worse. Like you see on the movies, like you see on the documentaries. I nearly, we nearly had a fit, we couldn't understand it. How could they get so thin? And then we went onto a field, and they let us stand in there, and the snows was up to here, and we are bare, we don't wear no stockings, we are not wearing heavy clothes, and we're standing there till they see to us. And meanwhile you see a few people dropping. I dunno, I must be terribly strong, very strong. And then they started allocating us into blocks. And my good fortune with my sister, we went in on one of the best blocks in Belsen, by the main gate, where all the Commanders used to live. They didn't have room for us on the bunks, but we were permitted to lay in the hallways, like, in the blocks. Used to sit by the wall, like this, opposite one another, in, in rows, and some girls, not a lot, they put on other blocks, and they, they vanished. I never saw them any more after this. I think they all must have died out. The, from the starvation, and for other things as

well, what was going on. There was, there was terrible places to be in. But my luck was, my sister and I was on the best block there was. Otherwise, I don't think I'd be here today either.

<u>End of FlO4 Side A</u>

<u>Side B is Blank</u>

This is tape l (tape 5) in the second set of interviews with Fela Bernstein, dated Thursday, l5th December, l988.

Cos, in the book ...

Okay, so we're up to more or less, the beginning of September l944, when you were sent from the prison to Auschwitz. If we could just dwell for a minute, on the conditions of the camps, can you say something about the living accommodation, and where you were actually situated.

In Auschwitz?

Yes.

Well, when we arrived in Auschwitz, we got off the trains, they, they put two groups of people, they put like women to one side, with their children, and men on the other side, if they had grown up sons as well, and we all stood in like, in a formation of five, and they, the Gestapo, with dogs, there must have been Mengele as well, because he was always there at every transport that came in, but I couldn't remember him who, because I only saw him for a little while, and only once. And they were standing there, and they were doing the selection, and I was, we were standing in five, my sister and I, and three other friends, five girls. And the women were behind us, my momma, and this other friend's mother, and another mother, and their children, my little brother, and we come to the front, and they were sort of wagging their finger, "You're this side, and you're that side."

What was their tone when they were doing it? Cos I've read recently, Primo Levi was saying that sometimes they were quite courteous about it. They were saying, "Ah, Mrs. Bernstein, would you like to come to this side?" Rather than the characteristic image of them beating you around with a stick, and kicking you to the floor.

No, I don't remember that. I don't remember beaten. It's only when we were taken out of hiding that, like the day before, that the women and the men, the grown ups received a whacking across the head, and the Germans said, "Wir schlagen nicht keine kinder." As he was standing in the doorway, everybody got a whack, and my momma too, cos I remember her, she was bleeding from behind the ear. And we came out, we came out in the courtyard, and we were assembled and we had to wait there. And there was one particular old gentleman, a very good neighbour, and he had a beard, because he was very Froom, very orthodox, and he went over to him, and he said, "Who is the oldest Jew here?" So, of course, he looks at this man, he's got a beard, he must be the oldest. So he said, "Was that your idea? Of going into hiding?" And he start beating him. And after that, I didn't see any more what was happening, because we were loaded up on the trams.

But at the selection time, when you arrived in Auschwitz, were they similarly brutal?

No. No. You know, they just stood there, because when you see these dogs there, you don't have to misbehave, you daren't, because they used to let the dogs loose. But

all they did, is, they, I still remember this, he was wagging his finger from side to side, who's going to the left, who's going to the right. We went to the, to the left. And the others that were chosen to go to the gas chambers went on the right.

Did you know that they would be going to the gas chambers?

No. But I saw gates, and that was the gate to Birkenau.

So why did you think that you were being separated?

I didn't even notice I was separated, because we walked on, and as I look round to see whether my mother's following, she wasn't there any more.

But you saw the man wagging his finger?

Yes.

Why did you think he might be doing that?

Well, he was, he was, you know, telling this one, go here, go there. But I didn't know that it, gas chambers. We didn't know what went on in Auschwitz. Not till later on. And we went on to the left, another way down in the camps, and we had our bits and pieces we carried, and when I looked around, my mother had disappeared with my brother, and my mother's friend, and her other neighbour. All the women with the little children, they were gone. So I haven't seen my mother since l944, that day we arrived in Auschwitz.

Since that particular date?

Since that particular date.

You were how old then?

l7.

So you were moved, with your sister.

Yes, my sister, and my other few, three friends, we were five, we kept together, and we went, and when they assembled us in a very big group, they marched us on to the camp compound, and there was fences, and there were other inmates, women, with shaven heads, and they wore these striped grey dresses. And I thought that I was in, in a nuthouse, I thought I was in a crazy house.

Because you still had your hair and you were in your regular clothes?

We were still, because we were just being marched to the baths, you see. And we look at these, and they're shouting and calling to us, "Give us your food, give us your food."

And they were behind the fences?

They were behind the fences, on the compound, the blocks. And when I looked at this, I thought, "God Almighty! What is this place?" Because when you arrive on the trains, it's sort of open, you don't see it yet, not until you walk through the gravel roads, there was like gravel, you know, the paths, the paths, that you begin to see the camp, and the blocks, and the prisoners, and the inmates running around free, like, you know, when you were allowed out the blocks, because most of the times they used to, they used to keep you in the blocks, but you used to get like exercise, what they call, like in a prison, and we see these women, and I thought I was in the nuthouse. Of course, no one believes what they're saying, no one is throwing the food, no one is throwing the bread to them.

You had food with you?

What we came with, you see, they gave us, when we, when we got on the train, they gave each person a loaf of bread. Could've been a large loaf, maybe a kilo of weight, you know, round, Polish bread.

You're making a circular motion, round?

Polish bread used to come round, and it could've weighed maybe a kilo, maybe more, but no one would give it up, because we can't believe it, what is going on here. And we march off, they march us and march us, and we come to an assembly hall, they march us in there, and we have to go in there. We put our things down. And they shout now that we must take our clothes off, in the nude, naked, like God created you. I was very shy. I have never been naked in front of anybody, you see. But you must, if not, you, you get your head split open. And we take our clothes off and everything, and then we have to walk towards that area. And they stood two big wooden cases, and you had to give up all your jewellery, whatever you had, even they made you take out, if you had golden teeth, you see. I had no, nothing like this. I had no jewellery, I had no treasures.

Did your sister? Cos she was older.

No. We had nothing like this, because we were poor people. The only jewellery my mother ever possessed is her wedding ring, and that used to get pawned many times, you know, in the bad old days. You're laughing, Robert! And that used to be pawned many a times, so my mother only probably had her wedding ring, probably when she was taken to the same thing, to the same barriers, in Birkenau, to the gas chambers, and I was told by some people, what a horrific experience that was for the people that went through there. You see, this I didn't see. And we come to this barrier, and you have to give everything up.

To whom?

They have these Kapos there, with SS women.

Jewish?

Jewish, of course. These were the privileged ones. You could tell that they were the privileged because they looked better than us. We looked starved, and thin, and we looked like diseased.

But you had the bread with you, why hadn't you eaten that?

Oh you, you couldn't eat it all in one go, because if you eat it today, like we used to, in one day, and especially going to a strange place, you, you don't, you can't imagine that you're going to get food right away. They didn't anyway. So we kept this bread, but that was only once in a while, we didn't get every day a whole loaf. If we used to get a whole loaf of bread a day, that would have been luxury. So we had to give everything up, didn't even manage to eat up my bread. We come to this barrier, and you have to put everything in. My sister and I didn't put nothing in, because we didn't have nothing. But my friend, my friend Paula that came with us, she did have something. She had a golden watch. It was only tiny. A tiny little golden watch, because I remember she was telling us, that her uncle send it from Argentina. She had uncles in Argentina, and they were in the jewellery business, in watches, so they send her a watch, a present. So she took it off the strap, she wrapped it up in a piece of cotton wool, and she hid it in a very inconspicuous place. Shall I tell you where?

What do you mean?

She hid it on her body, if you know what I mean. She, she hid it in her private place. Because like today, you know, your drug addicts, they smuggle in drugs, they hide it in the bowel area, yes? I've seen this in the news, you know, sometimes. She hid it on her, on her body, because we're already standing naked. She hid it in her private area. I see something peeking out, a little bit of cotton wool, but I am too ashamed and too innocent to know what it's all about. When she gets to the barrier, they notice it. If I had known what and when, I could've told her, you know. Something is peeking out. But I was so naive, so innocent. And they, they look at her, and they can see this piece of cotton wool peeking out, and they take it out, and they unwrapped it, and they can see it's a watch, a gold watch, a teeny weeny watch. And they started on her, they gave her such a beating, I shall never forget it. I thought they were going to kill her, just with sticks. Of course, we went through after that, after a good beating. We went into another area, that was the showers, and, and before we had a shower, they start shaving us, they shaved our heads, shaved all our private places, and they wasn't gentle. They didn't, they didn't shave us with a razor, they shaved us with clippers, you know, and imagine, if you pardon me, Robert, being shaved with clippers.

Yeh, I understand.

It's the most excruciating pain.

Women doing this?

Women, yes, the Kapos, you know, the ones that they, the privileged ones, the ones they selected from prisoners that had already been there some time in Auschwitz.

Why do you think they were so cruel?

Because, why they were cruel, because they were already a long time in Auschwitz. They also lost their parents, their folks, and some of them even witnessed, they even made them look and watch the way they suffered in the gas chambers before they died from the gas. And that's why they were so cruel, because they also hurt, you see. They couldn't take it out on the Germans, so they took it out on us. And that was ever such a lot of this going on, this punishment for the least little thing, they would beat you, they would hit you, they would deprive you of, of your watery little soup that they used to give you once a day, or withhold the bread ration.

It was almost as if they hated you, even though they were Jews?

Yes. And they were, they were Czechoslovakian, they were Czechoslovakian girls, and they were the worst.

As opposed to the Polish?

Mmmm. They were the worst. Because they have been there already longer, you see. They suffered also, like we were suffering. Where, at first, the Germans used to beat them nearly to death, when they give them over, this power to them, to the Kapos, they was torturing us. So when we went through this other hall, they shaved our hair, and then we went through to the shower room, they, they put some stuff on our heads, and you know, other parts, for disinfectant.

They'd showered you already?

No. Showered after they shaved our hair.

In hot water?

Yes, warm water, yes. And we just, it was sort of more or less like a rinse, there was no soap, like a rinse, because they put disinfectant on us here, if you'll pardon me, Robert, you're not a child, are you. And, and after the showers, we had to go in another hall, like a, they had like steam rooms there. They had these very big steam, it looked like a drum shape, it looks like a cleaners has, you know? And they had all raggy clothes, and they used to steam it before they gave it to us, to keep the, the lice out. And we went to this window there, there was men standing there, workers, and I don't know, I couldn't go to the window, I saw these men there, I'm standing naked, and so, you know? I'm so embarrassed. But there are other women that don't see that there's an embarrassment.

Why were you embarrassed?

Well, I have never been naked in front of anybody, except for my momma, not even for my father, after I, I grew up to a, a reasonable age, what, maybe lO or so. My mother used to make my father leave the house when she used to bath us girls. My sisters wouldn't get undressed naked when my father was in the house. I mean, in the

rooms, wasn't a house, I mean, there wasn't much room, so everybody had to be in the same area. He had, he had to leave, he used to go out, and I, I couldn't, I couldn't understand it, how some women, right away, were showing off. Mind you, there wasn't much to show off, everybody was so skinny. And they shared out the clothes. So I got an old skirt, but it was nice and warm, cos it had just come out from the steam rooms, the hot air. I put the skirt on, but it was so big, there was nothing to do it up with.

No underclothes?

No. No underclothes, no bra. And I was very young. And I was, I was maturing, I was blooming, you know, and I hurt, my breasts hurt, and I used to stand like this, you see. And no bra, and they gave me a skirt, no knickers, no shoes, and they gave me this jacket, I still remember it, it was a knitted jacket, and it had a lining, so I tore off some of the lining, and I made a string to tie my skirt up. I could've been a model for Christian Dior! And oh, oh, shaven hair. We'd come out already, in the yard, outside the, this building, and we all looking for each other, and calling for each other, we can't recognise, I mean, all of a sudden, you go with a head of hair, and you come out bald!

You're laughing now, you weren't laughing then!

Oh no! I was laughing now, I can laugh about it now, because, because I'm not in this situation any more, and it's such a long time past. I mean, there's, I'm talking about just gone 44 years, September. And I'm looking, I'm calling, I'm looking for my sister, she's standing next to me, and I can't recognise her, because she went in a beautiful blonde, and she came out a baldy! Of course, we embraced, and we cried, and we all looked like a bunch of crazy people. They assembled us, they march us off to a block.

How many women were there?

Oh, there was, oh, a lot. I tell you. 5OO. Because that block that I was in, was later on, selected. And 5OO girls of us, and young women, of course, were sent off to the ammunition factories in Millhausen, so we was 5OO. But it could've been more, but quite a few were not selected. But my luck was, I always had very high colours, and I was young, I was l7, I was in my, in my prime, I was growing, maturing, blooming, even with all the starvation and everything, but your body, your body works, you know. I mean, it functions automatically, it's not as if you need to, to put something in you, to make you develop breasts or anything like that, or go into puberty. I was not in puberty, I never was in puberty till I was liberated in l945, in July, and I was getting on for l8, but not yet, I wasn't functioning like a woman yet, you see. And we come out there, and they march us, and we got no shoes on our feet, and we're walking on those gravel paths, they're taking us to the blocks. There was a block already standing empty, and now I know why. Because this block, I think I was on block 25, where they used to bring in, and they used to select them out, and that's why the block was empty, and we walk and walk, and it was a very long way. And suddenly my sister sees girls working in ditches on the other side of the fences, there were wire fences, electrical fences. She wants a drink, you know. She runs over to

the working party, and she can see they've got a bucket of water, like. They give her a drink of water, but we've marched off. She's missed the column. She's running after us. The SS woman, she notice her running, and when the column stops, and she brings her into the formation, she gave her such a beating, that I don't think she's ever forgotten it, and this was only because of a drink of water. Well, we march on again, and your feet hurt like bloody hell, because you're walking in bare feet in gravel stones. Well we arrive at the block gates at the entrance, and we are herded inside, into this block. And there's no bunks, no beds, it's earthy, like outside in the garden. But well trodden in because there's been people there from before. And it's a very big block, very long.

Like a barn?

Like a barn, and in the middle, there was all the way across, was a brick, a brick oven, like a, for heating, you know. And in the front they had like a, the oven, and had iron gates, so they used to put in maybe coal, whatever they burned, but when we were there we didn't need it yet, because it was still summer, you see, and it's like two halves of the block, and you get allocated where to sit. Well, I, I sat with my sister and three other girls, we were sitting behind, like, you know.

Yes, in rows?

In a row, and you had to sit like that all the time, through night and through day, because you were not always, you only were allowed out at certain times to go to the toilet, or going out like exercise, and, and I'm sitting here, and not far is the Kapo's room, and she was a bitch. She was Czechoslovakian. She was a big fat pig.

Jewish?

Jewish. Czechoslovakian. She had a beautiful face. Her face was like a peach, but she was like this. And when it happened she was entertaining a man, because they could have men come into them, you know.

Which men?

Men also from the men's camp.

The men Kapos?

Yes. Those that were there a long time, there was, they were very well-orientated in the system. They knew, they knew how to be on the make, you know, and they knew things was going on, we didn't, we didn't know, we were newcomers. And she was in there probably in her room with a guy, mmm, because she came out, she was only wearing, I don't know what it was, whether it was a bathing suit, a two-piece bathing suit, or whether it was her knickers and her bra, and she was very fat, and she, she started screaming and yelling at the girls, because some girls sitting and talking, no one could sleep. How can you sleep when you're sitting? And I sat and I cried all the time I was in Auschwitz. I cried. Because when I found out, what happened to my mother, I cried for weeks. And those girls, the, the ones that were there longer, they

were quick to tell you where your mother went, and your other family, like if you had sisters, or brother, or father. She says, "You know those big chimneys." I says, "Well." She says, "That's a gas chamber. That's where they burned your mother and your brother."

And they told you this? And you were just sitting there? I mean ...

In the block.

But you were there for, you were there for like a few weeks?

A few weeks, that was in the beginning, that's why, when I heard this, you see, when we arrived, when we were in the block, the Kapos that, they were working, there was quite a few, I mean that was a very large crowd they had to control, so she had these, she was the Block alteste, what they called, and she had the other lower ranks. She was, she was bad, she was evil, but they were even worse. They never talk to you unless they're giving you a whacking.

What was it that you were doing there? It seems as though you were either sitting or being beaten? Did you have a job?

No, we didn't because I think, we didn't do nothing, we had no occupation, no work, because they were selecting groups to send into, into deeper Germany, to factories and all kinds of industry, I don't know, on farming, on working the land, or digging, whatever.

So your time in Auschwitz was spent just sitting in this big barn?

Yes, all those weeks, sitting, or when I could go out.

What was the day routine then, if you could go out?

Well, the only routine there is, is going to the toilet, or going to the, to the washroom.

Whenever you liked?

Yeh, if, we were, I think, allocated a certain time of the day, used to go to the washroom, and many times I got to the washroom, and I could see the way they were behaving there, and fighting for the drips of, drips of water, it had also one of these blocks, and it had one, the water system was running like on a pipe with taps, like some you see them in the Army using, you know, I've seen it on films as well. And, because the water in Auschwitz was very little, it was a very bad supply of water. Sometimes there was no water. And I could see how they behaved.

Who's they?

The girls, they were fighting for the water. I sometimes used to stand there and just look. I gave up washing, I never washed! I never washed for a long, long time, not even my hands. And I, I still come through it, I still survived, with all that dirt,

mmm? With all that dirt and everything that was going on there. And in the toilet, like I used to go to the toilet. I walked in that building, that block, I saw a man standing there, sweeping, or just hanging on the broom, and talking with other women, and women sitting on the latrine.

He was a Jew?

Yes. Some were Poles, you know, Polish. And you would sit on, and you would see these women sitting on those man-made toilets, wooden seats, like, all along ...

<u>End of FlO5 Side A</u>

FlO5 Side B

Yes, other times, there wouldn't be any men workers, I managed to go, but for a long time I didn't need to, because I was so devastated, especially when, when those Kapos, they were very, very quick to tell you where your family has gone, where they are. I didn't eat, I didn't sleep ...

Could you have eaten? Did they provide food?

Well, they, they gave us the soup, and they gave a portion of bread.

Three times a day? Once?

Well, in the morning, they give you this putrid coffee, black coffee, and whenever I used to drink it, it used to make me feel bilious, it used to make me feel sick, you know, but I had to put something in, to block the hole. But they give us a piece of bread, and once a day they give us a, a soup from the kitchens, and they would, they would wake you, let's say you were sleeping, they would select you to go to the kitchens to pick up the, the containers. They were containers that you close up like a Thermos flask, you know. They had like clips on the side, to keep it hot, so if we went in the night, to the kitchens, let's say a contingent of girls, because there was a lot of us in the block, we would go to the kitchen, and there used to be a long way to go to the kitchens, and with bare feet on the stones, and in the middle of the night, they used to wake you, and send you on, to pick up the containers of the soup for the block. And I was little, and I wasn't very strong, and I couldn't carry, but I had to, because I knew my life depended on it, otherwise if I, if I showed I didn't have the strength to do it, they probably would have selected me in a different way. I could've ended up in the gas chambers, because that was the only way you could end up in Auschwitz.

During this time, was it only Jews that you were mixing with?

Yes. Yes.

There were no gipsies, or political prisoners, or homosexuals or ...

No, no, they, they, we was separated, there was Polish girls on one compound, and there was men, and there was no, I didn't see any of gipsies not until I, until I came to Ravensbruck. I wasn't mixing with them, we were just, the people that were just coming from the Lodz ghetto, in the liquidation.

So would you have had, I mean, it's a peculiar question, but would you have had any sort of Rosh Hashana at this time?

Celebration?

Yes.

No.

I don't mean, obviously, as regards people, a sort of party, but were you aware, say, that one particular day was Rosh Hashana?

Yes, well, only in Milhausen, some of the girls were talking. They were saying "It's Rosh Hashana". But we didn't celebrate it. There was no special food, there was no feasting, there was no prayers, nothing like this. I mean, we were, we were absolutely in a, in a world of non-existence. You can't imagine what it was like. You, you can't visualise it. You can't visualise it, what it was like. I'm telling this in words, words, words, you can't see words, can you. You've got to see what the words mean.

So say, on, on a Friday, when you were in the ghetto, or even before the ghetto ...

Nothing, there was no, there was no religious observation. People were fighting for survival, from day-to-day. People walked around in the street in the ghetto like zombies.

And in the camps similarly?

The same. The same. Who, who worried or cared about Yomtovs, holidays, sabbath?

I mean, according to some books and films, some people did, you know, they, they kind of celebrated shabas in, with themselves.

Yes, but, I wasn't in this particular environment that was observed, and, and I, I was too young, I didn't observe religion. Children, I don't think, children bother about things like that, unless if you really come from a very, very Orthodox home, you see.

But you said there were some men in the camp ...

Yes.

Did you mix with them at all?

I only saw them, I only looked at them, but I didn't come in contact, I didn't speak.

Did any of the people you knew there, did they come into contact?

No, not our girls. It's only the ones I was telling you about - the Kapos, the Block alteste. She had fellows in her place, in her room, and if she was disturbed, let's say she heard the girls talk, and, or if she heard somebody cry, she came out, she came out with an implement in her hand, I think it must've been a piece of wood or something, and she would run around like mad, and swearing and cursing, and she would curse and swear in Czech, and she would call us, "You Polish whores. I'm going to beat you so long, until I see blood running from you." And that was in Czech. (SPEAKS SOME CZECH)

Of course, we have to quieten down, but I, I had a very bad time there, an upsetting time, you know, because when I found out my mother has gone from me forever.

Yes. So in this space of about three or four weeks, you moved from the ghetto into the camp. Was there anything in that time, that particularly sticks out. Any one instance?
I mean, you talk of it as if it were fairly routine, you know, you drank your coffee, sat on uncomfortable floors, were beaten, once in a moon.

Well, nothing really.

Did anything irregular happen? It seems a fairly regular type of ...

That was the routine, it was a nothing routine, you know. And then one day, there came an order, they were selecting us to go to work.

Regularly they were selecting you?

Yes. We were selected a couple of times, and sent back to the blocks, and I think on the third time, when the SS men came, we had to strip naked, and stand on the outside, on the compound, and they would come and look at you, you know, whether you were, how you looked physically, and we would stand and pinch our cheeks like this, to give us colours, you know.

You knew then, that the more healthy you were, the more chance ...

Oh yes, yes.

How did you know?

Well, by, by selecting us once and twice and three times, that we were not going, we were not going to the gas chambers, that they needed us for something else. And we went out, and we stood there naked, and they were selecting, they were young soldiers, and you know you sort of start, try to cover yourself up, you know, and he would say in German, "Don't worry about it, I've seen it before." You know, he'd seen naked bodies before.

How was his manner?

Well, they didn't beat us or anything like this. I think they had to keep us well, because, in case we arrive in the works camps, because we also were working amongst civilian Germans in the factories, that if we didn't, if we looked injured, or beaten, they might wonder what, you see. Though they saw us arrive, shaven heads, which they were also very shocked to see us, because I remember, they sort of pulled away, you know. The day we turned up, you know, at work, in the factory in Milhausen, when we walked in, on to our departments, they were standing like in a row, you know, to receive us, the new people. And when they saw us, they didn't know what to think, they were shocked.

In the way that you were shocked when you first went entered ...

Yes, they were shocked too, because, women? These funny dresses. Shaven heads. They thought we were lunatics. Of course, the atmosphere was very strange to begin with.

But that was in Milhausen.

Yes.

But before that ...

In Auschwitz?

In Auschwitz, I was just wondering because ...

In Auschwitz, I had a non-existent life. It was monotonous, and boring as well, because there was nothing to do, you just sat around.

So you don't remember anything particular, anything peculiar, there was no, no, no particular active brutality, or kindness, or courage or resilience, or ...

No, there was nothing what I experienced. But I always had this thing, because I see the things what was going on, all these beating, and you, you could get a whack for no reason at all, you know.

Did you ever?

I had, I've got a whacking as well.

For what?

For no reason at all, just your put your foot out wrong, you know. Let's say you have to march with your left, and you put your right out, you could get a crushing wallop across your head, for nothing. But I, I adopted the method to keep out the way. Keep your head down, keep away from things, anything that's going on, keep out of it, you know? Don't get involved.

What sort of things could you have got involved in?

Well, mostly is nicking.

Oh, so there was this type of thing going on.

Oh yes. Nicking, pinching, mostly something to eat.

From where?

From somebody else, or from the storage place, you know, where they used to keep it. If there was trouble going on.

What sort of trouble?

Girls fighting, arguing, squabbling.

Over food and things?

Yes. Always, even something she found, let's say she found, went on the rubbish pitch, tip, she'd find a tin, a container, cos they were, they were worth themselves in gold, a container, cos you could always keep your food in it. Let's say like a tin, or a saucepan, something like this, or if you found a spoon, or knives, we didn't have no knives, we didn't even have spoons. When they used to give us the soup, so they didn't give us the soup when it arrived hot in the night, but they waited till the following day dinner time, let's say, l o'clock, let's say. By the time they open up these containers, the food was already lukewarm. It had a taste like the way it looked. And they gave us in bowls. They filled it, and five people had to eat from the same bowl. So how do you eat it? You've got no spoon, so you sip it. And somebody wasn't very nice, she would stick her hands into the soup, and grab out if there was something solid in there, you know.

And that's how trouble began?

Mmm. There was.

But you kept away from it?

But I didn't, I accepted. And then again, I wasn't in a mental condition to fight about anything. I was too, too tormented, I was too upset, because all the time, I did nothing but cry.

So other women, it appears, became stronger, more resilient quicker.

Yeh. But I, and I didn't eat, I didn't eat, and I felt ill. I felt as if my soul was going out of me. I had that sinking feeling, and I thought I was dying. And then when I felt, I got this feeling, I said to myself, "I have to pull myself together."

When was this? This was still in Auschwitz?

Auschwitz, sitting in the block, on the ground, and in the night, you know, the dew comes, the earth is wet, and you have, you wear nothing underneath, and it's very cold, and my sister used to have a weak bladder. If they found out that she was wetting herself, that would've been her end. And I said to myself, "I think you must pull yourself together, because I think you're gonna die."

How was your sister at this time?

My sister wasn't too bad, because she always used to like to eat. My sister had always a very good appetite, and all her troubles, and all her sorrows, she could always resolve to food, you know. And she ate with the other companions sitting there, we're sitting like soldiers in a row. And I pulled myself together, and I started to come to myself.

Did she encourage you, or did she ...

Yes, she said, "You must eat something. You can't go on like this." And I started to eat, and I pulled myself together. Whatever they gave us, the piece of bread, and the black coffee, unsweetened. Poof! And the, and the soups from the kitchens, and everybody was like dogs, like animals they behaved. Can you imagine a bowl, a sip and you pass down the queue, and some of the girls that were there with me, they were girls that I didn't know, they behaved like dogs, used to put their hands in, filthy dirty hands, into the soup, maybe they caught a piece of potato there, or whatever there was, and my luck was, that we were selected to go to work in the ammunition factories, to Milhausen, otherwise I would have never survived Auschwitz, I would've died there. I would've died broken-hearted, because the loss of my mother, and my young little brother.

But before, before you went to Milhausen, you went to Ravensbruck?

Well that was, that was on the way to Milhausen. You see. They took us up from Auschwitz.

You were selected?

We were selected. And that same day they selected us, they didn't send us out right away, but they took us to, to the baths, and prepared us. But we didn't leave the same day or the same night. We were, we were put on a field outside, when, when I was told, later on, when girls, other girls came to work in the factory, Hungarian girls, when they arrived in Milhausen, and they saw us, they couldn't believe it, because they said that you were allocated for the gas chambers. And they, after the bathing, they sat us on this field to wait, because whenever they used to transport us, they used to transport us in the night.

So you were waiting in a field?

In the field. Loads of, all the transport of 5OO girls.

They selected all of you?

A few they didn't. Quite a few from our block. Some girls fell by the wayside, they were not selected.

Had you any idea of where you were going?

No. No, we didn't know at all. No, we didn't know.

So there was a possibility that you might be sent to the gas chamber?

Yes. Yes. And that's what the Hungarian girls, when they arrived a little while later, because they sent for another 2OO girls, so in our camp, in Milhausen, 7OO girls. 5OO Polish, 2OO Hungarian. And we was put onto this field, we sat there, and, to wait, till they getting ready for us, and this is in the night, and it's raining, raining cats and dogs, and you're sitting in the open, just with a dress on. And it's pouring, and you just sit. You can't go anywhere, you can't do nothing. They don't come to put us into sheltered place, and through the night it rained, and to this day, I'm surprised how I never caught pneumonia and died. Very strong. I was only l7, you see. I was strong at the time. I was healthy, very healthy, like a l7 year old should be, no? And we stayed there through the night, and I just sat there. I didn't worry about my hair because I didn't have any hair, I was shaven. And the morning come, and it's, it's bright, it's sunny, and then we, we went and marched off to the wagons, and we're on our way, we're journeying, we journey, and then it become so hot, and in the wagons, we have, we've eaten up the portion of bread they gave us to go up on the trains. There's no water, it's very hot in the wagons, and we're closed in. Can you imagine that? We're closed in the wagons, there's only straw on the floor. And we absolutely gasping for a drink. That's why I, whenever I see anything, you know, like on the movies where people are in the desert, and no drink, and they get all these, they see these fantasy places, what do you call them?

Mirage.

Mirage, oases, you know? I can feel what it's like not to have a drink. And they, they, they transport us, and we on our way, and we stop and we start, and we don't know when this is going to come to an end.

How long were you on this train?

Quite some time. Many many nights, many many days. Because I remember at least two nights passing.

And it was the same situation there? There was a slit at the top, and you were given buckets?

No. No. No. That wasn't. We couldn't go to the toilet at all.

So how did it differ? How, your time in this cattle truck, how did it differ from the time in the truck on the way to Auschwitz?

The time?

Yes.

Because we had a much longer journey, by the time we got to Milhausen, you see. Then the stop, the train stops on a siding outside the camp, and it's Dachau. And it stopped.

How did you know it was Dachau?

We were told.

Who told you?

The SS men. The ones that were with us.

There was an SS man in each carriage?

Yes. Yes. He wasn't inside with us, he must've stood like, on the, on the wagons, like, you know, where they have these, where you can stand outside on the trains. They were not inside in the, but when they opened up, he would come in, and, and the train stops outside Dachau, and they're going over into the camp, and I think they wanted to drop us off there, but, but I could see a very high ranking Gestapo man came out of there, he could've been the Kommandant, and there is words going on, and we could hear. He says, "I've got no room here for women."

You actually heard him say that?

Yes, in German. He wasn't going to allow us in there. So there was words between these SS and the Gestapo, and they quarrelled, and in the end, our lot had to give in, and leave. He wasn't going to let us in there, and this was our good fortune. Cos if we were let in there, it was only a man's camp. I wouldn't be here today talking with you, Robert. And the train goes off again, and we're riding again, and until they bring us into Ravensbruck. There, they had room for us.

So what happened there? They unloaded you?

They unloaded us off the train, that is, in the night.

Did you know it was Ravensbruck you'd arrived at?

No. And we walk, from the train sidings, not a station where people get on for travelling, it was alway done in secret, on sidings. Miles and miles away from the camp. We get off there, and they march us into Ravensbruck, and it's night, and we left on the compound, outside, because I suppose they had to make preparations where to put us, I mean, 5OO girls and women, and they left us on the compound, sitting outside the block, like on a grass verge, and it was a very nice day, very hot, sitting there for some time. I didn't have hair, and my head got sunburnt.

You didn't have hair?

No.

So they shaved your hair in Auschwitz more than once?

No. Once.

In three or four weeks, hadn't any grown back?

Very little, very little. Maybe like this, maybe like this, you know. And I'm sitting there, and my head gets sunburnt, because I mean, when did I ever get my head sunburnt? And it nearly drives me crazy. You can imagine sunburn? And then, then after a while, they, no, before that, I thought, "I'll go for a walk." So I went round the corner, and I'm walking down a path, and there's like a building attached to a fence, to a brick wall, when I come to the door, I look in, I nearly had the shock of my life. There was laying this body on a table, and there was, there must've been two doctors, SS, in uniforms, and they were wearing white coats, and this body is cut open from top to bottom, and they're sort of scooping out this body's innards. When I saw that, I nearly had a fit! I ran back to where I was sitting, and I was, you know, I was in shock what I saw. I'd never seen anything like this. And after a while, in the afternoon, they, they marched us into a block, and we was allocated with gipsies.

Did you know they were gipsies before you went in?

No. No.

Had you ever met gipsies before this time?

At home in Europe, yes, in Poland, yes, they used to come in the neighbourhood.

What was your impression of them before you met them in Ravensbruck? What did you think of gipsies?

Nothing very much, because as I said, I was a child, you see. I was a child, and gipsies, and there they really made us suffer.

Who's they?

The gipsies. Everything wrong they did, we had to pay it in punishment, and in this particular block, it was overcrowded, so can you imagine a, a 3 x 6 bunk had four girls allocated, so I was with my sister, and my two friends, and the four of us shared one bunk.

3 x 6?

Yeh. And we was laying like sardines, see, like this. My sister and I were at this end, and my two friends were in the other end. And one night, there is this terrible to do going on, and woke up from my sleep, and I've never heard such screams and yelling in my life. One of the gipsies was going to pinch off her shoes, her boots, off her feet. Cos we slept in everything, because we daren't take anything off, because if you took anything off, it would've got stolen, so you could've ended up walking round naked, you see. So, so it's terrible. The SS women come running, and they wanna know what's going on. Of course, the gipsies blame it on our girls. Not on me because I wasn't involved in it, but I was punished for it in the same way.

How were you punished?

We were taken out on the, in the morning, outside the block, the compound, and we were made to stand in punishment, all day, from dawn to dusk, on our knees, you know? Because they said that it was our fault and it wasn't. It was their fault because they were going to steal one of the girl's shoes off her feet, in her sleep. So we got punished that way. And we had not to eat, not to drink, from sun, from morning till night. And then our punishment was up, we were allowed back in the block, and we was given our ration, a piece of bread.

End of FlO5 Side B

FlO6 Side A

You'd arrived in Ravensbruck, and were, for the moment, living with some gipsies who gave you some trouble.

Yes. Yes. Yes, they did, they gave us a lot of hassle. They were very difficult to live with. Well, they were always known, I think, even before this, the thieves, didn't they? So we knew a little bit about them. But lucky for us, we didn't stay there long.

Were they particularly anti-Semitic? And were you on the defensive, and they were the aggressive ones? I mean, what was the relationship between the two?

Well, I don't think it was so much anti-Semitic, they're, more as things that they want from us, they wanted to steal things from us, you see. That was more, because I mean, after all, we, we both as peoples were there in the camp, you see, but they were more like thieving from us. And what they saw, they wanted. But how could we allow it to, to go on? I mean, they were also getting the same rations as we did.

And there was constant friction between the two, and punishments?

Yes. And we always used to get punished because what they did. Because the SS women would believe the gipsies sooner than they would believe us Jewish girls. But our luck was, we didn't remain there very long.

In Ravensbruck?

Yes.

Just for one week or two?

Yes, not very long from what I remember.

But just during that time, the routine, or non-routine, was the same as it was in Auschwitz?

Yes. Yes. You're sitting around in the block.

Not labouring?

No. We didn't do any kind of work. Just monotony. Nothing to do, and constant bickering, and, not so much fighting physically, you know, but bickering, quarrelling, arguing. And then one day, good fortune came, they said they needed transport.

What happened when that happened? You were re-selected?

We were selected again.

All of you? All 7OO?

No.   We were 5OO first.

And the gipsies were 2OO?

No, but they didn't reckon, only us. We were only taken on transport. Of course, they select us again, and all through the day, we stood in the, in the hospital area, in the compound, and we had to strip again, everything done naked. They wouldn't take us at face value, they had to see that we had healthy bodies. And we were selected, and, and it was very cold that day, and you stand naked all day. Why we stood so long, is because they went like, alphabetically, and my sister and I, and our two other friends, we were going under one name, I didn't use my family name at the time, we used my friend's name, because she was older, and she had already been married, and we used her name, so we were four of us. So if we come in a group, they often didn't split up sisters, or if you were, if you had a young mother, most of the time, some women wouldn't admit to being mothers, being sisters, you know what I mean? So they wouldn't be reckoned that they're old. So we all kept to the same name.

Which was what?

I think the name was Rechner. And it had the alphabet of R.

Rechner?

Something like this, very easy name, Rechner. Mind, our name was D. I would've probably come easier, earlier, to be selected, you know, and I could've got dressed and finished, but because I was so far down the alphabet, that it took practically all day, and we was frozen, and we were shivering, and we looked blue, and we're standing pinching our cheeks again, to make colour, and we were selected, and they look over you, and you turn round, and they look behind you, in your bum, and your feet, and your legs, whether your legs are good and straight, you're not a cripple, because there was two young sisters, one had a club foot, and they wanted to put her aside. And the one that was okay, insisted to let her be together with her sister, not to part them. She cried, she begged, she carried on something terrible. She tried to persuade the SS, the Gestapo doctors that she's very mobile, she can walk properly, she can work. Well, he gave in, and he let her pass. But I don't know where they are now, or whether they survived Belsen, because there you had to be healthy and strong, and, and they passed. When they come to me, you had to er, they, you had to open your mouth, and looking in that you had your teeth, and he was praising me that, in German, he said to me, "I have never seen such a marvellous mouth of teeth." I had every tooth. I even mention in the book, you know? And we were passed.

All four of you together?

Yes. We were all young girls, even the one that was married was only a youngster, you know, she could've only been about 25, 26, our friend Paula. She perished in Belsen. And a beautiful girl, like this, with blonde hair, and such big blue eyes she had. And we passed, we got dressed, and we all were done, that was already coming up to evening, dark. They took us in the bath, in the showers, and we had a shower, we came out, we got some clothes, some fresh clothes, and we got shoes, they gave us

shoes for the first time, boots, like wooden clogs, but leather, leather uppers, but wooden soles, and boy, were they murder for your feet! And if you got them too big, not fitting you, and you wear no socks, stockings, they rubbed your feet, and you were sore, and you couldn't walk, and this happened to me as well.

You got a pair that were too big?

Too big. They just gave out boots. And we came out, this is in the night, and it's cold, we've just been under warm water. We're only wearing a dress and the boots, and hair shaven, and one tooth is knocking against the other, you know. And then they counted, always counting, whether we're correct, the number, whether we're matching, you know, always afraid they'll say somebody's missing. And this is all going on in the night, in the darkness, and then they gave us a lump of bread, and they marched us out from Ravensbruck to, again, to the trains. And then we were on our way to Milhausen.   So that was the last stop.

This is around October l944?

Yes. That was well before Christmas.

How long was the journey?

I can't tell you. I don't know.

Because, you ...

It took some time, I know it took some time.

But you were given clothes and shoes, treated relatively well.

Yes. Yes, because they were sending us into work, in factories with civilians, German civilians.

So what sort of train was it?

Also a cattle truck.

It was exactly the same conditions?

Yes, cattle trucks, yes, but when we arrived in the town of Milhausen, we arrived at night, so when we got off the trains, they marched us to the trams. They had trams. It was dark. Inside the trams they were lit up, but they were curtained, they had these curtains that you pulled down. You were not allowed to lift up so anybody could see us from outside. And we could hear, as we stood there waiting, till we're all on, counting again. We could hear life, we could hear people, in the town of Milhausen, but we couldn't see them, we couldn't look out, and they couldn't see us looking in. And then the trains went off, the whole contingent, and we went for a little while, you know, I don't know how far, where, what.   And suddenly we stopped, and we must have stopped on the outskirts of the town, where the camp, begin the camps.   And

then we got off from there, from the trams, and we walk into the camps, but of course, they were not ready for us, you know, nothing, the blocks weren't prepared for us, so where we went is, because, on the other side of us, the camp, was where the SS, and the SS women lived, quarters, and also the civilian quarters for the people that worked in the factories that came from other places, that couldn't go home every day, or every night, so they lodged in those blocks there.

They were regular civilians, they weren't prisoners?

No, they were German, German people. Let's say they lived in Hamburg, they lived in Berlin, so they couldn't go home every night. Only, I think they used to go home the weekends, because they used to work, like, Saturdays we used to finish early, and we didn't work Sundays. So they would live in those quarters there, and they also had like a canteen, like a dining hall, and that dining hall had a stage, and they ushered us into this building, and we all seated ourselves on the floor, because they had parquet flooring. It was nice, beautiful, clean. And we were sitting there, you know, and, and I think they gave us something to eat when we arrived, and something to drink, also that bloody black coffee. And we were sitting there, and, because it was warm, it was a lovely place, and also, later on, towards Christmas, some of our girls, we had some very talented girls in our group, they put on a show.

The Germans let the prisoners put on a show?

Yes. Yes, the girls put on a show.

What sort of show?

Dancing and singing. Reciting.

At Christmas?

Yes. And they all the, we all went in there, sitting on chairs, in the show, and there was all these Germans were sitting in the front, like sometimes you see in the films.

The Germans who were sitting in the front, they were the regular workers?

They were the, no, they were also some of them the civilians, and also all the SS, and the SS women.

But it was only the Jewish women who ...

Only yes, yes ...

Who participated.

Only Jewish girls, because there were some very talented girls in our group. One of them was an actress, a singer and dancer in Poland before the War. All young women, young girls. So they, they organised, and they ask anybody can you sing, can you dance? And a group, maybe a dozen, and they put on a show, and it was very

impressive, and they were really taken with it. They couldn't imagine it, that there was such talent amongst our people. I mean, there were girls and women from very high places you know. Doctors. There was a, amongst the Hungarian women that came later on, came a doctor, a Hungarian lady doctor, you see. In the beginning we, we didn't have a doctor, and we had a doctor coming from Buchenwald, a French doctor, and I remember how all the girls, he was very nice, how they fluttered around him.

Him?

Yeh. A French doctor. A Christian. Also a prisoner, from Buchenwald. He came in his striped suit, with his number here.

To Milhausen?

To Milhausen, yes.

So you were mixed?

Yes. No. Only one, he only came once, to examine the girls, to examine us, whether we're okay, you see.

Just once?

Just once. And afterwards we had a lady doctor, that came in the other group of Hungarian girls, and was a lady doctor.

What was it like when this man doctor came?

He examined us, we were measured, not weight, we wasn't weighed, there was no, measured, I was measured in height, and examined, you know, physically examined, not gynaecologically, you know, nothing like that, that came later with the Hungarian doctor. And he was very nice. And I remember how the girls would flutter about, they see a man, oh man! Oh man! I didn't because I was too young for these things you see. And he only came once, and he came from Buchenwald, because we were only about l2O kms. from Buchenwald.

How long was he there for?

I think he spent the day. I mean, there was 5OO people to examine, and measured, we were measured. We were not photographed, just measured and examined, you know.

Do you know what for? Why would the Germans want to examine you?

To see whether we were healthy, you see. And we were all very healthy young girls and young women. We were, we were not fat, we were thin, you know, from lack of food, because what they fed us on, wouldn't keep a dog alive today.

Did he bring you news?

No. He was French, you see.

He spoke only French?

He only spoke French.

And did any of your lot speak French?

I didn't, and I don't know of anyone, I know I had a couple of women friends that worked with me, in the same, in the same department, opposite sitting on the other bench, they were like two sister-in-laws, they spoke Russian, and German, and Polish, and Yiddish, they were very intelligent women, you see, but no, I didn't know anyone that spoke French, maybe they did, but I, I don't know.

And so, this was in Ravensbruck until, sorry, Milhausen until the turn of the year?

Yes, we were spent there, we worked, we used to go to work every day.

What was the work?

Ammunition. Ammunition factory. I don't know exactly what sort, but our camp had three different kind of nationalities. The first camp as you come through the gate to us, the main gate, then we went through a roadway, and our camp was cordoned off, also with a gate, and wire fences, not electrical, just wire, was Italian. And next to them was Russian girls. They were, the Russian girls were freer than us, because they were voluntary, they came to Germany to work, and they could even go to town.

Russian girls came to Germany to work?

Yes.

Why?

From the occupied countries. You know, not from the free side, from where they were occupied. And Italian, Italians were there, and they used to sit, every night, when we used to come back to the camp from work, they would sit in the windows, we had no, we had no connection with them, we didn't mix, we were segregated. But they would sit and sing Italian songs, "Mama, de Santa Felicia", you know, every night that! And they were always singing about their Mama! Mmm, such Mummy's boys, aren't they!

They were men?

Men! Men! Russians, sorry, Italians, they were interned, I don't know why they were interned. They also worked in the factories, and they could mix with the Russian girls.

They could?

Yes, they could. Not us. We could only keep contact with them through the wires, talking to them as we passed by, or if we, if we were like, on Sunday, it was our day free, we didn't go to work, because the German workers didn't work, so we would be on the compound, come out in the yards, and we would attract their attention, and waving to them, because sometimes you could understand Russian because of Polish, you know, it's the Slavic language, and we would wave to them, and then some girls would become friendly, and speak, and sometimes they would throw over something in a package, because they were free to go to town, even to shop, because they used to get paid for their work, and, and they were also very friendly with the Italian blokes, and there was many love affairs going on.

Between the Russians and the Italians?

Yes. And sometimes, in months while we were there, there was quite a few Russian girls sent home because they were pregnant! You know!

But nothing between Jews?

No. No, we were, we did not come in contact with any sort of man.

Only through fences?

Only through fences, and we came by, and their building, their block was right in front of the gate, as we come through our compound, and they would, well, they might whistle or something like this. Make noises, make signs, I don't know, and they were singing, they were forever singing beautiful Italian songs, but before the main gate on the compound, as we come up from the forest, because these factories lied in forests, they were hidden in forests. So there was an open field, just before, as you come out from the forest, and on this side, as you come to the right, was an open field, but there was very high grass there, and even sometimes when it was dark, when we come home from work, when the nights was getting shorter, we come home, we could hear the, the carryings on, you know. She, they didn't speak Russian, they didn't speak Italian, but love, you don't have to know the language, you know, as the song goes! But they made themselves understand in one way or the other, I think, because, during that time when we was there, there was quite a few Russian girls sent home, to have their babies, they were pregnant.

But the Jewish women were completely segregated?

No, no, we were not, we were not amongst them, we didn't mix, the only mix was visual, maybe a wave, a smile, and maybe later on, when they got to know each other a bit better, talking through the fences, and also you had to be very careful, because we used to have the SS men walking on the, on the whatyoucallit, around the fences.

Yeh, the perimeters?

On the perimeter, guarding.

Do you think the Italians and the Russians knew why you were there? Because, presumably, you said they were volunteers.

Yeh, the Russian girls were voluntary workers, they come out from the occupied areas of Russia, what the Germans occupied, they came voluntary, because they had a lot of freedom, they got paid for their work. They used to, they could go to town and shop in the shops, because from what they had, and what the girls sometimes picked up, when they threw over something wrapped in a package, it must have come from a shop, in a town, you see. Lovely apples.

Did you ever ...

No, I, I, I didn't get anything like that, because as I said, I always tried to keep out of the way, because you got very heavily punished. But my sister got one day punished.

What happened?

Well, they used to deliver the vegetables and the potatoes, they used to come in on very big lorries, and they used to be Russian men, Russian blokes, they used to do the delivery, you know, when it used to be emptied on the ground, afterwards you had to scoop them in, into the storerooms under the buildings, they had like, storerooms, where they used to keep the vegetables, like cabbages, carrots, and swedes, you know those swedes. That's why I have never eaten swedes since the War ended, I just can't eat it. If I was to eat it, I know I'd be ill, because it, it brings me up in a, in a very terrible feeling, you know. It brings it all back to me, because that's the only thing they used to feed us on. They used to cook soups, they used to cook the swede, and to make it thick they used to put in flour, like, you know. And sometimes some potatoes in it. We, we wasn't given no meat, so one day, my sister was out, and she picked up some, some potatoes, and she got caught. And she was put down in the bunker, that's what they call it, in the cellar.

Confinement?

In a confinement, it was called the bunker. And she was there all day for punishment, and there was a tiny little window like, from the ground upwards like, and she, I would go out there, and ask her how she is, say, "You okay? You all right?" And she would cry, she'd say, "Get me out of here." But in the evening, she was set free, and if you did do any scavenging you had to be very very careful. Otherwise you, your head could go. They could hang you for the least little thing. But because they didn't give us such severe punishment, because we've have a very good report, a good report was going into the German hierarchy, that we are very productive, that we are doing very high production, and they used to come and pay us a visit, to control, so everything in the camp would be spick and span, the blocks and everything. The beds had to be just so, you know, had to curve like the Army beds, and they would go into the kitchens, and they would inspect and see what they were cooking for us, like we come home from work, because in the morning, we would, they used to call us out, wake us.

What time?

Used to be very early. But then again, I, after a while, I started working night shifts, so I didn't come into this, this routine.

Well, what was the normal day shift?

Very very early.

Five?

No, it wouldn't be five. They woke us very early, because we had to go out on salapel. Salapel is the counting. We had to stack up in fives, like you see in the Army, the soldiers, and they would count, to see whether we correct, anybody's missing. I don't know what they expected, where us to go. We were like in between Heaven and Hell. I mean, when I stood on the compound, and looked over the fences, I saw nothing, just barren land, fields, and the earth and the sky met, the horizon, you know? It's, I could see so far, and no more, because there was nothing to see. We were like in, in the wilds, you know, in the wilderness.

So you worked from ...

So in the morning, the ordinary shift, they, they, they, yes, they woke them about six, because we used to come home from the night shift, so they would get them up at six, you get dressed and washed, whatever, and you, we would go out on the parade, and we'd all stack up in fives, and they would count, count and count them, and then we march into the kitchen, and you'd queue up, you know, in a long queue, and you'd get your drink of coffee, and your portion of bread, and with that, they march you off to work, after everybody was collected, you know. After everybody had his, his portion of bread, and his, his black coffee. It wasn't pure coffee, they used to burn a kind of bean, like a corn bean, because sometimes you used to find whole ones, it wasn't wheat, I'm sure it was corn. Cos I might find sometimes in the coffee, a whole one, you know. And it was terrible, it used to make you feel very bilious, drinking that on first thing in the morning, you know. Then we'd be collected in columns, and we would march to work, you know. When I used to work on normal shift, it was still in darkness, dark, and through the forests, forest, forest.

You left the camp?

Yes. For work. And, and sometimes, at night, when we used to, have you ever seen glow-worms? They're such little worms, they, they light up. You think it's like a tiny little torch, and there was masses of them everywhere in the forest, but we couldn't see very much, because, because it was dark, pitch dark, and we, what we used to do, twice a day, march there, and march back.

No one ever tried to run away?

Where could you run? You couldn't see your way, it was dark. We always, we, we start work in the morning it was dark, and when we come back it was dark.

Did you ever hear of anybody,

No, no, not from our girls, not at all.

End of FlO6 Side A

FlO6 Side B

Yes, you see, it's like a, it was like an automated routine, you know. That was night and day, and always in the dark. But I, after a while, I was selected, my department, what I did, my kind of work, they wanted us to come and do night work, we had to do night work. So, for some time, I used to do night work, so my shift was different. I worked from 5-5. One week I would work 5 in the morning till 5 in the evening, and one week 5 in the evening to 5 in the morning.

What was the work that you were doing?

I don't know, I don't know what it was all about, it was all metal work.

What did yours involve? Just handling pieces of metal?

My, my, my work consisted of a press machine, a press machine, and these tiny little metal objects that were laying in oil, you know, and I had to put it into this machine, even and levelly, and press. Press. And it made a little shape, it made a little shape like this, you know, and I had to check this. I had a checking machine where I used to put it in, and press the dial, and see whether it's even, if it was the right shape.

But it was boring, and it was something you couldn't understand because you were part of a process?

Yes, but I didn't know what these bits made, because there was all different parts made, and I did this for some time, night work, and also these two women, these two sister-in-laws, the ones that spoke the languages, Russian and German, well, I also spoke German by then. They also worked in my, in my department, and I had a German Meister, foreman, big fat bloke, I remember, he was ignorant, he kept ... One day when the sirens went, when they were trying to bomb the place, but they never could, they never found it, we had to run to the shelters, because the sirens came, and they used to be the warning of the alarm, and they used to show up on, on dials, like you see those things in the Underground station, you know? So it tells you by the lettering, by the signs, what stages we in, and when it came out A, then you had to run for your life, and they always used to run so quick, the civilians, and push by us, cos they were so afraid, you know, and he used to say to me, once he came to my bench, he said, "Die Englishe Juden", "The English Jews, give money to the Government, so they can make War against us Germans." That's how clever he was, as if I knew what it all meant. I didn't even know that people existed in the world any more. I was in such isolation of the world, of anything. There was no radio, there was no, there was no, whatyoucallit? Communication, of any sort, if only hear something.

But in between camp members, what was the, well, there couldn't have been a social life.

No, but we kept together, we made some good friends. Unfortunately I think all my friends must be dead by now, they must have died in Belsen. I know one who must be still living in Sweden, because she was of a group that went to Sweden, 2OO girls. She must be alive, but I couldn't tell about any others. I haven't come across anybody.

Was there, was there particular, peculiarly strong sort of camaraderie between you, or was there a reluctance to enter into any kind of strong friendship, because you know that tomorrow, one of you, one of your friends might not be there? Did you kind of hold back in any way, or were you ...

No, no, I think that there was some good friendships made. Because wherever we travelled, we, we travelled from each camp to camp together. I mean, we all travelled to Belsen from Milhausen, but of course, we were separated, we were allocated different blocks in Belsen, they put so many in this block, they put so many in this. My luck was, I was put in one of the élitist blocks in Belsen, where all the girls worked for something, like in the kitchens, in the offices, you see, in the laundries, and in the baths, in the steam house, and this was the elite, and I managed to get pushed in with other girls.

(INAUDIBLE QUESTION)

Better and that block stood like this, on the gate, as you come into Belsen from the outside, cos the other compounds, when you went to the right, when you turned, was the men's camp, and there was the Dutch camp, Dutch people with their families and children. And, and then there was the openness there. But my block stood here. Like here, by, by the gate, by the fence, and that was one of the best blocks in Belsen, for the others I couldn't swear.

But before you reached Belsen, you'd be travelling with more or less the same 5OO?

The same girls. From being chosen ...

From Auschwitz?

From being selected from Auschwitz ...

September '44.

Yeh, till, till we come to Belsen.

Yeh, that's February or March, '45.

As a matter of fact, I still meet somebody here in England, that I was together, two sisters that are here. I sometimes meet them if I happen to go to market shopping.

They're in London?

Yes, they live in London. Also married, grandmother already, like me. And I meet Rosa and Renia. The girls, I think. One is Rosa, like Rose - Rosa, and one I think is Renia. I meet one of them, not very often, you know, and last time I heard, somebody told me, because they had a little business in Ridley, Ridley Market, Dalston, they had like a little smoked salmon shop, and some months ago I heard her husband had a heart attack. She married here, this girl, married a Jewish man here, and I think he

had a heart attack, and he was in the hospital, that's the last time, but when I met her some years ago, and I wanted to, to talk about our times in Milhausen, ugh! "Please don't talk, please, don't wanna talk." They don't wanna talk because it's so very painful, they don't want to talk about it, I says, "All right."

And so it was possible, it was not possible, it was, you remained friends.

Yes. Yes.

But was there anything different about being in a camp and making friends, than there would be outside the camp and making friends? Was there a different dimension to it?

Well, I suppose it wouldn't be, it wouldn't be the same fight, the same survival theme, you know, that wouldn't be, it would be other things, you know.

What do you mean?

Other things, about different things in life, you know.

You mean you'd discuss different things?

Yes. In the camps was different discussions.

What sort of things were they?

Well, we fantasised mostly about food.

You discussed food?

Yeh, all the time food. Discussing it, and fantasising, "What I'm going to have when the War is finished. What I'm going to eat. I'm going to eat up a whole bread to myself."

These are the things that you said?

That I said, I said one day, I was laying, sitting, I think, on the bunk, with a mate of mine, and we were talking, and I said, "When the War is ended, I'm going to eat a whole bread by myself." And when the time came, that same night, when we was liberated by the British forces, they got busy, and started preparing food for us, and they went to the town of, of Bergen, and they bought bread from the bakeries, because beyond Belsen, Bergen-Belsen, was Bergen, and that was a very sizeable town, and people lived their normal lives, and I don't know whether they knew, or they didn't know what was going on this side of the country, and they brought back bread, and they give each one a quarter of a loaf, and I went as far as two slices, and I couldn't eat no more. Because, before, the little while before we were liberated, there wasn't not, no food, and there was no water, there was no electricity, we were living like, like animals, and dirty, and the place was, was dirty and frozen, the toilets were overflowing with ice, because as the water came down it froze, and there was terrible

terrible mess everywhere, because you couldn't use the toilets, so some people behaved like dogs, and if you pardon me, Robert, they did it on the floor anywhere. And, and I think this also helped me, at times, saved my life, because I wouldn't be caught for work in Belsen the time I was there, because the SS women and the Kapos dreaded going into the toilets, because they were so iced up and dirty and everything, they thought they might catch something, they might catch an infection, so I was safe there, and I hid myself in the lavatory. You see, my nose could take it, theirs couldn't take it. And, and that's where I hid myself, and that, I think, saved a lot of trouble for me, because the few times they caught me for work, I didn't come out so good, that's why I made up my mind that I'm not going to be caught any more for work.

So while you were in Milhausen, you kind of had these food fantasies.

Always fantasising.

What did you miss most, foodwise?

Bread. Bread. Most, it's the bread was important, even today, to me, bread.

Nothing exotic?

No.

Lockschen?

No. No, just bread to eat, bread, plenty of potatoes, you know, and meat, but no, nothing like that, nothing extraordinary.

What were the other things you dreamt about, fantasised about?

I wanted to be free. I wanted to survive. I wanted revenge. I wanted having done to them what they'd done to us. But this didn't materialise.

So these things you'd discuss with your sister and friends?

My sister and friends, we used to sit, Sundays was a free day, we didn't work, so Sundays we would go, after we would be woken up, we'd come out to be counted again, Salapel, that was called, and we'd go to the kitchens, a few girls, we would go to the kitchens and collect the rations, and we'd bring it into the block and we'd share it out, and the breads used to be long, the German breads were like long, imagine split tin, have you ever seen the bread, split tin? Well, that was the shape, so that used to be cut into four, and you used to cover it up with a blanket, so no one can, everybody can have their pick, which one you want. I would say, "I want the first portion," this one would say, "I want the third portion". In four. And everybody would stand there with wild eyes to see maybe her portion was bigger than mine, maybe it wasn't cut so evenly, you know. So after a while, somebody, they scrounged some cardboard and string, and they made a scale. So they made a scale to weigh whether both portions weigh the same. Where do you do such a things in a normal life?

How big were these pieces of bread, were they about the size of my fist?

Well, they could've been maybe a quarter of a pound.

How is that in size? Say slices of bread?

Well, you could cut as many as you wanted to, little small pieces, if you didn't want to eat up a whole loaf, the whole bit in one go.

The size of it, though, what was the size?

Like this, like this.

About 5", 6".

Like this, something like this, you see, like this.

About the size of a big matchbox?

Maybe so wide.

Yeh, a big matchbox. And that was to last you for the whole day?

That's for a day, so I, I didn't keep any for, I used to eat it up all in one go, cos let's say if I put it somewhere it might've got stolen, so the best thing was, is to eat it up all in one go, finished.   I never used to leave something for later or for tomorrow.

And did you make plans, did you think, "When I leave I will travel the world?   Go to America?"

No.   No, that didn't come into it, never thought that far ahead. Well, I didn't have these thoughts, I was thinking of going home. I was thinking of going back to Poland.

But you thought about things like revenge?

Revenge, and fantasising about food, that was the greatest preoccupation - food.

If freedom was on your mind, you must have thought ....

Well, I said to myself, "This must end sometime. This can't go on forever.   How long could we endure this?"

But you were certain you would live it out?

Oh yes.

You mentioned before that someone in Milhausen, a worker, said to you, that the War is coming to an end. So did you take this seriously?

Well, no, it wasn't a worker, it was the SS man. He said, oh yes, we believed him.

Was it news?

It was news. It was a very important news, bits and pieces came in, let's say, when they used to deliver the goods to the camp, those Russian men from the other camp, from Buchenwald, they would drop a couple of hints, because as I mentioned, my, my friend, the woman that I worked next to, she spoke Russian.

So what sort of things would they say? What pieces of news?

They were discussing politics, you know. How things are going. You see, because, because he knew, he must've known, because, you see, for men it was different, you know. Like some of them, you see those films, you know, from escape, you know, Colditz and all that. Men always managed to be in the know, you know.

How?

They, they would get some bits of information from somewhere, you know. And there were also escapes from these places. There were escapes from Auschwitz.

Yes, but not for the women?

Not for the women, because ...

Or not as far as you know, anyway.

Not as far as I know, and not Jewish women either. But there was escapes from Auschwitz, but I never come across anything like this. I wasn't long enough in these places, because after all, from the time of the ghetto to the liberation, to in Belsen, there was what? About eight months altogether, you see.

But you, weren't you agitated at all? Or didn't you think, or wasn't there a thought amongst all of you that you ought to try and escape?

No, no, we couldn't escape. How could you escape, you have, you have soldiers with guns, with rifles, standing watching you.

No, I'm not saying it never crossed your minds, the possibility, but didn't it ever arise as a thought?

No. Not with me. Maybe others, yes, but not with me. I put it all down to, of my youth, because I was a child, literally a child. I wasn't grown up and matured and developed like you see today, the youngsters. It never occurred to us. Where could we run? We couldn't even escape from the ghetto, because you get caught, and you go to the wire fences, you get shot, which it did occur, or there was sometime during that period, in the early part of the ghetto, there was a man and his son, they managed to get through the wires, they got on a tram, the conductor's asking them for payment. Go into their pocket to pull out money, and he's pulling out the Star of David, and

they saw that, what he had with him, of course, he was right away taken off the tram, and marched into German police or whatever there was in Lodz, and the next things we know, they're being brought into the ghetto after they've been sentenced, and they were hanged in the market square. The son, the father and the son. So, what, where do you escape? What could you escape to?

In Milhausen, the Germans who disciplined you and ordered you around were they men as well as women?

You mean the SS?

Yes.

Yes, most. The civilians they had no authority over us.

And were there any examples of sexual abuse, or, you know, just, did they take liberties?

Only, in what kind? Violent?

No.

What. Sexual?

Yeh.

No. No. Nothing like that. Because in our camp, the SS men, if you were of a lower rank, you were not allowed into our quarters, only the very high officers, the whole, the lieutenant, and the, and what was his name? He's a very tall German, he was an officer, lieutenant, very handsome, very handsome, blonde. He used to come in because he was an officer. The SS women, yes, the SS women used to come in, at light out, in the morning to wake us, to get us up, and sometimes they made raids, because, you see, strangers were not allowed to sleep together, but sisters, yes, or cousins, or mother and ...

Why weren't strangers allowed to sleep together?

Because they thought that hanky panky was going on!

Would there have been any hanky panky?

I don't know. But I do know that in my other room, they did separate two girls, they were sleeping together, and I only think they slept together because we, it was very cold, and we had only two blankets, and it was very cold. Even my sister asked me one night whether she can sleep with me, she's cold. So I let her. But what happened? She wet herself, if you excuse me, and she made my bunk wet, because we didn't have mattresses, we had these, the sack filled with straw, and if that rotted away, you've had it. And she made me very wet, and she wet me right up, up my back. I says, "Right, you go and sleep on your own. You're not coming any more in

my bunk." But they thought that was any, what would you call that word? They thought they had something going, you know.

But I'm interested in this, because no one's, whatever the books, and whatever I've heard about the camps, no one's undertaken any study whether there were any sexual relations, or hanky panky, as you like to term it, not I mean, between women, but just amongst any inmates?

You see, there wasn't, because there was such a degree of starvation, and everybody so thin and weak, especially amongst men, and you didn't have the mind for sex.

Didn't have the mind for sex? That's what I was wondering.

But, but I only, to me, I think it's, they wanted to keep warm together, you see. But I don't think it was anything other than that. Maybe yes, maybe yes, I don't know. I don't think I would've paid any attention to it, I wouldn't know, I wouldn't even know what it meant. I was so bloody ignorant!

So as far as you know, the officers ...

Only yes, they could come in.

They didn't abuse their authority in that sort of way?

For sexual purposes?

Yes.

No! No! They only come into see that everything is in order in the blocks, you see. No. And, no, nothing like this. I tell you this, when we used to go once a week, we used to go and use the baths on the other side of the camps where the civilians used to live, the SS women, they had shower rooms there. Our blocks didn't, our block only had washbasins and cold water, and toilets we had. We had like, each two roomed block had two toilets, you see, and had a washroom, but cold water. So once a week, Sunday, we were all, we went all on march, so many at a time, and sometimes the SS women used to say to our Kommandant, he was an old man already, a very tall, big man, and he was Gestapo, cos he used to wear that, the, the marking of the Gestapo, the cross-bomb, what you call it? The skeleton. And they said to him, the SS women, "Why don't you come with, and see the girls, how they're bathing? Naked." You know. He never came, he wouldn't go. Cos he was already an old man, what could it do for him? You see, these are the men that they got these positions because of their age, they couldn't be sent any more to the frontier, they were more like the Home Guard, if you know what I mean. But no, there was no sexual abuse, not to my recollections.

I'm not talking about sex now, but just about kind of passions of pride, or feeling very happy, joyous, or not sad, but feeling very good, feeling as though you're actually ...

Well, we, we, we were more relaxed, it was more relaxed sort of situation, you know, because we were not constantly under, under violation, not being beaten and punished all the time, because we was doing very good work. We were doing good production. I wasn't, in particular, because I, I had been threatened. I used to be threatened, not by my meister, by the foreman, but the General Manager that was sitting in my Department, in a, in an open office, with glass, like you see, like, you know, and he would be sitting there, and he used to wear a black suit, you know. He was well-dressed, grey hair, you know, and he used to, he used to have a false eye, one eye, and I'm sure he could see more from the false than from the good one! And sometimes my production was below what I should, he would threaten me.

With what?

He told me that I must pull my socks up. I must increase my production, he says, "Because if you don't, I, I shall send you back to Auschwitz. And you know what that means, don't you."

But were you given any time, not time, did you ever feel as though you wanted, I can't really put it, not relax, but did you play games, did you sing at all?

Yes. I think some girls did, those that could sing. And there was girls wrote poetry.

With what? Where did they get the pens and papers?

Well, those that worked well, used to get a bonus, and they used to have like a, like a canteen, like a little, you know like you would say in English, a tuck shop? And if you got the bonus you could go and collect it and you could buy what you liked. You could buy a toothbrush, wooden toothbrushes, a toothbrush. There was no toothpaste. You can buy pins and needles, paper to write with, safety pins, cotton, things like that.

No food, though?

No food, no food. And yes, that's why some girls, I remember there was one girl, she was quite bright, she wrote something, she wrote poetry, but I don't know whether she survived, because a lot of our girls were dying out.

Even during Milhausen?

No, no, in Belsen. In Belsen. So I don't know how many there's left of us. It's myself, my sister, and there is those two sisters I mentioned. They didn't come like I came to England, they came through family, they were in Sweden, and they had family, they had an aunt here, and they found their aunt, and this aunt, they had a Jewish butchery shop where I lived, in the West End, they were butchers, and they brought them over from Sweden.

I'm just trying to get an idea of what it was like, of what you felt during, say a day?

During the day?

Yeh.

During the day I was very much ...

End of FlO6 Side B

FlO7 Side A

You were saying you were very introverted during the day?

Yes, I always, I was always afraid that I would be punished, and they might separate me from my sister, and we kept very close, we never let go of each other. If we stood in a contingent, we would stand arm in arm like this, you know, so that they wouldn't tear us apart, and that was my great fear, punishment. Maybe, maybe being sent back to Auschwitz.

But the atmosphere?

But it was lax. Our, our, our camp in Milhausen, it was laxed, you know.

Compared with Auschwitz, you mean?

Oh! Auschwitz was hell on earth.

What was it like compared with now, the atmosphere now, living in l988?

From myself? Ah, words can't describe it. I mean, I am, I'm comparatively happy, you know. I'm free, I have no fears, I'm not afraid of anything, you see. What else can there happen to me?

Is there any situation that you can describe, that would enable somebody who wasn't in Milhausen or Auschwitz, to understand what the atmosphere was like?

In Milhausen, the atmosphere was more relaxed, it wasn't so tense, and you didn't, for a while, you didn't live under constant fear. The greater part was starvation, not enough to having to eat, and cold, because we didn't have heating like, like in normal times, there was no heating, and we used to freeze. Mostly it was, and, and we worked so hard, we worked such long hours.

So, very cold, very hungry, very afraid.

Afraid, fear, fear, mostly fear, and we worked so hard, we worked such long days. We worked l2 hours. We had very little sleep, because they used to wake us at most ridiculous hours, to get us ready, because the preparation going to work, that at least took two hours, by the time they called us out on counting, and after finished at salapel, then we had to go to the kitchens, and queuing, and 5OO people are queuing to get their coffee and their piece of bread. Then again you have to line up, in a, like soldiers in a row, and be counted again. I don't know where they thought we'd gone, or run, after we got our coffee, you know! And then march us off to work, that alone, took two hours or more. If we used to receive five hours sleep, was a lot, because you know, the lights went out, maybe lO o'clock they would turn the lights off, lights out, they would come in and switch off the lights. But even so, we didn't sleep, girls would talk, you see, talking of all kinds of things, reminiscing from days past, and you also couldn't sleep because they were, they were talking, so if you got five hours sleep or so, it was a lot. So no sleep, little sleep, no food, fear, because, being in this place,

though it was so lax, so relaxed, we still knew that we, we, we probably going to end up somewhere else, we're not gonna stay there forever.

Which was what happened in February?

It happened. When the War was coming to a close.

What happened?

Well, there must have come an order from the high up, and we were told that we would be moving out, that we're going, we're leaving this camp, where we're going we don't know, we're not told.

Were you afraid you might be going back to Auschwitz?

That, that thought did occur to us, in case, you know, because we didn't know of any other places, we've already passed a few. We didn't know of Belsen, we didn't know of Belsen, you see.

But you knew the War was drawing to a close?

Yes. Because what, what they were talking about, and that gave us a sign, the information.

Hope?

Yes. They are shifting us, you see, but where to, we didn't know.

So you were kind of stronger for the knowledge that the War was coming to an end?

Yes. Yes, we knew, because we had bits and pieces of news, what, from the German, from the SS men on the train, and he was with us on transport, he said in the fruhling, the War, in the spring, the War will be ended, but how and what and when, who's going to win it, who's going to be defeated, we didn't know.

Yes, so ...

And we also knew a little bit from the Russian blokes that used to deliver the food to the camp in the lorries, the lorry drivers. They were talking with this friend I was mentioned to you, that could speak Russian.

Yeh, so you were moved to Belsen?

To Belsen.

Were your clogs, your shoes and your clothes taken from you?

Oh no. No.

You kept them?

No, we kept it, because we used to wear this, when we, when we arrived in Milhausen, the Kommandant he didn't like the way we looked. We came in these bare heads, striped dresses, clogs is nothing. How would be the reaction of the civilian Germans in the factories?

So giving you these clothes was a sort of public relations exercise?

Yes. So he, he must've ordered for clothes to be delivered, you know, from where and what, I don't know. They arrived clothes, underwear, you know, dresses, and coats, and macs, and we used to wear these going to work, so we should look reasonably decent, you know.

Did you have to surrender them when you went to Belsen?

No. I didn't. We only surrendered one garment, the over, the mac, we had a coat, so in case that was raining when we used to go to work, it would protect us so. But when we got to Belsen, when we went to the baths, when the SS man looked at me and my sister, he said to us, "You're clean enough you don't need a bath." So we didn't get a bath, but we were made to discard one garment, we had to give up the macs. But that I wore the other clothes till, till the liberation. And it was in a pretty sorry sight, you know.

So you were in Belsen for two months?

Something like this.

And what was the work you did there?

In actual fact, not a great many people could work, because, because the people were walking round like skeletons.

So it was entirely different?

It was entirely different. It was a horror camp. It was a waste camp, because there was no work, there was no factories or anything like that. Only the work to, to manage the camp, the camp, you know, like. Inside the camp, what went on, what had to be done, like the cookhouses, the offices, they like keeping records, things, and the, the baths, the people that worked, worked in the crematoriums, and the overseers, you see, the Kapos, these people, and, but other than that, it was, it was a death camp.

And it was even worse than you had experienced in Milhausen, or Ravensbruck, or Auschwitz?

Worse and worse and worse. Auschwitz was hell, but Belsen was living hell, because there, you just wasted away, you, you, there we got even less to eat. There was absolute starvation, and people were dying in the hundreds overnight. The piles of dead bodies lying all over the place. I saw such things that I couldn't believe it. I was

one day selected very early in the morning, dragged out of my sleep, I was sleeping on the floor, I didn't even have a bunk, I slept on the floor, and I was selected, they came in and pulled me out from my sleep, and I had to go out and wait till they collected enough, and we went outside the compound, to the forests, passed the men's camp, so it was in, by the time we started getting there, it was daylight, the sun was out, and as we, and we're looking over to the mans' camp, I can see that bodies are sort of laid one, side by side, like sardines. So I says, "Oh, it's a nice warm morning, sunshine, maybe they're taking the sun", you know.

You really thought that, or just joking?

No, I thought they was sunning themselves, you know, keeping warm, because they were skeletons, they, they, there was nothing of them, you know, so maybe the sun would warm them, and we walked out of the camp, you know, into the forest, and there they were, they were chopping down trees, and we were made to carry the logs back to the crematorium camp, because that's what they used to light the fires with.

Did you know what the crematorium was for?

I, I knew already from Auschwitz. In Belsen they didn't have this. In Belsen they were only burning the people that were dying from starvation. But after the day was finished, we had the same time there, Ukrainian girls, from the Ukraine, and they were bitches, they were so wicked to us.

What were they doing there?

They were, they were Kapos, they were overlookers, like, over us, they was watching us.

They were Jews?

No, they were Christians. And they also had young SS men, young boys, young schnucks, and of course, he's got a rifle, he's tough, so one of them says to him, "This one's Jewish." Because she was dark, and she looked it.

One of the Kapos?

No, one of my friends. And this Ukrainian Kapo says to the SS man, she says to him, "Sie ist eine Jude" - "She is Jewish." He says nothing. He goes over to a tree, he breaks off a branch, sort of, he cleans it from the bark, you know, he strips off the bark, and he beats her, for no reason at all, just because she looks Jewish. He beat her so long that she had gashes in her face, he cut her face open, and that day, when I saw that, I made up my mind, I'm going to get very smart, they're not gonna catch me any more for work. That same night, finished work, we marched back, I look over, it's darkish already, it's cold, they're still laying there. Then I realise that they were dead. Every night they used to take them out, every morning, the ones that used to die overnight, they used to take them outside, they used to take their clothes off, and there was also from what I, well, I've seen it, but from what I heard, was cannibalism going on.

You heard this?

I heard and I saw it.

You saw it in the camps?

Yes. I saw one man, as we come by of the, of the men's compound, and also where the, this side was the Dutch people's camps, and there was the, right at the end of the camp was the crematoriums. And come into the gate, I see a man sitting on punishment, on his knees, he had two bricks in his hand, and he was holding a human ear in his mouth, for punishment, because they were eating human flesh on the men's camp.

You knew that this punishment was an indication that they had eaten?

That they were eating human flesh.

How did you know that that's what it meant?

Why would he be sitting on punishment with a human ear in his mouth?

I don't know, but how did you know it was an indication that he had eaten human flesh? And hadn't just been bad in some other way?

No, but where would the ear come from? It had to come from the human flesh. I also heard by ear, what others were telling me. And I've seen it myself, because I didn't see him eating, but I see him sitting on punishment, with a, with a human ear in his mouth.

And the ear meant, it meant ...

It meant that they were eating it. But this didn't go on on the women's camp.

In the women's camp, there weren't just Jews, or were there?

No, we were, were mixed, there was quite a few nationalities, yes, there was us, Polish, Hungarian, and they also had a block where it was absolutely separate for German prostitutes. The Hungarians and Czechs, we were, and Yugoslavian.

They weren't just Jewish women?

No, not Jewish, Gentiles.

Did you talk to them?

Yes, yes, we used to talk. Everyday conversation, nothing important, you know. But, but there was one block, there was, they had for German prostitutes. They were

also interned, and they didn't wear clothes like we wore, they wore their own clothes, because I saw one of them wearing a coat with a fur collar.

They were prostitutes for the SS, or they were prisoners?

No, no, they were also interned.

If they were prisoners why could they wear fur coats?

They were German, they were German nationals, they had a lot of German nationals, they had the German political prisoners in Buchenwald. That was also just a man's camp, they had mostly, they had, what they put it down to as traitors, and yes, most, also political, German political, you know, and because Buchenwald was built, was for many many years, before the War, when Hitler come to power, when he started on his own people, he started first with the Communists, you see, and when he, when he finished with his Communists, he started on the Jews, with the Jewish Communists. Firstly he accused all the Jews in Germany, they were all Communists, but they were not. They were very high, very important people, you know.

So what was the routine in Belsen?

In Belsen, the routine was of doing nothing very much, unless if you were, if you were caught to work, which I put a stop to that, because I didn't like what was going on. I saw the brutality.

You hid from the work, in the toilets?

I did. I hid. I hid in the toilet.

All day?

No, while they were coming, selecting, then I would come out, and I would spend my, my days just, just being on the spot, doing nothing much. Sometimes I would, I would do some errands for the girls that worked there, in the block.

The Kapos?

The Kapos, and not only the Kapos but the girls that worked in the kitchens, and they used to send me on errands to the kitchen, and they would give me things, and I would smuggle it back into the block.

Food?

That was foodstuff, yes. But of course, if I was caught, I would probably have been hanged. Today, today I wouldn't pinch a buttonhole, but at that time, I was very good at it, because I was so tiny, that I could carry it on person, here, under my coat. You see, I was very small. I wasn't always the way I am today!

But you'd steal?

They would give me, I wouldn't steal. I would be their runner.

Yes, you would take illegally some food at the risk of being caught?

At very great risk.

But now you said, nowadays you wouldn't do anything illegal, at the risk of a small fine.

Never. Never. Not in my life. I don't need to, you see. I've got to eat. I've got a beautiful house to live in. I am free, I'm not living under fear, under stress.

So it's need that compelled you?

Definitely.

What do you think of people nowadays who steal out of need?

People who steal out of need? If they steal food, I understand. But when they steal for luxury.

If they need, if they need ...

If they need to eat. Luxury is whatever they can steal and sell, let's say they're on drugs.

Yeh, if they need the money for drugs.

For drugs. Or steal because they want the same things that other people have got, they can't obtain it in an intelligent way, or work for it, then they can steal, they don't think of the consequences, and that time for me, was also a time of no consequence, and I was in great danger. I could've been killed so easy, because, I'll give you a little example. One day, we was sitting in the block and looking out the window, and it's still late winter, and there is a pile of rubbish outside the kitchen, the cookhouse, from the wastage, from peeling potatoes and things like that. And that pile has already been put disinfectant on it, so no one would touch it, because there was a very big epidemic of typhoid in Belsen, which my sister also became very ill with it. I didn't, I was immune, because when I was five years old, I had typhoid, so that was my, my luck that I had typhoid when I was a child. My sister didn't, and, and we hear a rumpus going on. This girl went to this pile of peelings, and she was digging away, the disinfectant, they threw like a powder disinfectant. Today, you make bleach in liquid form, in those days, it was still so very primitive, you know, it wasn't so scientific as we are today, so it used to be in a powder form. So, can you imagine putting, pouring bleach, and wanting to pick it up? And she was also scraping away the ice, the snow that was covering, and she was caught doing that, and we all gathered in the windows, and we looked out, and the SS man, he started beating her, and he beat her, and he beat her so long, until she dropped dead, from her beating.

And this has always taught me, stay away, keep your head down. Avoid, you know, what you call it, communication with them.

With?

If they don't see you, so you won't be bothered. If you don't let yourself be seen, you know, and that was my, my luck, is because I've always managed to keep my head down, and I used to go with these, to the kitchen, and I would carry things for them, out. They would treat me for it, you know, but at a very great risk to my life. Today I realised it, what a great risk, what a lucky escape I had.

So who were the, the young SS boys?

Well, they were guarding us, you see.

They took, they took liberties?

No. No. No. No, well, you see, also Hitler used to say to them, that to associate with a Jew, is rasserschander. It's shameful to your race, for the German people, because they, they treated us like, like vermin, they compared us to lice, and there was plenty of lice in Belsen. They were walking about like human beings, we were absolutely infested with them, so that's why no German did associate themselves with, with Jewish women. There might have been, but in my knowledge, I don't know anything of such a thing.

Did you know anything of medical experiments?

No. Not till after the War, what I heard. After the War, I was told of certain things, but during the time, I didn't.

If you could watch a film of the Holocaust, for example, everything would be very dramatic, there will be, one scientist in the corner who'll be chopping up a body, another, another German in the other corner, who will be raping left, right, and centre, so you get this, you get this picture of the Germans abusing the positions they've already abused, even further, but your experience, it was just horrible, of course, but rather mundane?

Yes. Yes. I wasn't, you see, because the first years I was in the ghetto, and there we also had no connection with the outside world. The ghetto was run by, like, an inside Government, set up by the Germans, giving, giving these privileges to the Jewish people, and those that were capable of managing, of running things, and the man that was chosen to be President of the Lodz ghetto, was Hyam Rumkowski, was his name, and he, he was very well, what you call it? About organisation, because he used to be the Head, before the War, for many years, the orphanages. He ran the orphanages, he knew how to manage people, you see, and he wasn't a young man even. He was also in his 7Os when this, when the ghetto was set up. And he had the knowledge, he had the wisdom, he was a clever man, he was an evil man, because they say now, that, that he collaborated with the Germans, and, and when he persuaded us people to leave the ghetto at certain times during the ghetto, for transport, for people to go, volunteer

for work, they didn't go to work, they ended up in the gas chambers, in Helmo and other places, you see. And, and that's why he had that dreadful death when he came to Auschwitz. I was told that they, they bunged him in the, in the furnace in the gas chambers, in the ovens, alive, for what he did, because there was people working in the gas chambers, the inmates, that were ghetto people, you see. Some that had been sent to Auschwitz previously, and many, because my uncle, I have an only uncle in Haifa, my mother's youngest brother, he's now 83, he's got a number, because he spent four years in Auschwitz.

Have you got a number?

No, I haven't, because we were from the last ones, and there were so many arriving that they, they didn't have the time, so we didn't receive any numbers you see.

Nor in Belsen, either?

No, no other place did they do this sort of thing, only in Auschwitz, and they stopped it by the time the people came from the ghetto, like, in the liquidation, these people already didn't receive numbers. They didn't have to any more.

So, on l5th April ...

Because they didn't think they were going to keep these people for work or anywhere, you see what I mean? That was the politic of it. They didn't bother to number us, because they knew we were all going to end up in the gas chambers. That was the final solution, is to clear us all off.

In Belsen, then, you were there for two months?

About two months, about seven weeks or so, but they were the worst few weeks of my life.

You said you were liberated on l5th April. Did they, the few days preceeding that, did you know that liberation was coming? Was there some kind of atmosphere in the camp that told you that ...

Well, I don't know an atmosphere, I was already alone by myself. My sister was laying, virtually dying of typhoid.

Yes, but you later met her?

Yes. Many weeks after we were liberated.

And at this time just before the l5th ...

I didn't know that she was alive, because I gave up on her. I didn't go to see her any more, because when she took ill one night, she woke up, and she was burning up in fever, so the following day, I took her on to sick bay, and that was...outside my compound. Another gate to pass through. And that part was a very horrific place to

spend your time in. There were absolutely stacks and piles high with bodies, so I wouldn't chance ...

End of FlO7 Side A

FlO7 Side B

It wasn't a good thing to be caught up in there, because I couldn't go to stay overnight in another block, and I couldn't very well stay in the sick bay, because it was a terrible place to be in, people laying about sick, very ill, dying. People laying in the hallway of the block, dying, on their, on their last breath as you might say, and it was very frightening for a young girl like me, to be left all alone there. So I, I came back to my part of the camp, and, but she was ill, about, she took ill about two weeks before, and when I went to see her on another day, she was in such fever, she was in delirium, and there was no, no medication, they just left people laying there, you know. Just let them die off in their own time. And the worst thing you can do, is to eat and drink when you have, when you are in such a fever, and she was delirious, and she said something to me, very frightening, and I thought that she was going crazy, you know. She said to me, "Have you been down that cellar?" So I said, "No." But I could see it wasn't, it wasn't normal, you know, because she never spoke like that. So I says, "Right, I can't come and see you any more, if you're crazy." So I left, and the couple of occasions that I used to go and see her, I sometimes, when she was a bit better, I would take something for her to eat, and one day, I was attacked on that part, between the trees, there was like a few trees growing there. Two Ukrainian girls attacked me, and they took away from what I had in the little pot.

Food?

Yes, I was taking that for my sister. And they left me standing there with an empty pot, and I was crying like a child, because I got so upset, here I'm struggling to get something together for her to eat, and here they come and pinch it out of my hand.

How did they attack you?

They pulled out the little, little, I had a little enamel pot, you know.

They kind of mugged you with a knife?

No, no, there was nothing like this. No, they just pulled it out, they were, you know, just pulling it, which one is going to get it. And they got it out of my hand, and they, they ate it up and they ran off. And then I, I didn't go back any more, and then I was on my own, but I could see, a few days before the British Army marched in, I could see there was flags, white flags flying.

Where were these flags flying?

They were on a roof, on the other side, on the offices where, they could've been the house, the bungalow that Joseph Kramer lived in.

Who's Joseph Kramer?

He was the Kommandant of Belsen, and, Irma Gris, they were all hung, you know, in the Nuremburg Trials, and she was over the women, and she was evil. She was such a bad person, she was so rotten, you know, the things that she used to put the people

through. She always used to walk around with a whip in her hand, and she didn't care where it flew, who it caught, she was, she was, I don't know, she was so bad, it's something in the personality, whether, I dunno, whether she was angry with the people there, or herself, you know. But she was evil, the things that she used to do. And one day, I notice also the German soldiers were wearing white armbands.

This was just before you were liberated?

Just before, because, because many days before, I used to go outside in the night, my friend wasn't well, so I escorted her out, because she was, she had diarrhoea, and she was frightened to go out on her own, it was the middle of the night, so I came out with her. She says, "I'm so afraid Fela, come with me." So I would sit on the steps of the block, they had like, two little steps, and, and I heard the bombardment.   Boom, boom, boom, the guns, heavy guns, and the sky lit up, so they couldn't have been very far, they could have been probably in Hannover.

You knew that it was the Allies?

Oh yes, must be.   And the sky lit up, red, and heavy armour, you know, boom, boom, boom, you know.

And you knew this meant Liberation?

That meant that something is coming.

Something good?

Yes, yes. And, and the gates after, just before, the gates was left open, because they were already scurried, they were running away, they were packing up, they were running, but they didn't get very far, I don't think, they were all caught, and brought back, all the SS men, and everybody, because Kramer was there, you see, cos I saw him on the day of the Liberation, he was in the camp. They couldn't, they couldn't escape, they were surrounded.

So what happened on this day, can you remember from the beginning?

On this day, a few days before, I could see, what with the white flags, the gates open, but I, I didn't go outside, I didn't.

Could you have?

I could've but I didn't.

Was it possible that you might have escaped?

Yes. Yes, but not escape.

Or ran out?

Just go out. To go out of the other side on the compound, but I wouldn't take the chance, the risk, because just in case, they are, it's a hoax, you know, and you're coming out and you get shot down. But now I know that I could've, but I didn't, because my life was too precious to me. I held on for so long, you know.

Did anyone, did you know of anyone ...

No, no, every, the people was, was, was so weak, they could hardly walk on their feet, I think I must've been one of the strong, sort of strong ones, you know, because I wasn't ill. But there was also many days without water, without food, without light, but I wouldn't take the chance, because I, I could've been shot down. But it wasn't, they were, they already had given in, gave up, because they were under surrender. There was white flags flying on the building, and they were wearing white armbands, the soldiers, but I wouldn't go outside the gate.

So in the morning of the l5th ...

That was before the morning of the l5th, but the morning of the l5th, when we got up the gates were open, yes, I didn't see any more SS men, I didn't see any SS men, any SS women, and I was on, on the best part, I was in the front of everything, you see, cos after all, I was in one of the best blocks, because they were, they were already, the rats were already running, you see, but they were all caught, and brought back. And then, on the day of the l5th, I don't know whether it was ...

The l5th was the day you were ...

I was liberated, yes. The first I saw ...

Of the Allies?

Of the Allies, and the first, the first Ally I saw, was a soldier, an officer in a British uniform, but he wasn't English, he was Dutch, and he was in the car, with a chauffeur, and two nuns.

He was the first one you saw?

He was the first one to, yes, drive in through the gate, and he stopped, and he, he asked for the Kommandant.

Who did he ask?

He asked people, I was also standing around.

Crowding, just to see what was going on?

Yes. And we looked, I looked in, I could see these two nuns, and his chauffeur, soldier, and this officer. Why he came in first, because he had the news that his family, his wife and children were in Belsen. So he came looking for them, but they were not there any more.

So, he came in in his car, you, the situation was that you were all crowding round?

Yes.

What sort of, what sort of feeling was there? Were you silent because you didn't know, because you thought you were going to be transported to another camp? Or did you know this was the end?

Well, we knew that was different, I never seen nuns before. Let me put it that way. But the elation came later, not with the first car. I was sort of numb, I didn't, I was confused, yes. I was confused, I was, "What's this?" Well, he, they were, they told him where Kramer was, and he went to pick him up, and he went in the camp to look for his family, but his family wasn't there any more, because about two weeks or so before, they took the whole of the Dutch people and took them on transport, and the bloke that's in the book with me, that I met at the radio station, was a child from that transport, he was telling me, when we talked, cos I've read ... But later on, when he,

You mean the next day?

No, the same day. When he had gone away, drove away with his car, a little while later, came a, came another, came another officer, he came on a jeep, and we surrounded him, and we were overjoyed, and he, he was a Jew, he was an American officer, he was a Jew.

How did you know he was a Jew?

Because of the way we spoke with him, you could tell, you know. And he said to us, "We can't come and liberate your camp, because you know there's a terrible epidemic of typhoid here, and my soldiers might get affected." But the women started shouting and screaming, "No. Look at us, we're not ill, we're here, we're alive." Well, in the end, in another little while, I saw tanks coming in, tanks rolling in, they were British tankers, and then we knew, we are now free. And of course, as they pulled in, the Armies came in, and when they saw us, they were aghast. They could never imagine what they saw, the British soldiers.

This must've been the first camp they went to?

The first, yes. This particular, what, what would you say? Division, whatever. They probably were the ones that liberated only Belsen, they didn't go anywhere else. And they, I thought they were all going to pass out, you know, because they had never seen anything like it.

So they were silent, and you were jubilant?

Yes. You know? Then there's more. The infantry followed, and then great, great elation, you know, great joy.

From you, or them?

From us, and also the soldiers. After they, they took a good look, and they saw what was going on here, and then they, they, after a while, they, they started seeing to things. They went into the kitchens, and they wanted to know what was the food for us to eat, but there was nothing cooked. But there was standing barrels and barrels peeled and cut in cubes, of swede, and because that's what they were feeding us in Belsen on. And they emptied them out, like into the gutters, in the yard, and soldiers started cooking their own food. They were preparing, they were cooking soups, you know, from us. And that day, and also by the evening, we already had fresh bread.

The soldiers had gone for some bread?

They went, they took their Army lorries, and they went to town, they went to Bergen, and they must have been baking there continuously, probably from the time they, they came on the scene, you know, from the time the soldiers came through the town. And as I told you, all the time I was fantasising, "I'm going to eat a whole loaf of bread to myself." When I had two pieces, I couldn't eat no more, and I think, I was lucky in a way, that I didn't eat more, because I could've done terrible damage to myself, if I loaded up a whole stomach with warm bread, and those that did paid the price.

They died?

Mmmm. A lot of our girls died, because they, they grabbed the food, and started to eat, stuffed themselves, and they died. They became ill, and they died from it.

So what, after the l5th?

Well, then, then we remained in the camp. I remained in my block. I was on my own. I remember one day, on a, on a, on a lorry, some soldiers came, and they had the kind of watches, they must have found, you know, a stack of watches, and they threw to the girls, you know, they emptied them and threw them.

They threw the watches?

Yes. Whoever caught any, I caught one that didn't even work! But I could've, I could've amassed, you know, but I was by myself. I was all alone. I didn't know whether my sister was alive, and I had no interest in plundering and taking and all this. This, this sort of thing was finished for me, I didn't have to do it any more. But, if I was with my sister, I could've amassed a fortune, because I walked in, one day after I was liberated, and I was on my feet a little bit, you know, I began to feel human already, that was only a very short while after, only days, I went into Kramer's bungalow, where he lived with his family, with his wife, and there was things there, you know, there was wardrobes full with goodies, fur coats. And the bed, the bed was undone, and when I moved the pillow, there was still laying, that much of a chocolate bar, under the pillow. That's the splendour they were living, eating luxury and torturing us in the next breath. And then I went down to the stockroom, and there was so much food, to last 2O years storage, and then I went into his, like into another room, where he kept his armour, his guns and rifles, and Lugers, there was a whole wooden crate, standing with pistols, laying there. But what did I need a gun for?

Some took it. Some of the Poles took it, because afterwards they went and done the Germans in, in the villages.

Where were the Germans at this point? In the camp? Where were the guards?

Oh, they were all under arrest, and they were made to work, and clear up the bodies, to clear the camp of all the bodies, to take them away for burial, and I remember this, because I stood watching it. It done me good to see it. That they, they were clearing away, and they were in a terrible state. They looked just like we looked. Dirty, filthy, smelling, unkept, unnourished, and they had to take all those bodies, and pick them up on the lorries, to take them away for burial.

Did some people beat them?

No, because, well, I didn't see it, I didn't do it, because they were guarded by British soldiers, you see. And they were all under arrest, and then when they cleared the camp, they were taken away, they were taken away to prison. And what happened after that, I don't know, but they went on trial. I know Kramer, he, he went to the gallows, and so did Irma, Irma Gris. She was such a beautiful girl. I can't tell you. How can such beauty do such horrific things? She was so evil, I can't tell you.   So that was that day.

How long were you in, how long was it between l5th April, and the time when you left Belsen?

Well, I didn't come to England till October, the 3lst October.

So you were in Belsen, from l5th April till October?

Yes that time, and then we settled in. But we were taken out from the old Belsen, because after a while, they transported us to a new place of Belsen, to a different barracks.

After how long?

I don't know.

A few days?

No, no, much longer. First they came in, and they, and they gave, what you call it? They disinfected us. They flitted in powder into our, into our bodies, into our clothes, and into our bunks, and I was there for a little while, then they, they start clearing out the old Belsen, because they, they burned that down to the ground, from what I was told, cos I wasn't there any more, you know.

You were in the new Belsen?

I was already in the new Belsen.

That's like in May?

Yes, could be May, could be May, it wasn't so long after, and we lived, we lived on the new site. First they took us to, they took us to a bath, and cleaned us out, and steamed us out, and then they loaded us on Army lorries, British Army lorries, and they drove us into the new Belsen.

But you'd left your sister?

I left my sister, my sister was, you might say to me dead, I didn't know of her existence, but she had recovered, she came out through her crisis, she came out of her fever, but it was a terrible place to be laying ill, because I remember, before she took ill, our friend Paula, she took ill, she was the daughter of my mother's and father's friends, and this is also the girl we were in hiding with, and she took ill, because she already had TB in the ghetto, but she recovered from it, she had help, she got better, but she still had a disease, she had the illness. When we came to Belsen, she took very ill, and she was so ill, that she was, she was sort of, in a very high fever, she was failing, she was, you know, failing. She couldn't eat any more, she couldn't do anything, she had a dreadful cough, she cough night and day, and she had so much bread rationed out, saved up, and we asked her to give us a piece, and she wouldn't give it to us. I still remember this. She wouldn't part with her bread. She must have had a handkerchief, a big scarf, all tied up, like, you know, with portions of bread, she couldn't eat it, but she wouldn't give it to us, and we were childhood friends, close friends, can you imagine that? And my sister said, "I think we'd better take Paula to the sick bay." Because my sister wasn't sick yet. And we took her over there, and we took her to the sick bay. My sister walked in, onto the ward, like, you might say, I was left standing outside the block, and round the corner, on the left side of the block, there was such a pile of dead bodies, that they used to take them out and sling them up there. It was the most horrible thing that you can ever see. It's like sometimes you see on the documentary films. And there was women laying in the corridor, like in the hallway, on both sides of the wall, fighting for their last breath. This is the most horrific thing that you can ever witness, to see somebody dying in such a way. And one was nearly there, so one of the nurses comes out, and she says to my sister, "You and her, take this woman and sling her on the pile." I says, "No, I'm not going to do that", I says, "Let her die in peace." And I didn't, and I ran away, and I ran through the gates, out of the, out of this particular compound. My sister followed me, I says, "I, I couldn't have the, the feeling, the thing to do it." You know, taking still a live body, and throw them on the pile of the dead. And then my sister took ill, and we were parted for some weeks, and I didn't know that she was, whether dead or alive, and I was on my own, and I had a bad time because I was terribly lonely.

This was in Belsen?

Yes, and that was, during, during still before the Liberation. And after the Liberation, cos she took ill about two weeks, she, she was bitten by a, by a louse.

You didn't know anyone to go around with?

No. There was, there wasn't anybody, there was somebody to talk to, or something, but, but how can you compare your own to strangers, you see? We were all in the same boat, and I was terribly lonely, and a kind of a madness. I thought I was going to go mad. I was all by myself, no one, it was a most terrible feeling, I've known such loneliness.

But you knew things had come to an end?

Oh yes, yes, because I could see there was something, because they already didn't feed us, there was no water, there was no electricity, you see. And then, then that few days after that, when I saw them walking about with white armbands, the flag flying, I knew it must come to an end. And when it came, it was, it was a day that I shall never forget.

And in the new Belsen?

In the new Belsen ....

Did you have to go to a hospital to have some treatment?

No, I didn't, I didn't, no.

So, what was it that you were doing, just recuperating generally?

Yes, I lived with a couple of friends, we sort of got together, and we lived in the same area, and by the time our group came to Belsen, there was no more houses to be had, no more rooms, so what they did, we went on the compound where they had the artillery, you know, where they use horses, where they carry the big guns, you know? And they had horses there, and they had stables, and they cleaned out the stables, and they, they managed to get, put up bunks for us, and also steel cupboards, like, you know, it must've been like from the soldiers. And they used to have troughs in the yard, can you imagine what I mean? For the horses to drink, and that's where we used to get the water from, because in our stables there was no, there was no water, it was a very big stable, and there was a lot of people living there. We lived together, with strange people.

Just women?

Yes, just women. And you have to undress to get the ... in the morning, you know. There's no one had any, what you call it? No one was shy?

Shame?

No, no one was shy, everybody was so free, you know? I mean, we were used to always taking our clothes off, you see, and, and I lived with three girls, three of us, you know, three girls that I knew, and I used to be the runner, I used to provide, I was the provider.

Because you were the younger, or the fitter, or the cleverest?

I think cos they took liberties with me, I was what you call a schmerel, an idiot. People used me, because when my sister came on the scene, she soon put a stop to that, because they were, they were using me.

How were you used?

Well, I used to do the running, the washing, the cooking.

While they did what?

Providing. While, one friend of mine, she was a much older woman than me, and I don't know whether she's still alive, but she was not so long ago in Israel. And the other one, Aida, I don't know where she go to.

But what did you get in return for running for them?

Nothing. Nothing. There was no question of payment.

No, I don't mean money, but, why did you do it?

Because I just wanted to, it was me. I'm that, I'm that sort, I never know when ...

End of FlO7 Side B

FlO8 Side A

And this older friend of mine, she knew my mother still from years back, so we got sort of friendly, and she would lay on the bunk and smoke all day, because I used to get lots of cigarettes from the English soldiers, and I never smoked at that time, because I could buy things with cigarettes, you see. The men, they didn't get cigarettes from soldiers, especially the Poles, the Polish men, they liked the smoke and they liked drinking, and I could buy things off them, cos one day, I bought lovely meat, they went in the villages and they, they beat up the German farmers and they, they bring in a cow, in the camp, and sometimes at night, I could hear them making noises, you know, mooing, and they would slaughter a cow, and they would sell the meat for whatever people could pay with, but I had cigarettes, so I would buy it with cigarettes, and sometimes they went catching fish in a, in a special breeding pool, such carps, such carps they brought, and I would buy them, and I would cook Polish fish.

Whilst in the Camp still?

That was after the Liberation.

Where were all the facilities, who provided them?

For all this, they used to go and rob.

Who's they?

The Poles.

No, but to cook, for example.

Well, I, we had a fire, an open fire, I would cook on an open fire, you know, like you see the gipsies, like camping, you know. And one day I bought a big lump of meat, you know, for a few cigarettes, and this Madam would sit, would lay on the bed, and because she was a smoking person from before, cos she was, she must be now well over 8O if she's still alive in Israel, and I didn't mind, I didn't care because I didn't smoke, and sometimes also I, in the early time, I would get up very early in the morning, and I would walk to the villages, and I would tell them who I am, and they would, they would give me something in food, like. They might give me some eggs, some butter, maybe some, maybe some sausage, milk, you know, and we were living good after that. But when I met my sister, when one day, like God would give Friday, I used to go out to the troughs because there was the taps of water. I had a very big pot of potatoes to cook, because there was three of us, and I went out to wash them after peeling, and fill them with water for cooking. When I'd done that, previous to that, I met some girls, and they said to me, "Do you know, we saw your sister Mania." "I think you're making a mistake." I says, "You couldn't have seen my sister Mania, my sister Mania died many weeks ago." They said, "We have seen her." I says, "Where's she live?" "Oh", they said, "Well, that we don't know, we met her in the camp like, in the streets. She lives somewhere around here I think." And that was that, they walk off, bye bye. And after, after a few days, it was Friday when I go out

to wash my potatoes, when I done, finished, I'm picking up the saucepan, and I'm standing up, and I'm turning to go. I freeze where I'm standing, and I see her coming, approaching with two other girls, they've already been discharged from the hospital, they recovered from the typhoid, but they were very skinny, hair crawling out, she was very puny, she shuffled along, cos she was weak. She wasn't 2O, 2l, she looked like 8O. I can't tell you of the meeting. When she sees me, I'm already recovered, you know.

Dolled up?

No, not dolled up! I didn't have any clothes, it was, it was clothes that came in, like, for refugees, from England, so they told us to go to this and this place, and pick up something that fits you. That time, something still fit me, of clothes, today I'm not so lucky to get anything to fit me! I have a great problem in getting something to fit me. Either it's too, too long, or it's not wide enough. But anyway, I got something, I picked myself out a little skirt, with little candy striped blouse, with a peaky collar, and a little jacket. I've got the outfit on a picture from the first, from the first Jewish Canadian Brigade that came into Belsen months after, and they photographed, they were the Ambulance Corps, so we were all in a group. I stand here, on a side, and my sister on the other side of. And, and there was a whole bunch of boys and girls, you know, and this, this Canadian soldier, he's sitting on the floor, and somebody's taken the picture, and I've treasured this. I'll never part with it, because I shall never look like that again, you know. With my hair short, only about here, cos I mean this was what, only about, not even a year since I had my hair shaved off. And she looks at me, and, and the river of tears, and we cry, and we scream, and I tell her to stop, I tell her to be grateful that you've survived, that you are alive. So she said, I said to her, "Where do you live?" She says, "Just down there." She was only two blocks away from me. But we were so many of thousands of people, we were so overcrowded that that's why it took us weeks to bump into. And she also didn't wander about too much, because she was weak on her legs, so I said, she said, "Where do you live?" I says, "I live in the stable." So I made her come back with me. She said goodbye to the other two girls. She shared a room with two other girls, two Polish girls, Christian, not Jewish, that had also recovered from typhoid. And she came back with me. I sat her down, and I gave her something nice to eat. She couldn't get over it, what I had there! I had cooked up for Shabat, for the Sabbath. I had fish, meat, I was, I was cooking a big pot of potatoes, all food, isn't it disgusting the way I talk about food!

But it's possible that you might not have met her, and you left the camp, and you could've thought her dead.

Yes, yes, yes. And she, she looked so puny, her eyes were sunk in, you know. She wasn't the same beautiful girl, the beautiful natural blonde, she had such beautiful corn blonde hair, very unusual colouring. We all kids had all different colour hairs. And then we, we, we got together, and when she recovered, we came to live together. We shared a room. And a little while after, there came an order, they were taking us out on a transport, the British soldiers. They were taking us to, like, to give us a little holiday, you know, in a different area, to come out of this atmosphere. And they took us to Lingen.

Lingen?

Lingen, it was called, I don't know where it is.

This was when? Mid-October?

No, no. Some time in July, some time in July already. That was in July, the summer, beautiful weather. That's when I became a woman, no, not through a, a man didn't make me a woman! A man didn't make me a woman! I, you know what I mean? I came into puberty, is that it?

Yes.

That happened one day, "Oh", she said, "you're a woman today."

Was your sister, was your sister at this point, was she equally a woman?

She was a woman at the break of the War, she was l2 years old, she became pubic, but in the War, that was cut off from her system, she never saw any more periods till, till the summer, like me, of, after she recovered, she came to herself. I got a picture that she sent me, she was so fat, cos I came to England in October, and in l946, when she's recovered, she send me a picture, she is so fat, because you do get very fat after typhoid, because that happened to me as well. But that soon levels itself out, you know, because a lot of people that suffered from malnutrition, and this sort of illness, get fat, but, but that soon stabilises itself in your system. She wasn't, after a while, when I, when I saw her again, when I saw her, the first time after I went to Israel in '58, I hadn't seen her from '45 till '58, she was, well, she was already the mother of two children. The boy was what? The boy was l2, my nephew, my nephew Abi, and Zippy her daughter was lO, so since '45, she was slim, she was nice. Her hair was beautiful, always kept.

But in July, '45, you were sent together, you were together at that point?

We were together after that. After we met each other. But when she recovered, when she could come out from the living quarters that she shared with two other invalids, you might say, we came, we found the room, we were allocated a room, and we lived together, and then they came, and they wanted to take us out somewhere.

Who's they?

Well, the British Authorities, the people that, they looked after us, you know. The British Command that took, took Europe you know, and there were also certain Jewish people that sort of got themselves involved in running of Belsen, the camp, you know, so they took us on a transport, big lorries, big Army lorries came for us. We packed up our little belongings, what we had, and they took us to Lingen. We got to Lingen, so they allocate us into barracks, like, blocks, and there was no, no bed, so one day we made our way to, to the village, to the farmland of Lingen, because that was a very large farm area. Even when we was going through on the lorries, the

fields, the potatoes were not yet picked, the Germans ran away. They left everything as it stood in their houses and on the land, so the, the lorries stopped, the British soldiers stopped with us, and many people went over to the fields and picked new potatoes, and we went into the houses, and, and there was, the houses stood, you know, except the people ran away, they were so frightened, because, they were frightened in case they, they be occupied by the Russians, because they did some terrible things to them. They killed them, they raped the women, and they were very afraid that they shouldn't fall into the Russian hands.

They were afraid they'd be treated like Jews?

Mmmm. And they, they ran for their lives. And that was before we come into Lingen, in the countryside, the farmland. So people picked potatoes. I went into a house, I went in the kitchen, and there were certain bits and pieces in the kitchen, like groceries, so I took something.

So the house was deserted when you went in there?

Deserted, and stood as it stood, beautiful houses, you know? Houses standing on their own ground, not like lots together, semi-detached, or something like here. And there was everything, everything stood as they left. And there was beautiful homes, and I could see they had some beautiful paintings on the walls, you know, and everything, art works, and then we went further, we stopped, we ate, the English soldiers made tea for us, they made in cans. They had biscuit tins, so they made this instant tea. The Army tea. I didn't like it, I never liked tea, not for many many years, I never drank tea in England. And we went off, and we rode off again. We came into Lingen, in this camp. You get there, you get allocated a room, no beds! Where you gonna sleep, on the floor? We had no bedding. So the following day, my sister and I made our way into the village, but it was a beautiful town, Lingen, because we went into the bakers there to buy, we went into the butchers shop, we bought sausages.

You had money?

Yes, we had some money given to us.

By the British?

Yes. And, and we went further into the village, and we came into this house, and we went upstairs in the bedrooms, and there was standing a beautiful wide bed, like Italian, with all the, they had like flowers on it, embossed, carving, so we took it apart, my sister and I, and we did a couple of journeys, and we carried the bed back to our camp, to Lingen, so we had a bed to sleep on. It was a single bed, but it was a large single bed, you know what I mean? And we stayed in Lingen for a little while, and then again they're shifting us, and they shifted us to Diepholz, it was called, Diepholz, a German place, that was also an established camp, but, but some of the people from there had already left, and it was standing empty, so it was more like a holiday camp to us, and it also was adjoined onto German, German houses and German gardens, because I remember one day, coming out of there, and going into this German garden, she didn't like it, she was having a fight with me, because I was

picking her gooseberries off, off her bushes. And I caught, I caught myself with a gooseberry thorn in my finger, and I paid the price for it, because it got infested, and I had a terrible finger, that's why I've got a, I've got a disfigured finger here. You see, I've got flesh missing, because the way it had to be removed. The French doctor he, when I went to him in the sick bay there, he was so bloody cruel, he held my finger, and he took the scissors, and he cut all the rotten flesh away, off my finger.

With no anaesthetic?

With nothing, as I stood there. You know, as I stood there, the nurse held me, and he just cut away, and he took on a swab, and he dug into that hole here.

Don't! I've had this done, and I'd rather you not went over it.

What?

I've had the same thing done to me, and I know it hurts, and it just kind of hurts me to remember it.

Really! Oh! And I had a very bad time with this, because I had to bandage it, I had to bathe it, and when the bandage used to stick to me, I used to rip it open.

Oh, shush!

Don't be so soft! And I had to use a certain powder, and that used to be every night, every evening I had to do that. And it took me a long, long time to heal. And for a long time I couldn't hold anything. I couldn't hold anything. If I held a needle to sew, I had to do it this way.

Yes, I had the same on my thumb.

It's a terrible thing. You don't feel so good?

No. I just remember the pain, cos it still hurts me occasionally.

Yes, I know. But, see, that's why I've got, it never grew back, you see. But he, he was a dreadful, he wasn't a very caring doctor, I must say.

This was in one of the camps, and presumably they didn't have any equipment to deal with people?

Yes, that was in Diepholz, and we stayed there for a little while, because it was summer, it was in the country. We were free to go anywhere we want, and we met people, and I met English soldiers.

This was the first time you were free in your adult life?

Yes, yes. I was l8. I went on, I went one day, maybe twice, on a, on dates, English soldiers came into the camp, and they wanted to take girls out. I went with one, we

went for walks. We went in the fields, we were sitting in the cornfields, cos it was already cut, I remember it was, it was very spiky to walk on it. We sat down, we talked. I didn't know any English, but I don't know how I made myself understand with him. He was a very nice, charming soldier, dark, I remember, and he had a moustache, a very thin moustache, and he gave me a, he gave me a bar of soap, a present, a very big bar of soap, they don't make them now any more. It was like a big pear shape, and he gave me cigarettes. And we talked, and we talked, and he asked me questions. I couldn't say words, I used my hands and my feet, he seemed to enjoy the conversation. So a couple of times I went out, you know, they come calling, because they heard girls, girls, you know, girls! And it was a very pleasant time of my life, that time. Very enjoyable, and then after some weeks, they took us back to Belsen, we were recuperated as they say. And life was sort of, going about with nothing much. I didn't work, it was a kind of ...

Holiday?

Holiday time. Lazy life. There was no, no work, no employment of any sort, everything come, you were given to eat, you know. And we used to go out, and, in Belsen, they had, they had a cinema and a theatre. That must have been for the German, the German soldiers when they were there. And they used to bring different entertainments for the English soldiers. So some days they would have films, so you would, you could pick up a soldier, you would stand there, and you ask him to take you into the cinema, and they would take you in. Some would get fresh. I know one got so fresh, my sister screamed something awful, I think he must've, you know, touched her knees or something! And we used to go to cinema, and sometimes they used to bring in, like, shows, and, and we used to go in as well, they used to take you in as a partner.

I find it odd listening to you speak about going to the theatre, having listened for the past few hours, you're talking about being shuffled from one camp to another. So you, I mean, I find it odd just listening to you talking about it. What was it like to, you know, being in a ghetto for four years, and in a series of camps for about eight months, and then the possibility of going to a show?

Well, afterwards, it was a very carefree life, you know. And that was forgotten, that was put aside. We didn't have the time to grieve, or to sorrow, or for sorrow.

You didn't have the time? You mean you chose not to grieve?

We didn't chose, we chose not to grieve. The times of crying was past. Now was the time for the good life, you know what I mean? You pick up the pieces of your life, and I was young, I had no worries. I didn't think a great deal of anything, you know.

What did you think initially you might do? At this particular moment, when you were going to shows?

I didn't. I didn't. It was just a good time. Having a good time.

You didn't think where you might possibly go or what you might do?

No, I didn't know, at that time I didn't. Not till a little while later when the opportunity arise.

Very much kind of living for the day?

Yes. Yes.

Thinking not beyond that?

Yes, yes, we didn't know where we are going to end up. We already, we didn't want to go back home, because we realised there's nothing left. Not our home.

You mean in Lodz?

Yes. Not our home, nothing of the home. But all our family was gone, so we had to start something new, a new life.

So what were the decisions that you made, prior, prior to leaving for London?

No, I didn't make any decisions. I just carried on from day to day, you know.

But on 3lst October, you left for London?

Yes, because before that, one day, where I lived in the, when we come back from Diepholz, we settled into Belsen again. I lived with a bunch of girls in a very big room. And the block alteste, the man, he was a Pole, he came in, and he asked who is of the age of l6? I said, "I am." I didn't look l6. I looked about l2.

You were l8 or so?

Coming up to l8. I couldn't, I looked so little, you know. My hair was straight and short, I used to hold it up with a, a what you call it?

A clip?

A clip, mmm, you know, I wasn't painted, I didn't wear no make-up. I was small, and very slim, so he took it for granted I'm l6, you know. So I said, "I am." So he put my name on the list. When this list was compounded, I was the first one on the list.

Did you know what the list was for?

He said ... he said, "I have, I have an order here to register 5O kids, 35 boys and l5 girls."

For what purpose?

To go to England for a while.

And you immediately said yes?

Definite.

Even though it meant leaving your sister?

I also had a romance going which I didn't want, you see what I mean? I didn't want to get myself tied up to this guy, cos I was too young, like they say "Too young to die", I was too young to be married, he wanted to marry. He was, he was, he was four years older than me, he was 22, a young Polish boy from Krakov.

It would mean leaving your sister, going to England?

But I, I wasn't going to come here for permanent, it was only going to be like for a six months holiday, but I wanted, I wanted to avoid the romance.

That was primarily your reason for leaving?

I didn't, and when he asked me, how you going? Where you going? I said, I said, "My family in England want me to come for a holiday." Which of course I lied to him, because I didn't want to get serious, I didn't wanna get married, I've only just got liberated, in May, in April, and I'm leaving for England in October. And when I told him that I'm leaving, the poor sod was standing and crying his heart out. Here, a tough guy, went through four years in Auschwitz, he also had a number, a young chap, Polish boy, and he's standing crying there. And also I didn't like, he was a drinker, you know? And I don't like that, I don't like in men, when they drink heavy, so, so I said, "I've got to escape, I've got to run somewhere. I don't want to get married yet." So he took my name down, the block alteste, and he said, "You'll have to go there and there." Because I had X-rays done, we had to wait a little while, till everything was processed. I had X-rays done, I remember, and I was as clear as a bell. I had injections given to me, some terrible injections, my arm hurt for days and days, and then we had to come to a meeting point. But some of the Orthodoxy ...

Jews?

Yes, in Belsen, they didn't want us to go to England. They said that we, they will assimilate us into Christianity. But the boys, they didn't want to hear of it. They went to the offices, let's say like, to the office of the Rabbis, Rabbinat, and they created a rumpus there, they smashed up the offices ...

<u>End of FlO8 Side A</u>

FlO8 Side B

You had to give into the demands of ...

They did, yes.

The Jewish boys who wanted to leave for England.

Yes. Yes.

Where would the Rabbinat, the Orthodoxy, have preferred you to have gone?

To have remained in Germany still, till eventually, go somewhere else, I don't know where they wanted us to go, because we knew, we knew we can't remain in Germany, and there was no such place as Israel yet, I'm talking l945. Israel hadn't become independent till '48.

But was there any possibility of going to Palestine?

I didn't think about that.

Well, had ...

Yes, they could've, because I think they were preparing for that, they were preparing the people, the ones that are remaining, to go to Palestine eventually, and a lot of them went even illegally, my sister, my sister was incarcerated in Cyprus, in l9, yes ...

At the same time ...

Yes, my sister didn't arrive in Israel until January l949.

Why didn't you want to go to Cyprus with your sister?

I was, I was already in England, in '48 or so, or before that.

So before you left for England, you were planning on returning to Belsen six months later.

Well, this was supposed to have been, you see, we were only supposed to come here for six months, so we, we were taken by lorries, when we was already given the okay that we can go to England, we was taken by lorries, we had to assemble in a place, the weekend. It was on a Friday we were supposed to fly, but we couldn't, they took us to Sellar, because that was Army, Air Force base, and they were very, very kind to us, they gave us a party of our lives, because it was coinciding with Chanukah, you see. And we went to Sellar, and we stayed there, because, there was bad weather across the channel, and the planes couldn't fly, and not only that, we were not flying in luxury planes, they brought us over in Dakotas, they're like sardine tins, we were frightened to stand up in them, in case, in case you put a foot through, and we stayed

over the weekend in Sellar, and then Monday, and all that time, I was so nervous, I only hope my sister didn't tell him where I went.

You were nervous because of the boy?

The boyfriend, my boyfriend. I was nervous that he could follow me up to Sellar. And I hoped, and I told her, "You mustn't tell him." And afterwards she told me that he blamed her, for me going. And when I, when I went to this place that morning, to see whether we're going to leave, I ran back to say goodbye to my sister, so I ran to avoid his, his block where he lived.

You went round the camp instead of through it?

Yes! Yes! So I went a long way to avoid him. Because he used to work in the kitchen, and this, the kitchens used to stand like, in the middle between the blocks, and you could see, so I would run from behind, around, so that he couldn't see me. And I ran to my sister, and I says, "I'm going today, we're leaving today. I've come to say goodbye." It was very early in the morning, I still remember, she was still in bed, and I said goodbye to her, I says, "I must run now", I says, "Don't tell him where I've gone." And when I got to the place of assembly, there was lorries waiting for us, British lorries, soldiers, and they took us to Sellar, but I was very nervous that weekend, we couldn't fly for two days. But he didn't come, and the following morning, Monday, there was better forecast, the weather cleared, that was October 3lst, and we sat, we were there at the airport, we were marched on to the tarmac, and there was a Dakota, waiting for us, and we went on this plane.

Did you know any other girls at the same time, at that time?

No, I didn't know none of these girls. They were all strange to me, but we became friends here, cos we lived for some time in England together, in different hostels, you know. So we started to fly, well, it doesn't take that long to cross the Channel from Germany, what, a couple of hours? We arrived in Southampton, also on a, on a military airport, Air Force base, and we got off, we, we, they walked us into the barracks, into the dining hall, and there was these ladies coming to meet us. They were from the Jewish Committee, from Bloomsbury House. YOu know where Bloomsbury is? Bloomsbury Street? Off Tottenham Court Road? Well, that was the Jewish Refugee Committee, and they were in, in charge of all this, and they had these very rich ladies dressed up in fur coats, because it's, it's already October, and they marched us in, in these barracks, and there was tables laid for lunch. I still remember it till today, we had tomato soup.

What else?

I don't remember any more, and we had all given an orange, I shall never forget this. And these ladies took care of us. These beautiful dressed up ladies, these rich, Jewish ladies.

Your stomach was okay by then? You could take all the food?

Oh yes, because, I mean, that was already months after from the time I was liberated, you see, and they were very nice, and very kind.

Speaking German to you?

No, I don't know what they were speaking! English. I understood a little bit, you know, I already picked up a few words from the English soldiers that I used to go out on dates with, you know, and also from the cinema, from going to see films. I'm a quick picker-upper, you know? Got a good ear. And then they start making preparations for our journey further, you know, from the airport.

How were you received at Bloomsbury House? Was there a kind of great celebration or were you just another load of Jews ...

No, no, nothing special, nothing, it's these ladies, they belong to this, they were charity workers, you can say, and, and then there was coaches waiting for us, and they put us on these coaches, and we start on our journey. And of course, it took a little while to get to where we was going. We was going into Durleigh, that's Southampton, in Durleigh, and it's also between Winchester, not far from where we were in the hostel, but they was already, when we arrived, there was already children there, that come from a different part of Germany, and we journeyed through the darkness, and as today, was beautiful in the afternoon, with sunshine and dry, that's how it changed in no time, but by the time we arrived in the hostel, in, in Durleigh, it came down cats and dogs, it poured of rain. I says, "Oh my God! Does it always rain like this in England?" You know? Anyway, we arrived in the hostel, and we arrived there just before dinner time, and of course, there was other kids, they come to greet us.

Jewish?

Jewish children, yes, from other parts of Germany.

It was a Jewish hostel?

There was another l5O boys.

Jewish hostel?

Yes, oh yes. Very observant. Shabat. Kosher. Mmmm. No smoking on Saturday, but at that time I did not smoke, but by the time I, I ended living in Great Chesterford near Cambridge, I already smoked, so for spite I used to smoke, cos it was also very frum there.

Very frum?

No, not me, but the Hostel was. So we arrived in Durleigh, it was beautiful and warm, and bright, and clean, and soon we had dinner. They had to do two settings, because we were over 2OO children there, you know, so they had two settings of dinner, you know. And we had dinner, and then they took us up to our rooms, and

there was this very large room I shared with many girls, we had double bunks, one bunk, two bunks, no more. And bathed, we bathed in beautiful bath, very huge, it was like a mansion house, they, they rented this property. The Bloomsbury House, they rented this property from some very wealthy people, and they made up like dormitories, you know? And I was on the, on the first floor, and it was a very very huge room, whoever had this bedroom, very wealthy people. It was a very big property, it had a tennis court, they had stables for horses, but there was no horses any more, probably for ponies, you know, and they had an orchard round it. It was a very big property.

All organised by the Bloomsbury organisation?

Yes. Yes. They were, they were the Charity Organisation, they always managed with refugees, even before the War, the ones coming from Germany, you know. I don't know where they operate now, because I don't think they're in Bloomsbury House any more, in Bloomsbury Street, they might have offices in Woburn house.

They were called, what were they called?

They were the Jewish Committee, Bloomsbury House, in Bloomsbury Street, just off Tottenham Court Road, you come down to Holborn, around the British Museum, and later years, I lived in Woburn Square ...

Opposite Woburn House?

Around the corner from Woburn House; I lived in Woburn Square, and Woburn House was in Tavistock Square. So, we bathed, going to bed. How can I go to bed? I've got nothing to wear. I needed pyjamas. Well, they gave us pyjamas, because they already had stacks of clothes, like, waiting for us, and we went to sleep that night. In the morning we got up, we came down for breakfast, I didn't like the breakfast, I didn't like the English cheese, I didn't like porridge, ugh! So I didn't eat the cheese, and I didn't eat the porridge, and they gave us all vitamin pills, and there they couldn't stop feeding us. We had five times a day to eat there. Breakfast, elevenses, lunch, teatime, suppertime, and if you wanted something else, later on, maybe lO o'clock, a glass of hot milk, with a roll or a bun, or a cake, you could get that as well. They, they couldn't stop feeding us, all the time, the whole day was occupied with eating! And other activities, we lazied around, we listened to music, we used to go for walks, we had lots of toys, lots of games, books, lots of puzzles, to put puzzles together, we had a very big common room, it was called.

What were the ages?

Well, we were only supposed to be up to l6, l6, maybe from the other places they took them l8, but there were some, I was told, that were well over 2O or more, but they didn't look it, boys, they were so thin and puny, that you couldn't tell whether they could be close to 3O. I met there a little boy that also came from another camp, that was from Lodz, not far from where we lived, in our neighbourhood, and he knew me, and he asked me about my brother, cos they were mates, they were running round playing in the streets together. I told him that he's not with me any more, you know.

He said, "Him? He couldn't make it?" I got that boy on a picture, on a very big photo from the press, you know, when the press came, I got a couple of pictures, I've got that boy on one of the pictures, he's sitting next to me, in the common room.

Did you have any trouble or difficulties with the language or the customs, and just kind of generally adjusting yourself?

No, no, what customs? About how to eat with a knife and fork, or things like that?

No, I don't mean that, I mean ...

What customs?

You'd lived so much of your formative life, either in a ghetto, or in the camp, and there you were thrust into a semblance of freedom ...

No, no, I, I, I accepted, I managed to get into things, the swing of things, you know.

But was it difficult to adjust at all, or not?

No. No, not at all. I learned English pretty quick, they were really amazed, some people that we visited in Portsmouth for Christmas, they invited us, and when they heard me speak, and they heard my other friends speak, you see, so they couldn't understand why I speak better than them. Why I haven't got an accent as strong as they did. Because I always, right away, I tried to, how should I put it? To put my tongue right when I speak, you know, the pronunciations.

Yes, and tone.

Yes, because I used to listen. The, that, then, you see. But from, from, from Durleigh, we were sent on after a while, they disbanded that place, because that place was only hired, rented for a while.

For how long?

I don't know how long.

How long were you there for?

Not very long. Not very long. The only way I could tell properly is by my Identity Card, I've still got my Identity Card, cos in every place we moved to, we had to go to the, to the Police, to be registered and they had to stamp.

But after six months?

Well, when we stayed here six months, we were at that time, already in Great Chesterford, in Cambridge, near Cambridge. And it was a beautiful country place, and there were also children that came over before the War, German Jewish refugee children, you see. Like some they showed the other week, that they're making a

gathering of all these that came over before the War, and they must have been the same children in this hostel where we were, in Great Chesterford, and they were here since before the War. Some were all different ages, and they were already going to school, and, and they spoke fluent English, because they come here very young. I've got pictures of a whole bunch photographed in the garden, all the children, some could've been 7, 9, lO, some were big girls, some were maybe l4, l3, something like this, nice kids. We got on very well, and we stayed there for a little while. And then when we were there, the young Jewish students in University in Cambridge found out there is children from Europe, so they came to see us, and they invited us to their rooms, like they call, in the University. And they entertained us sometimes, Sundays, for tea, in their rooms, and they made us bread, and they would take us for walks, they would take us showing parts of Cambridge, universities, and they were very nice. I don't know what happened to them now, they must be all older than me, cos, one particular, Ruth, I think, I've got her on a picture, she was studying, she was much older, she was quite a grown young woman, she was studying something to do with water, what you call this? The purifying of water, and, and there's a word for it, but I can't think off hand.

Desalination?

You see, all to do with water, she was studying all this, you know, how to make good water, you know, all this. She was ever so nice, she was a very nice young woman, so all these students must be pretty old by now, because I am old, I'm 6l, and they were older than us.

So this six month period was up.

Yes, yes.

Did you have the option to return to Germany?

If I wanted to. Then one day came news that it's been postponed, we can remain here indefinitely.

So, did you sit down and think, "Do I want to go to Palestine, or do I want to return to Belsen, or do I want to stay here."

No, no, no, I didn't think of Palestine, I was doing fine here, I was happy.

You didn't want to see your sister? You weren't eager to see your sister like that, in that sort of way?

No, I didn't want to return, I had this fear, you know, of something else.

This boy still?

This boyfriend.

Still?

Mmm. And I didn't want to return. I was writing to my sister.

And what were her feelings at the time, what were her intentions?

No, not at all, she was having a good time, she was going about with her friend, she went on the American Zone, and they had a jolly good time.

And she was intending to go to Palestine?

No. She was still single then. This didn't come about till after she married.

So, more or less she remained for the next couple of years or so, in Germany?

She remained until some time in '48. But at that time, she landed in Cyprus. She was incarcerated in Cyprus with a whole group of people, they were going to Palestine. But she also had no intentions of going to Palestine, to Israel, because, because she, they wanted to remain, they wanted to go somewhere else, but it wasn't easy to go anywhere else, because they didn't allow people into other countries at that time.

So, so you were having ...

But because she didn't have anywhere else to go when she married, and had little children, so they went to Israel.

And all this time, you were still in Cambridge, having more or less, a whale of a time?

I was still in, I was in England, I was happy. I put my life behind me.

Did you have a job at all?

No, I didn't work then yet. I put my bad life behind, I buried it. Out, as they say, "Out of sight, out of mind", I buried my past. I didn't, I didn't want to dwell on it, because it wasn't doing me any good to dwell on it, and it doesn't do me good now to dwell on it, that is why this has been buried for over 4O years, it's only just now that it's coming out, and after I've done what I've done, I think I'm going to bury it again, and I'm not going to live with my past, because it is too, too destructive to me, because I can become very ill, very quick, and I can't allow that. I'm growing old, I've got to think of other people, not just myself, I can't wallow in my miseries, in my pains.

So you put this behind you at the time, as you are now.

Yes I did. Because life was so lovely and pleasant here for me, you see, without any cares, without any worries, I hadn't worked, I had the leisure time, in Cambridge, and then we came back to London again, and I lived in London for a little while.

With friends?

With friends, yes, and there was also other, other boys, there were some boys, also in the Shelter, that's in Mansell Street, there was a shelter also for refugees, off Aldgate, and I stayed there for a little while, and then the Bloomsbury House made different plans for us. And I enjoyed living in London, I enjoyed living in the East End, because the East End was not like the East End of today.

Where was it that you were living in the East End?

I lived just off Aldgate, in Mansell Street, you see.

Whitechapel?

Before Whitechapel. Whitechapel is past Gardeners Corner, further down. That was Aldgate East, Aldgate. Do you know that area?

Yes, near where Blooms is now?

Yes, before there, it was lovely. Blooms was marvellous, I tell you, and everything at that time, in the East End was marvellous.

Brick Lane?

Yes, it was marvellous. Lots to do, lots to see, I made some aquaintainces, some people, and we lived a little while in the Shelter, and there was some other boys, from a, from a different hostel they came. One boy is also from Lodz, and lived in the next street from where we lived in the ghetto. I don't know where he is now, probably, probably emigrated maybe to Israel, or America, a lot of them have gone. A lot of my friends have gone from England, they've gone to America, to family, to Canada, a group of girls went to Canada, and also, and another group, I remember, they also went to Israel, because one of my friends had a sister, that's lived before the War in Israel. One had cousins, so they went to Israel, even before Israel became Independent. They went early '46, before that, you see. They were admitted to Israel because they had family there. So, I know, it dwindled out, there's hardly any of us in England, you know, I mean, we only came, l5 girls, you see, l5 girls from Belsen, and 35 boys.

So you were in Aldgate East. What were you doing there?

Nothing. Have fun.

But what was your income?

They used to give us pocket money every Friday, they used to give us ten bob, you know, lO/-, in the paper money, used to be pink, pink money, they used to give us pocket money, lO bob a week, 5Op on today's money.

Were you involved in anything politically or religiously?

No. Nothing like that. No, no politics, no religion, I just lived from day to day. I enjoyed my life, it was carefree and easy, no worries, and we stayed there for a little while, then, they took us to another hostel, in Kings Langley, off Watford. Kings Langley, when you pass it when you come into Hemel Hempstead, it's very nice. A very nice sort of town, Hemel Hempstead, and we lived there, I was there through the summer of '46, that was '46, and we had a wonderful life there, because it was a beautiful place, it was a very big mansion house, and, and we were mixed, the children, like, boys and girls, not too many boys. There was one particular girl, she was with her brother, and Eva also, she was a Hungarian little girl, she was with her brother Archie, and she wouldn't leave me alone, you know, she wanted to run after me everywhere I go. She had very wealthy family in America, and they used to send them money, dollars, and parcels, tons of sweets and chocolates, and I wasn't such an idiot, I was on her side, because we didn't see, or it was still rationed, and I always used to go with her to the bank to change her dollars, and at that time, a dollar stood, wait a minute, 4 dollars to the pound, good times, yes? Four dollars to the pound. And she told me her story, she was in Auschwitz, with her little brother Archie, she was separated from her mother, her mother went somewhere else. She didn't find out about her mother till after the War, till she came to England, that her mother survived and was in America. She lost her father, and she saved Archie's life from going into the gas chambers. She was working on, on a works party where you had to take out rags from, after they took the clothes off from the people, she had to put them in a big basket trolley, and take those clothes out, and he was allocated to go with the party, the ones that were going in the gas chamber, and she put him in this basket, and covered him with all the rags, and that's how she walked out with him.

Where did he go to?

She had him put in amongst, with the gipsies, and their children.

End of FlO8 Side B

FlO9 Side A

Yes, and she was so protective of him, Eva, to Archie, because how easily she could've lost him. She wouldn't let him out of her sight, she was so protective, she was like a little mother to him. And there we also had a wonderful time, and we used to have wonderful people come from Committees, young people, and, and one day I remember a bunch of youngsters come, English Jewish, and they took us to Bognor by the sea, on an outing, by cars, not on busses, all the members of the Committee came in their beautiful cars, and took us for the day to Bognor, and took us to the seaside, and it was a beautiful day, and we went on the roundabouts, and carousels, and see-saws, and we went up on the scenic railway, and I've only been once on it, and I shall never go on it again. I thought I was going to lose my insides on it, you know! I've never been on a scenic railway, you know. And it was a wonderful day. And then another time they come Sunday, and they, they invite us to their homes in Bognor, and they, they lived in an area, very large houses, like estate houses, and they, they put up marquees, and they had luncheon put on for us, and they were wonderful to us, you know, and they used to come to the Hostel if we wanted anything. One day, this particular girl gave me a wonderful coat, a camel-haired coat, because she smudged it with lipstick, she couldn't wear it. And she also used to be a dancer, but she broke her legs, and that stopped her dancing, she used to be a dancer on stage. She was so tall, about nearly six feet tall, beautiful girl. English Jewish. And we stayed in Kings Langley, and we had a wonderful time there.

How long did you stay there?

I stayed there till, till I started to get a job, in the London Jewish Hospital. I wanted to do that, I wanted to do something useful, you know. I, my feelings began to open up, you know. I felt I was beginning to become a human being, you know, so I said I would like to go into nursing. So my major said okay, Miss Pearlman was her name, so she made an appointment, she applied to the London Jewish Hospital. I had an appointment given, and we went one day, we came down from, from Watford, and we went to this appointment, and I was accepted, because I looked very good on the outside, you know, and I started to work there, and I, we went back to the hostel, and I packed up my belongings a few days after, and I travelled down to the hospital, and I was all alone again. None of my friends around me any more, and I started in the hospital, I was given uniforms, I was taken to the nurses quarter, I had my own room, which was lovely, and I started going to, to reading classes, in the lecture room, for a time, to acquaint myself with anatomy, and I was there for a little while in these classrooms, then we was taken on to the wards. I was like a, a probation nurse, what they called. At the beginning it was all right, but then I began to have problems. The Matron was such an anti-Semite, she kept hounding me, like, like a dog.

Were you the only Jew there?

No, there were some other Jewish nurses, but they were already of higher rank, you see, she couldn't pick so much on them, because one was already a Staff Nurse, my Sister, the Sister, the Nursing Sister was Jewish from Viennese, from Vienna, and she was lovely to me. She was very good to me, very considerate. And there was other

nurses. All these nurses were all from Germany, you know, and there was a few Irish as well, made friends, they were also very nice girls.

But one particular woman picked on you?

But the Matron, she was a monster. She was a drunk, an alcoholic, and how many times she used to come on the ward, her hat used to be askew, you know, because she had too much to drink. But I stayed there from November ...

'46?

'46. I was there for Chanukah, for Christmas, there was a wonderful Chanukah party, a dance, you could invite guests, somebody, and I couldn't, I didn't know anybody, I was on my own, it was very miserable. I was very lonely and depressed. And I was in the nursing till I resigned, because she made my life hell.

Was she anti-Semitic, or was she ...

She was anti-Semitic. She picked, one day, I broke a glass funnel, she gave me such a to-do, I can't tell you. I, I had to report to her in her office, and, and she made me look so small, you know, I used to cringe when I used to see her. One day she would come on the ward, and she said, "Nurse, return to your quarters, and wash your face. Wash your paint off your face." I never used to wear paint, I never used to, because my high cheek, she thought I was wearing rouge. And I was working on the men's ward, which I enjoyed as well, and she showed me up, she made me look an idiot in front of all the men, you know? And I was having a hard time, and things was getting hard for me, because I had to do all the dirty work, you know, and there was a couple of deaths, you know, dying, and I didn't like that, because I'd seen enough of death and illnesses, I thought it would be very romantic, you know, for the good of mankind, to help others? To look after other people? But it wasn't like this. One day, I had to handle somebody that died, and it really scared me out of my wits, you know, and I had to clear away very dirty beds from incontinent patients. My hands were always chapped from constantly being in the water, from rinsing and clearing the sheets, you know. I said, "This is no good." And what with this, and what with her bullying me like this, I mean, I came home, from off my duty at midnight, maybe I was in five minutes after midnight, she caught me one night, coming in the hallway. "Nurse, you report to me. You are five minutes late after midnight." And you had to sign out when you went off duty, cos sometimes I used to go down to the Hostel, to Kings Langley, you know, off Watford, to be with my friends, and I said, "I've got to, I've got to leave this, because she's going to break my heart, you know, she's going to destroy me", you see. There happened to be a lady patient, she came in to have an operation, and she liked the look of me, because I was a nice little girl, you know, she liked the look of me, and I used to talk with her. Her name was Mrs. Jason, they lived in Hampstead, in Lincroft Gardens, and I confided in her, told her how I feel, and she could see that I wasn't myself, that I was depressed. And I told her that I'm resigning, I'm leaving in May. So she, she called me by my name, by my Christian name, she never used to address me, she didn't think I was a nurse, when I was just starting in it, I had no qualifications yet. She said to me, "Well, if you're leaving, if you want a home, my door is open to you. You can, you can have a home with us." So I

thanked her, and said, "I'll think about it." I thought, and because I could see the family was coming, and her husband Jacob, her daughter Lily with her husband Charlie. Another family came, I could see they were very nice people. When I resigned, I packed, I had the address, cos she had already left. She came in for Pesach, she had the operation, she had a stone in her gland, and I used to give her extra hot water bottles, you know, I could see who was nice and who was not. I would be nice to. And she was also in the hospital over Pesach, and that year it was early, and the people, her family used to bring her in food, she wouldn't eat the food in the hospital. And when I left that was May 6th, I took a taxi, with my suitcase, and I travelled from the East End, from Whitechapel, till Hampstead, to Finchley Road, they lived in Finchley Road, off Finchley Road, in Lincroft Gardens, and I moved in there, because they had a very large flat, but at first she couldn't put me up, living with her, in her flat, but she, she got me a room across the road, the woman that used to do charring for her. She had a very big flat, a double, a double, two floors on the open road, of Finchley Road, and I shared a room with this woman, with Annie, and her girl's name was Barbara, and she had a boy John. I'm talking 42 years ago, isn't it. And I moved in there, in lodgings, and there was two beds, so I had one bed, and Barbara had the other bed by the wall. And I slept there, but all the meals, and the time spent, I would spend over there, in their home. And I lived with them, very happily for a time, and I used to help out, I used, I also went to work, I found myself, when I gave up nursing, I went into dressmaking, I became a machinist.

Near, near to Hampstead?

No, that was I first job I got in the East End.

So you had to travel all the way back?

Yes, it was a very long way to travel on busses, every morning to work.

So you were more or less still mixing in Jewish circles, Hampstead, the East End?

Yes. And these people, they had a very vast crowd of friends, and they were from ...

Any of them immigrants?

They had, they had one couple of friends, Terry and Eric, they were Viennese Jews that come before the War.

So you were the only one in this crowd, either in the domestic situation, or at work, who had been through the Holocaust?

Yes. These, all these people, this lady that took me in, and gave me a home, Mrs. Jason, she's Russian Jewish, she came at the turn of the century, well, she's passed away now, God rest her soul, about five or six years ago. She lived to a very ripeful old age, close on 9O, and she came from Russia.

But did they ever ask you about the ghetto, and the camps?

No. Not very much. I think they knew, but I think they, they didn't want to say nothing, because they didn't want to hurt me, maybe. You know, they didn't pump me, they didn't ask me anything. Sometimes when they used to see something on the television, you know, they didn't, she could never understand why I never cried, you see, because I, I was still, I was still cold, I was still frozen, if you know what I mean, because I did that, I put a wall around myself to protect myself. I couldn't, I couldn't afford to be upset. That's why they never used to see me cry.

So how long was it before, before you met your husband?

Oh, I, I lived with them for quite a few years, and I had a very comfortable life there. After I, I got dressmaking job, I left that one because it was too far for me to travel, so I went one day to the West End, and I got a job.

And eventually you met your husband, in?

Yes, I met him in '5O.

l95O.

'5O, I think, I think, yes.

And you were married in l95O?

We were married in '52.

l952. And when was your son born?

My daughter was born in '56, September 4th, my daughter Estelle.

September 4th?

Yes.

And regards the, your children, did you, did you decide not to send them to some kind of frum school, religious, religious school?

No, No. I believe the children should mix. I think it makes a better atmosphere. People get to know one another, learn from each other, and learn to understand, and to get over these prejudices, these, these fears that some people have about us.

As Jews?

As Jews. That we are different. We are not much different than anybody else. It's just that we are Jewish, and other people are Christian, or Moslems, or whatever, but we're all people. The same people under one Heaven. All the same people. We get born the same way, and we, we die the same way. We don't go to any different places, we all go to the same place.

And as regards the Holocaust, did they ever ask about what had happened to you during that time, or did you ever speak to them about it?

My children?

Yes.

Not a great deal.

When they were children?

No. This has only come about since they become teenagers.

Yeh, and then they first enquired, or you told them without them asking?

No, I might just sort of make a comparison.

Such as what?

You see, if they saw something.

Such as what?

If they saw a documentary about certain things of the Holocaust, I would say, "Your mother was there. I've been through this. I can't imagine it. To my normal mind, it's not possible. It was not possible for me to come through this hell." I've been to Hell and back, like you might say. And when they ask me, "Who are you? How did you manage it?" I said, "Because it was luck, sheer luck, a miracle."

Do you think it was important for them to know?

Yes, they do know now. I think since he's read the book, my son ...

The book that's just come out?

Yes, he's, he's read my chapter. My daughter's been with me.

The book's called The Journey Back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors, by Anton Gill.

Yes, you see. And they know now a little bit more. My daughter Estelle knows, because she came with me to Poland, and when we travelled to Auschwitz, and she saw what went on there, the remains. The certain remains from the population, the people that came through Auschwitz, the, the, our belongings, our wealth we had to give up to this, to disband it, to give it up, because we were not allowed to keep it. So she saw all the kind of things. The first, the first block we walked into, the museum, on a wall there, all along, are hangers, and there are prayer shawls, talaisim, you know, hanging like, like curtains, and they must have been from men that come to Auschwitz, and had to give up all their belongings, and there was suitcases in one

showcase, one window, big, big blocks, with suitcases with names of people from where they came from, all stacked up to show. Then in another window they would have utensils, kitchen utensils, and in another part they'd have hairbrushes, combs. In another window was spectacles. In another window there would be all parts from invalids, from people that had all, artificial parts that had to wear, had to wear appliances, false arms, false legs, people that had ruptures, that wore rupture belts. Another, another window, another showcase would be hair. The hair that they shaved off, all colours of hair.

And you'd relate this directly to what, to what happened to you?

Yes. Because I also, there must be things laying there that belonged to me. So much lays there.

So there's a series of questions here, it's quite funny. They stick out because they're in a sense, more, more personal, or whatever, such as, I can only ask them to you as they're written here. How would you assess the impact of the Holocaust on your subsequent life? I can't ask that in any other way? I don't mean to sound dry.

What now? Now?

Yes.

Well, as I said, I, I'm not trying to live with it, you know what I mean? I'm trying to put it aside.

So you consider it history?

History. I can't live with it, because it was so horrendous, it's so disturbing, and hurtful to me, I have, last time you were here, Robert, I have been disturbed for many days, till I, till again I reasoned with myself, I don't have to be like that any more. This has gone. This will never happen again.

So, you reason it away?

I reason it away, you see. I have nothing to live like that any more. I will never find myself in such conditions. I will not experience it again.

So how do you, how do you relate it to whatever religious beliefs you might have?

I'm not religious, I don't believe in anything. I don't.

Before or after?

Or since? Because, before, before, in my early years, from the War years, I was too young really to understand religion, and I know I had a very wonderful grandad, very frum, very orthodox. My zeder lived, my grandpa lived for Synagogue. Look at my grandad over there, my Momma's father. He was a very pious Jew. He was from the very first people in Lodz to build the first synagogue.

But for you personally, piety means nothing, having been in Auschwitz?

Since, since my going through this, this catastrophe, I have no religious beliefs, but I don't do nothing wrong.

What do you think of people who do have religious beliefs?

The ones that have, let them have if that's what they want. If this is what makes them happy, they have something, something, it's an anchor, because there's some people still frightened.

So religion is a sort of therapy? Personal therapy, presumably?

Yes. Yes. It's what you want to believe in. It's okay by me. I don't condemn people that keep to their religions, they're frum, they want to do all these things that interlocks with religion, kosher, keep up holidays, keep up the high holidays.

But there's a question in some circles, which is, "Where was God during the Holocaust?"

That's right.

What sense do you make of that question, or don't you?

Well, I ask myself as well. Where was He? Well, He was sitting up there in his pure palaces, and looking down upon us, and letting us suffer? Why? What for? What did it do? What did it do for Him that he saw us suffer like this?

Yeh, these are questions, do you have any reply to those questions?

Where I was concerned, personally, he was nowhere near. There was no God.

He'd turned away?

Yes. He didn't listen. He didn't hear, and He didn't see.

Can you account for that?

Maybe there were some people that were doing bad things, but where I'm concerned, I was a child, I have done nothing wrong, I had never done anything wrong to anyone. I've never insulted anybody, I've never taken anything from anybody. If it's not mine, I don't take.

So how, how, how does, how, how has it made an impact say, on your politics also?

Politics?

Yeh. Or hasn't it? Does it have a bearing on any feature of your life?

I am not, I am not too clever, I'm not clever to understand politics, but I think it has come a time that people should come together, should try to live in peace, and try to understand other people as well, not just themselves, and they shouldn't put their point of view on others, "You've got to do what I say." I believe in, in freedom, in self-expression.

So what do you make of the Nazis?

The Nazis? I think it would have been better if they never existed. If they never come to power.

But, since they did exist?

And they did it because, I think, they must have been mad. They're such a cultured clever race, and they resolved to such horrific doings. There must be something in, in their make-up, you know. They always want to go to war, they never win them, but they've always got to start up a war, you see. But I think, what I said is, they must have suffered temporary insanity, because only crazy people could do such violent things.

Well, people oughtn't to be punished for insanity, but the Nuremburg Trials punished people.

They punished them, but they haven't punished enough. After the War, when I saw all this, I had wished that they dropped an atom bomb. After I heard that they dropped the bombs on Japan, I wished they'd dropped a bomb on the Germans.

But you're saying the Germans were, do you honestly mean, do you honestly believe that they were temporarily insane?

They were, they must've been crazy.

I mean, clinically almost? Inasmuch as they should have been put in a mental hospital, rather than suffered punishment? An asylum rather than a jail. Which would you think would befit a Nazi? Goebels, if you had a choice either to put him in a lunatic asylum, or a prison?

Well, I would have him hanged. I would clear them all off. I would have had them all executed, you see. Not enough were put down, because it's given those that still believe in it, again, the spirit of things, you see.

Do you think it may happen?

It could. It could maybe.

Against the Jews?

Against the Jews. I don't know against the Jews. But there are now some other people that, that they reckon that they're not entitled to live, isn't there. I mean, there's enough going on, all over the world. There is unrest everywhere. Isn't it? In the Latin countries, you have wars, civil wars, South Africa, the Middle East ...

End of FlO9 Side A

FlO9 Side B

He left, that's all he's doing, he left a legacy, you see. And it's this violent, this barbaric, how should I put it, this barbaric, it's the way people still behave in a most barbaric way, in many countries.

So if the Jews are potential victims ...

Maybe they are not now singled out, maybe not, because they found a place in the world.

Israel, you mean?

Definitely, because we have now power.

So Israel's an important ...

It's an important, it's an important element in our survival, and if we don't have Israel, we will not have any standing. That's why we've got to work very hard, strive, and keep that tiny little country going, and support it.

Would you support it by living there?

I would very much so. I would go tomorrow if I could. But I don't think my children would.

You'd only go with your children?

Of course. But I know, I know one, one of my children wouldn't go, my daughter wouldn't go. Maybe my son, you know, he has, he has a great love and feeling for Israel, but she hasn't, you see, and I couldn't leave her. I think I owe something to her. I brought her into this world, and it's still my duty to care for her, and to guide her, to guard her against certain elements, especially from loneliness, for no one there to care for her. She'd be all alone, all by herself, and that would make me feel very bad. I'd feel very guilty. I'd, because the children have a way of doing this to you, you know, they make you feel guilty!

There's a last set of questions here, just on, whether or not you have any personal documents, relating to the Holocaust.

No.

Which you'd be willing to put, as it says, "in an appropriate public archive or museum, or to have photocopied." Do you have anything that could be displayed publicly?

Well, I only have, it's my momma's Birth Certificate, but other than that I haven't. I've got some photos that I took, you know. I have some photos that I took when I was in Poland.

Oh, recently you mean?

Yes, three years ago.

Do you have the photographs from the immediate post-War period?

Soon after?

Yes.

Only from myself, but it's not, I don't think it would be any useful to put that there, you know, in the archives, you know. The only thing is those photos I took, and because I

came away from Germany, the way I stood, with no belongings, with nothing, I had nothing. And my mother's Birth Certificate, I only obtained three years ago.

End of FlO9 Side B

End of Interview

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Ref. No.: C41O/OO5 Playback Nos: F1O1-F1O9 inc.

Collection Title: LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Interviewee's surname: BERNSTEIN Title: Mrs.

Interviewee's forenames: FELA

Date of Birth: 21/1O/27 Sex: F

Date(s) of recording: 28/1O/88; 15/12/88

Location of interview: Interviewee's home

Name of interviewer: Robert Wiseman

Type of recorder:

Total no. of tapes: 9 Speed: -

Type of tape: C6O Cassette Noise Reduction:

Mono or stereo: Stereo Original or copy: Original

Additional material:

Copyright/clearance: Full clearance

FlOl Side A

Born Lodz, 2l/lO/27.

Father: Abraham Zelig, born Lutomirsk, Poland.

Grandfather: prosperous tailor and grocer, very religious family. His wife emigrated to USA, used to send clothes for children. He did not help his son much. He and his family murdered l94l/42.

Her father was not so religious - more socialist. He was sent to Lodz to learn shoemaking. Met his future wife there - she was l5. He was l7 - outstandingly good shoemaker and an active socialist.

Wide circle of friends, Jewish and non-Jewish.

Her mother was less political and, religiously liberal. She worked with him at home.

Fela was born in a small basement room.

Tough, rich, Jewish landlord.

Moved to a larger room in l935. Six slept in room, including parents.

Mother prepared meals. Took bread and cakes to baker for cooking. Also cholent.

Father liberal - clean-shaven. Many Jewish and non-Jewish friends.

Mother liked theatre and dancing.

Evicted for non-payment of rent. Moved to country, near father's family.

FlOl Side B

One older sister survived Belsen - now lives in Israel.

Another older sister, Chana, missing from ghetto - presumed dead.

Description of selections from ghetto for death camps.

Ghetto President, Hyam Rumkowski - in the past ran an orphanage.

Fela's father died l942/43. Afte the war she visited Lodz but was unable to find his grave.

Reverting to pre-War - her mother became rheumatic and returned with the children to Lodz.

New landlord, Schwartz, very rich, hard businessman. Large room up four flights of stairs. No water or electricity.

Fela went to a mixed primary school. Not very religious. Had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Met one survivor after the War.

In l939 evicted from homes and sent to ghetto. Poles occupied vacated homes.

Before this, Jewish and non-Jewish children friendly.

Then the ghetto. Fela, blonde and blue-eyed, used to queue for bread.

Just before the War, her family's fortunes improved. All helped making shoes and even employed a non-Jew called Strepan Kaputza, until he was called up.

He went out with Christian girls, but was friendly with Fela's family, particularly her mother.

Things improved economically. Her father started working for Bata.

FlO2 Side A

As a child, Fela did not understand Jewish history.

There was no animosity at school. Some jealousy of the very rich.

Her mother kept very busy cooking, especially for Yomtovs when the house was open to visitors.

Very decorative, beflagged Succahs.

Conversation mainly in Polish.

German Jewish refugee guest for Passover - eventually fled to Russia with local woman.

There was an influx of German Jews to the ghetto. After the German invasion, many men fled to Warsaw but most returned.

There was a curfew until all Jews were rounded up into ghetto, and, in l94O, the gates were closed.

The Jews were able to take a minimum of luggage and no furniture except beds.

Her father returned from Warsaw to Lodz, which was being preserved as an industrial area.

There was a call for work vlunteers many of whom were sent to gas chambers.

Most of her father's family were liquidated. There were only four survivors and the family spirit was broken.

FlO2 Side B

Family living under constant fear and deprivation. In May l94O the ghetto gates were closed.

Photographs taken for identity and ration cards.

Father worked making shoes from parts of discarded ones.

Spent winter l94O mostly in bed for warmth.

Oldest sister, Chana, escaped through the wire, but caught and sent to prison. On release, found ghetto conditions worse than prison. People starving to death. Then industry became organised and ration books were issued.

Family first worked making straw boots. Then tailoring.

After four years, the liquidation started. Starvation rations.

Much TB - her father died of it.

One murder - public hanging: many suicides.

Vitamin shortage - semi starvation.

FlO3 Side A

Worked 8-lO hours a day, first in straw factory, then dressmaking. Then into hiding - friend's house - secret room behind shop - l6-l8 people. Had to keep quiet by day. Finally discovered, beaten and sent to Auschwitz.

Many old, sick and children sent to gas chambers.

Description of very primitive hospital.

Social life - creeping from hut to hut after dark visiting neighbours. No radio, no pets.

Mixture of people from rich and poor, religious and non-religious backgrounds.

Outside curfew, safe to walk around. No violence, no resistance.

The unpopular, relatively well-fed Jewish police kept order.

The President, Hyam Rumkowski ruled the ghetto until sent with family to gas chambers.

FlO3 Side B

Until then, Rumkowski and family well-fed and prosperous.

The chief of Jewish police publicly hanged by Germans for prospering.

Fela and family pulled out of hiding and sent to Ravensbruck.

Description of madly ferocious Gestapo man hitting adults, but not children, with a stick, en route for the gas chambers.

During first night's stop, Fela sent back by mother to pick up a sack of potatoes which were boiled and eaten later that night. The following morning, packed into cattle trucks - no toilet facilities.

On arrival were unloaded and divided into three groups. Mengele supervised. Marched to baths, where all clothing and valuables removed. Their heads were shaved. Supervised by violent Kapos. Issued with old, steam-sterilised clothing.

Marched to Auschwitz to a block whose previous occupants had been sent to the gas chambers. It was September and getting cold.

FlO4 Side A

First night in Auschwitz, after bath, issued with outerwear. No underwear. At dusk, taken to block. Issued portion of bread, bowl of soup for five people - passed from one to another. In morning, unsweetened ersatz coffee.

After freezing night, told that mother and brother had gone to gas chamber.

Fela cried all night - was beaten by Kapo. Pulled herself together and settled into camp.

People dying every night - some from TB, some in crematorium.

Sent to Ravensbruck, where got sunstroke because of shaven, unprotected head.

Billetted with gypsies. Much quarrelling - punishment: on knees all day.

Subsequently, while wandering around, Fela saw, through a window, a corpse being dissected.

Next day, afer rigorous physical examination in the nude, selected for work in ammunition factory in Millhausen.

Months later transferred to Belsen.

<u>FlO4 Side B is blank</u>

<u>lO5 Side A</u>

Arrival Auschwitz, September l944. No beatings. Split into two groups. Those on the right, including Fela's mother and brother, to gas chambers. The rest to labour camp, where stripped naked and robbed. Then to showers, where shaved (head and private parts).

Czech Jewish Kapos very cruel. Given old, disinfected clothing - no underwear.

Learned about mother and brother having been sent to gas chambers. Broke down, but somehow survived.

<u>FlO5 Side B</u>

Food provided. Morning - black coffee. Rest of day, a piece of bread, and a portion of soup.

All Jewish girls in camp; no religious observance; no contact with men.

Weeks of idleness, with occasional beatings, at Auschwitz.

Then paraded naked for selection to work at Millhausen.

Those selected were bathed, given clothes, and after a night's wait in the open in the rain, sent in cattle trucks via Dachau to Ravensbruck.

Fela shocked, while wandering around the camp, to see a corpse being dissected.

Jews billetted with gypsies. Hostilities between the groups.

<u>FlO6 Side A</u>

The gypsies stole, creating friction with the Jews. The authorities used, unjustly, to punish the Jews.

After about two weeks, another selection.

Showered, fresh clothes issued, including footwear.

In October l944, sent by train and tram to Milhausen. Put to light engineering work with German civilians. Life became easier - even put on a theatrical show at Christmas.

Medical check-up by a doctor - a prisoner from another camp.

Italian and Russian volunteers working nearby.

Most of the food rations consisted of swedes. Fela retains a dislike for them.

They worked some night shifts. Their work was good and they were relatively well-treated.

FlO6 Side B

Her work involved fitting a metal part to a machine: did not understand why.

Many air raids.

Fela made some good friends but fears most of them subsequently died at Belsen.

Feb/March l945, arrived at Belsen. Still meets two survivors (sisters) from Belsen.

Fantasy discussions, mostly about food, but, on liberation, could hardly eat.

Rumours about the War coming to an end.

A few men escaped: if recaptured, hanged in main square of ghetto.

No sexual abuse. Once a week marched across the camp to showers.

Working conditions eased. Paid small sums to spend in camp shop, but no food available there.

FlO7 Side A

Milhausen more relaxed than Auschwitz or Belsen.

Rumours that the War was ending.

Transfer to Belsen. After two months there, people were starving to death, and bodies cremated. Fela witnessed some cannibalism.

She ran dangerous errands to pick up food from cookhouses. Account of a girl trying to scrounge potato peelings, beaten to death by SS man.

Fela did not witness medical experiments or similar atrocities.

Further account of Hyam Rumkowski being flung, living, into crematorium furnace.

Liberated l5th April, l945.

Before this, her sister became serverely ill with typhoid.

FlO7 Side B

Fela took sister to sick bay in another block. Tried to get food to her but gave up after being mugged on the way.

Germans put up white flags and wore white armbands.

Camp liberated by British on April l5th. Began to organise and provide food.

Fela visited Kramer's bungalow: full of luxury goods and weapons. Kramer and beautiful but wicked Irma Greiss subsequently executed.

Guards arrested and made to clear up camp.

By May, Fela and companions had been disinfected and transferred to a new camp.

Back to pre-liberation: an account of their friend Paula being taken to die in the sick bay.

Piles of corpses were lying around.

Fela and two friends managed to lie low in the stables with the horses until the liberation. She used to run errands for them.

Used to pay Poles with cigarettes (given by English) to buy food.

Discovered her sister still alive. Very weak, but she feeds her and restores her to health. Now lives in Israel with two children.

Fela (l8) comes into puberty.

The British sent them on holiday to Lingen; large houses deserted by owners for fear of Russians.

Fela and companions foraged for food and bedding. Then to Diepholz. Similar conditions.

Fela very ill from poisoned finger.

On recovery, started living an enjoyable social life.

Then took the opportunity to go to England, partly to escape from an importunate Polish boyfriend, and against orthodox rabbinate oposition.

FlO8 Side B

Her sister finally reached Israel in l949, via internment in Cyprus.

In England, Fela and companions were met by a Bloomsbury House Ladies' Committee, and helped to settle in.

Lived for a time near Cambridge, then to a shelter in Mansell Street, East London.

Then to Kings Langley, became friendly with Eva, a Hungarian girl, with her little brother Archie, whom she had saved from the gas chambers.

FlO9 Side A

Fela and companions were given hospitality by a wealthy Jewish Community from Bognor.

Then she began to train as a nurse at the London Hospital, but was persecuted by an anti-semitic matron.

She was befriended by a wealthy Jewish patient from Hampstead, and sent to live nearby, giving up nursing to become a machinist, first in the East End, and then in the West End.

Met her husband in l95O - married in l952 - a son and a daughter.

Did not send them to a religious school, as she believed children of different faiths should mix.

Did not speak to them about the Holocaust until they were teenagers.

Her son read the chapter dealing with her in Anton Gill's book, The Journey Back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors.

Accunt of a visit with her daughter to Auschwitz, with its horrific museum.

Still deeply disturbed by thoughts of the Holocaust. Has no religious beliefs. "Where was God at the time?"

She believes in tolerance, but cannot forgive the Nazi leaders who, she thinks, should be executed.

FlO9 Side B

Barbaric legacy of the Nazis.

Israel's existence is important both as a symbol of the survival of the Jews and as a haven of refuge in time of need.

She would like to live there, but her son and daughter would not, and she will not leave them.

She left Germany with no possessions at all and thus has nothing worth putting into the archives.

End of Summary