

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Charlene Perlmutter Schiff  
March 23, 1993  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Charlene Perlmutter Schiff, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on March 23, 1993 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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**CHARLENE PERLMUTTER SCHIFF**  
**March 23, 1993**

Q: Good morning, Charlene.

A: Good morning.

Q: Tell me your name and when you were born, including your maiden name.

A: Yes. My name is Charlene Perlmutter Schiff. I was born December 16, 1929, in a small town in Poland, Horochow. My first years, my early childhood years, were very happy years. My family consisted of two wonderful parents and an older sister, Tchiya. My sister was four years older than I. We lived in the small town of Horochow. Both my parents were educators and civic leaders of our town. My father was a professor in Lvov, the State University in Lvov. He taught philosophy. He was a very educated man. He had several doctorates from different places, the Sorbonne, Basel and I'm not sure, one place in Germany, I don't know if it was Heidelberg or Berlin, I'm not sure. Our home was a happy home. It was usually filled with many people, people from all walks of life congregated there. I remember meetings, I remember recitals, poetry readings, all sorts -- book reviews, all sorts of cultural activities took place in our home. And, the important thing I would like to stress is, my parents were leaders, not only in the Jewish community, but in the community at large. Our home hosted the Starosta, which is, I guess, like a mayor here; the clergy, the Kshondz, the Polish Kshondz, the Ukrainian Batiushka, as well as the Rabbi. I had a lot of fun when I was a very young child. We were tutored from the time we were four years of age. We had private tutors. My father believed that education was one of the most important things in life, and he stressed that, and we had to obey his orders. The home was a loving home, but there was a lot of discipline. At dinner time, I remember we would not speak until spoken to. My father had to speak first. I don't know, it seems that where we lived it was the main street of our little town, it was Ulica Mitzkievitcha 57, and I remember the street was lined with old chestnut trees all along the sidewalks, and it was a wide street. Our home, our house, was on a terraced piece of property. There were beautiful English gardens in front, and there was like an orchard in the back, and the entire house was surrounded by a fence, and there were steps going up to the house. That's the way I remembered it, and that's the way I like to remember it. Unfortunately, it wasn't like that when I went back after the war to see the house again. Coming back to my childhood, I remember that all during my very early childhood there was talk about our going to America, immigrating to the United States, we called it America. And, I remember on my fourth birthday I was walking with my father on the banks of our river, and I asked him, "Papa, is that America on the other side of the river?" And, he explained to me that was not so. He tried to show me maps, but that was a little bit beyond my scope of understanding. He also tried to teach me many things, and I remember he explained what air is that we breathe, and, again, that was a little bit too much for me, but we had a wonderful relationship. My mother was a very loving mother. She was on the go most of the time. I know that she was a teacher, but I do not remember her teaching, working as a teacher. She

worked in different areas of the community, and I distinctly remember that every summer she organized, she and other ladies, but she was usually the chairman of it, she organized camps for the poor children, and these were summer camps for all the poor children in the area. It was not just a camp for the Jewish children. Meetings were going on and the congregation kept coming, I mean, they used to congregate in our home continually. Now and then, there were meetings where my father would close the door to his library, and these meetings I was not allowed to interrupt. I did not realize what this all was about until after the war, but these were meetings with young people who my father helped escape illegally out of Poland.

Q: What was your name, your first name?

A: My nickname was Musia. It's a derivative, Polish, Jewish, what have you, but my given name was Shulamit, here we pronounce it Shulamit, it's a Hebrew name.

Q: Can you talk about your sister?

A: My sister was a very artistic person. She was four years older than I, and I know I was the bane of her existence, because I always tried to go and do whatever she did, and I bothered her friends. She played the violin beautifully, and she also played the piano. I was given some lessons, but, I was not artistic at all, and they finally gave up on me with these lessons. She continued, and she sometimes, you know, played the piano during the recitals in our home, or she played the violin. I remember one incident, it's rather funny now, it wasn't at that time. I was angry with her, I was mad at her for some reason. I don't recall why. But, I got hold of some paint and I painted all the keys on our piano so that she wouldn't be able to play. I was punished for that severely.

Q: How?

A: I was sent to my room, and I wasn't allowed to come out for the entire afternoon. That was a lot of -- that was a big punishment for me, because I was a free spirit, and I was sort of a tomboy, and I liked to be around, you know, outside and play with children, climb trees, and do all these sorts of things. I never painted the keyboard again. It took a long time to clean it up, and I think it cost a lot of money, too. So, that was a mean deed that I did. But I loved my sister, I adored her, and she was wonderful with me. She was very patient, but I did not understand that. I felt very secure in my home. I had so much love and so much caring that in retrospect I feel that gave me the basis, the strength, to survive. I thought about it a lot, and I think that's probably why I did -- one of the reasons I survived, I was able to survive, is because I had so much love, and security and caring in my very early childhood.

Q: Can you talk a little bit more about your father and these walks that you took? Was this a regular --

A: Yes, and, I mean, the way it was arranged, my father traveled to Lvov, to the university, and

now and then he would allow my sister or me to go with him to the university, but we never went together. These were times, private times, for my father and me, or for my father and my sister. And, he, I guess now when I realize, he spoke to us a little bit on a higher level than we were able to -- than I was able to understand, but it was always very uplifting for me to be with my father one on one, just to have him to myself, and he would tell me stories, all sorts of stories, and he always tried, I don't know, it's almost -- it's scary to say this, but it's almost as if he knew that our time would not be long enough, and he tried to give me as much as he could of the knowledge that I could absorb.

Q: Before we go on, could we show the picture for a second of your parents and your sister, please?

A: Of course, yes. This is my father here. This is a picture that my husband and I had worked on and finally -- I mean, it came to fruition in Japan. I had nothing left when I came to the United States, but some of my family had different pictures, and this is a composite of three different pictures, but these were the closest to what I remember my parents and my sister, that's the way they look, and that's the way I have them etched in my memory. They were very loving, giving people, and I'm sure I idealize them now, perhaps, a little too much, but that's the way I remember them. I cannot tell you one flaw in these three very perfect people.

Q: Did you spend time with your mother alone?

A: Yes, yes, yes, we did.

Q: Where or how?

A: We would go, there was a great big park on the -- well, it wasn't quite in the middle of the town, but there was a park, and this park, I mean, was with trees, you know, and flowers, and shrubs, and this is where people used to go when they wanted to take a walk. And on the edge of that park there lived the landlord of the -- the rich landlord of the town, she owned a lot of property. She was a very old, old lady, and I remember she always wore black. She was an old lady, she was a widow, and all she had around was just servants to help her. But, the park was on the edge of her estate, and that's where I would take walks with my mother, just she and I. We would go sometimes, the whole family, too, but our time one on one was very important to my parents, and they did give us time one on one.

Q: Do you remember any conversations you had with your mother?

A: Yes. With my mother, I mostly discussed my friends, what she was doing, the things that she loved so much, the camps that she arranged for the children. I know she traveled quite a bit. She was gone to Rovno and to Kovel, and there she had meetings with other ladies who were also arranging for different summer camps for children, and she would tell me about the meetings, and I would ask, you know, what she would bring me, you know, little surprises. Wherever my parents went, they always had to bring us a surprise, whatever it

was. It didn't matter what it was, but we loved to have surprises, presents.

Q: Who took care of you when your mother went away? Was your father at home?

A: No, no. There was a young woman who would come in and stay with us. No, not my father, no. He never did dishes, and he never did anything in the house whatsoever, you know, as far as helping out, no. My father had a very wonderful library. His private library was his first love after his family I think, and teaching, and he collected rare books. His books, I mean some of them were first editions, and all sorts of rare precious books. And, people in the entire area knew that he collected these books, so when they found a rare book they would come to him and he would pay through the nose to get these books. And often he would go into his library and read, or bring out a book for us to enjoy, but we always knew we had to wash our hands, and we were not allowed to touch these books without his permission. It was a very wonderful household, perhaps, nowadays it might seem too strict for the way we live here in the United States, but we didn't know any different. I mean, we accepted it, we loved it, and we gained an awful lot from that kind of upbringing, I believe.

Q: And, both you and your sister were part of what was going on in the house most of the time.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: So, you were not considered just little children.

A: Well, I was a pain in the neck always, and I was into everything. I remember one time during Passover, there was a -- for the first Seder, which is a festive occasion, our parents gave my sister and me gold lockets with the Star of David to wear on our necks, and I promptly lost mine, and no one could sit down at the table until we found that locket, because that's what I wanted. And, I was a little spoiled I guess. We did find the locket, I mean the Star of David and the chain, and I did not remember that occurrence until we went to Israel in 1985 and one of my father's former students reminded me, because he was one of the guests at that dinner.

Q: Did you have your own room?

A: No. I shared it with my sister, yes.

Q: Did you have your own little library?

A: Yes, yes, I did, yes. We started collecting, I think I knew how to read when I was four, because we -- it was stressed, and it was part of our make up, that as soon as you knew how to speak, and walk, and talk, you had to start acquiring knowledge. My father was almost fixed on that, I mean it was a fixation with him, and he kept saying that knowledge and education no one can take away from you. And, again, in retrospect, I didn't realize it, but now I realize that the education that my father acquired was all done out of Poland, the

reason being, in Poland there were quotas, so he had to go outside to acquire his education and to him it was priceless and he tried to, I mean, I guess, give it to us, the feeling that education is very important.

Q: You described yourself as a tomboy.

A: Yes.

Q: Not a student?

A: Not a student, no.

Q: What do you mean by being a tomboy, what did you do?

A: I liked to just, you know, loaf around, play, climb fences, and I always had a little penknife with me, which came in very handy later on. I don't think I played with dolls much. I think I had one doll, that's about it. I bought a big, beautiful doll when we went back to Europe in 1988 to make up for it, but I think I wasn't into frilly dresses, I was not very feminine I guess. Maybe that's why.

Q: How did you come by this pen- knife? That seems unusual.

A: I don't know. I just liked to have a penknife with me, and I asked for it, and my father and mother debated, I guess, but they finally gave it to me when I was about 5-1/2 or six years old. I had to show it every day when I'd come back, you know, from playing, that I knew how to use it, yes, and ever since, it's almost, I have a penknife with me now. I never go anyplace without a little knife.

Q: And, what did you do with it at five?

A: Oh, I would get some, you know, willow, pussy willow branches and carve things and cut up things, yes.

Q: You had a dream, a recurring dream.

A: Yes, I had a recurring dream, and it was more than twice or three times, I don't know how many times, but I dreamt that I was left in a forest all by myself, and I remember when I woke up from that first dream I ran into my parents' bedroom and I cried, and they tried to, you know, appease me, and tried to explain that it's only a nightmare, it's a dream, and it doesn't mean anything. And, when it happened several times, they just dismissed it in a way. It's almost scary, because this is exactly as if a prophecy, because it did happen later on.

Q: Were you hearing things about what was going on in Germany even as a five and six year old?

A: I guess I was hearing, but it was sort of -- I did not realize what it was all about, but politics was part of every meeting, of every discussion, of every dinner, of every gathering in our home, yes. But, I just didn't want to have anything to do with it. It was scary, and maybe that's why, but I just did not pay much attention to it, but it was discussed continually, yes. And from the time I remember walking, all I remember in our house was a conversation about going to America. I knew my father had family there, and my grandmother was in America, and I remembered her address, 231 Echo Place, Bronx 57, New York. I don't know if they had ZIPs at that point, but that's what I remembered.

Q: Who was in America from your family?

A: My father had five sisters and his mother, and they all ended up in America, and he was the last one, supposedly, to leave. He was somewhere chronologically in the middle, but I'm not quite sure. At this point, I only have one aunt in Columbus, Ohio, my father's sister.

Q: Do you remember prejudice, or anti-semitism when you were growing up?

A: Strangely enough, I do not. My friends were Jewish young people, and Polish girlfriends, and Ukrainian, and we all played together. We all had wonderful times. We were in each other's homes. No, I must say honestly, I do not remember any anti-semitism before the war. Again, maybe I wasn't perceptive enough, but I did not see it. I had a good time, I played, and we were -- the house was open for everyone, I was welcome in their homes, and they were welcome in my home, and I did not see it. Obviously, there was anti-semitism, but I was not aware of it.

Q: You and your sister were in the same room together.

A: Yes.

Q: And, she was four years older.

A: Yes.

Q: And, you were the bane of her existence.

A: Yes, I was, and I feel badly, I feel very guilty about it now, but I was very curious, and she was very artistically inclined. She practiced a lot, you know, on her musical instruments, she played the piano, and maybe I was a little bit -- maybe that was sibling rivalry, I don't know. She was such a young lady. She was beautiful, and she did everything right, and I did not. And, I know my parents loved us both equally, but I guess maybe I tried to steal away a little bit of attention from her, and that was my way of doing it, just to disturb her and to show her that I'm there too, you know, because otherwise I was insignificant. And, I wanted to be grown up. She was so grown up, and I was not.



Q: Did you play together at all?

A: I don't recall that we really played together, no, no. She would correct me when I would practice the piano and would tell me, you know, how awful I sounded, you know, and I knew I wasn't good, and I wasn't -- I really wasn't interested in playing, and I was not interested in being good. I guess I wanted to be good, but I didn't want to work at it.

Q: Did you have a best friend?

A: Yes. I had several best friends, yes. I would rather not give their names for several reasons, but I did have several best friends, yes.

Q: Girls? Boys?

A: Girls, and they -- no, there were two boys, too, but the girls, one of them had a very sad ending in the ghetto, and that was very difficult for me. All the others died, I mean were murdered. The one Ukrainian girl, when I came back, her name was Marusia Czajkowska, and I asked about her. She was about a year older than I, and she died, we were back in Russia in my home town in 1988 in August, I was told she died in May of 1988, and that I was very saddened by that. We have not kept in touch at all, but she was one of my friends. Yes.

Q: Were your parents religious?

A: That's a very difficult question to answer. When you -- they were traditional, they observed the holidays, all the, I guess, things that make one, you know, be considered a Jew, but we didn't go to synagogue every Saturday. We were not kosher in our home. I don't know how to answer that. So, they were and they weren't. They were, I'd call them, emancipated, or they were not assimilated per se, you know, because we all were very proud of who we were, who we are, but there was not such a stress on the observance of prayer and things like that.

Q: Tell me what happened in 1939, at least as far as you know.

A: In 1939 when the war broke out, September 1, the Russians -- the Soviet -- I mean at that point, now I know that Hitler and Stalin had an agreement. They divided Poland in half. We lived in the eastern part of Poland, and, consequently, the Soviet Union took over our part of Poland. I remember it happened maybe two or three days after the actual war started, and I remember long lines of people, these were the refugees who were trying to escape from the German part of Poland, they would -- I mean, there were people with bundles, children, and I mean it was a very sad picture, and that's what is in my mind, of all these people walking on the street, not even on the sidewalk because there were so many of them. And then, when they stopped, that's when the Russians came in, and there they were the soldiers and tanks. People greeted them with flowers, very happy, and it was sort of exciting for me, not

realizing what was happening, but there was no blood shed in our town, you could hear the sound, I guess, of guns and all in the background, but for a very short time. They came in, and as far as I know, nothing really changed for us with one exception, the official language became Russian instead of Polish, because -- and that was no problem, because most Europeans are bi- or tri-lingual because of necessity, our neighbors all around us were speaking a different language, so that was no problem. And, my father still had his job. I mean, he kept his position at the university. I'm sure there were some very drastic changes, but I did not realize them. Some of the people who had businesses in stores, I guess, in town, they are the ones who probably felt the change more drastically than I did, because most of the stores, or all, became nationalized. And, at first we had much of everything, and then all of a sudden things started to -- there were shortages of bread, milk, clothing, but that was not my problem, that was my parents' problems, and I did not sense any perceptible change in anything. The Russian language came after a little while, it wasn't difficult, and they did not single out one particular group of people, but I guess they did, only I didn't realize it, they singled out the people who were materialistically rich. And, now and then, I understand, there were people who all of a sudden would disappear at night and we wouldn't know, you know, what happened to them. These were the people that were, I guess, driven out to Siberia. These were the -- they called them the Kulacks, the rich people, but we were not materialistically rich, and my father was an intellectual, and he was left alone. I know one thing, that going to synagogue was a little more difficult. My father paid more attention not to be so visible in the synagogue as he was before, and I'm sure that was because of the Soviet occupation. Other than that, I really did not see many changes. Again, we still had meetings, the people congregated in our home. There were some disappearances. The Polish Kshondz, the Polish priest, wasn't there anymore. There were still the big beautiful Kosciol, that's the church, the Polish church, which was right in the middle of the city on the main street, and it was a magnificent building. It looked almost like a palace, and, again, there were old chestnut trees all around that Kosciol, and across the street there was a beautiful statue of Swienta Matka Boska, and that means Saint Mary, the mother of Jesus, it was a beautiful statue, and it was always surrounded with flowers, even in the winter time. And, that sort of got neglected when the Russians came in. The Ukrainian Tzerkev, that's their church, was very close to our home, and that was also a magnificent building with the onion-shaped domes in gold, and I noticed that there were not as many people attending as they did before the war.

Q: And you noticed that then?

A: Yes, but I didn't question it at that time.

Q: Were you frightened during this period?

A: No, no, I was not frightened. In the beginning, it was sort of exciting, you know, all these changes, I was not frightened. We were, I sensed that my parents were very disappointed, because, apparently, our papers were almost ready for our immigration to the United States I remember, I'm not quite sure, but I think it was in 1938, that we all traveled to Warsaw for

interviews, and I guess we went to the Consulate, you know, getting ready to immigrate to America, but, of course, the war interrupted all that. And, I sensed that my parents were disappointed. I know one thing that happened. In 1939, I think it was 1939, there was the World's Fair in New York, and my father was offered two tickets, he received two invitations through the university to attend the World's Fair. My father asked for four tickets, and, of course, they didn't give him the four tickets. So, that's ironic and very sad for me now. I remember taking only one trip to Lvov, to the university, during that occupation. I don't know why. I mean, during the Russian occupation, only one time, and there was a speaker, and I mean, of course, it was all in Russian, you know, and I didn't have as good a time as I used to at the university.

Q: Do you remember why?

A: No, I don't know why, but I did not have as good a time.

Q: Your father didn't go to Krakow anymore?

A: No, that was another thing that, again, I mean these things come out only when people question me, because I don't, you know, realize how important it was. He used to be a visiting professor at the Jagelonski University, which is a famous old university in Krakow, Poland. And, when the Russians became our -- when they occupied our part of Poland, my father's visits or trips to Krakow stopped, yes.

Q: Was your mother working during this time?

A: No, she was not working, no, I mean working for pay, no, she was not, no. So, I mean, we didn't have money problems, but we didn't live a very -- we lived a comfortable life. I didn't know any better. We used to get shoes twice a year, in the summer and winter, that's it. And, I mean, you know, everything was just regimented and very -- not frugal, but my mother -- my parents were very careful with the money because there wasn't that much money. We lived comfortably, and I wasn't lacking in anything, and it was a wonderful life.

Q: When the Russians were occupying, your sister was a teenager at this time.

A: Yes.

Q: Were there boyfriends? Were there -- do you remember?

A: No, there were no boyfriends per se, but there were boys who would come to the house, but there was no dating. Everybody went in groups, and that's when I started going on my own. I was old enough, I think, I guess, what was I, eight or something --

Q: '41?

A: -- no, '41, that's '39 to '41, nine, ten, at that point I already had my own friends and I didn't bother my sister too much, she was far too old for me at that point. But, no, there was no dating, but there were activities at home, and we used to observe Imieniny. Imieniny is like a birthday. It's actually, it means giving a name, and they had Imieniny every week it seems like one of her group, you know, had a party, and at school there were parties, and there was a very active social life, and there were lots of activities. She had a bicycle, my sister, and that was rather -- that was a luxury. I never learned how to ride a bicycle, and I did not have one of my own. I was supposedly to have gotten her's later on, but it never came to be. And, we used to go on Wycieczki, and that's like trips, I mean, just go to the park, you know, picnics, and from school, these were organized things, organized activities, and then we did it also on our own, and there were many sports events. I don't know, it wasn't football, I think it was soccer, and there was, I want to say softball, it's not softball, with a net, what do you call it, volleyball, yes, volleyball. There were all sorts of activities and, I mean, games that we used to play, and in school I remember, there was a huge school yard, and we would go out for there for hours for our physical education, there was physical education from the time you were in kindergarten, and it's organized, you know, and I mean we used to play all sorts of games and these were very entertaining and very fulfilling. We used to run, have games of running, and walking, singing, and it was a lot of fun. And, I guess when the Russians came in they just took over the schools and all, but they continued with the same activities. There was one thing that I would like to bring out, too. I wanted very much to become a Brownie, and Jews were not permitted to be in the scouting movement. That was - - when I say there was no anti-semitism, that is the one sign, I didn't realize why, but Jewish boys and girls were not allowed to become Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and I missed that because of the physical -- I mean, they had so many physical games, you know, and they did their activities, they were very fulfilling to me, very appealing to me, and I could not participate in that. I know I'm jumping from one thing to another.

Q: When did life change drastically, 1941?

A: In 1941, early summer, life took a turn for the worse. Apparently, my parents did hear, and the whole community, they heard what was going on in the German part of Poland, but I don't know, but it seems, of course, I didn't know then, but it seems no one could believe the atrocities that took place, and so, we just went on with life as it was. In 1941, in the summer, all of a sudden we heard bombs and the airplanes flying overhead, and after a few days the Germans marched in very much like the Russians did a few years before, and, again, I mean, there was no bloodshed as far as I can recall. They came in with tanks. They came in, the soldiers looked much -- they were much better dressed, and they came in and people again greeted them with flowers, and they were very welcome in our town. A lot of people were very happy that the Germans came in, and that the Russians were leaving. If there were fights, they were outside of the town, so, really, there was very little fighting in Horochow. But in 1941, early summer, was when the world became completely topsy-turvy for the Jews. When the Germans came in, from the very beginning, they concentrated and they let it be known that the Jews are the ones that they are going to try to murder, all of us. What they did, I don't recall if it was the first or second day after they came into Horochow, they went

around with a list and they looked for people by name. These were people who were leaders, the Jewish leaders, and my beloved father was among them. They came into the house, they burst in, and they asked for him, and my father saw them, he tried to get out the back way. They caught him, and they led him away. He never even said goodbye. I'll never forget that look in his eyes. And, this way, they took away about 300 of the Jewish leaders. The next day, it seems every day from then on there were decrees. At first, it was for the Jews, we always had to congregate in the marketplace, that's the central place. And, each day there were new decrees. First, we had to bring all the gold, all the silver, all the radios, all the furs, all the rugs, the Persian rugs, everything that was of any value, we had to bring to the marketplace to give to the Germans. It was an organized thing, and everyone, there was so much chaos, and so much panic, that it's almost like people were going in a trance. All of a sudden, most of the heads of the families were gone. We didn't know where, when, or if we'll ever see our fathers and brothers again. I know now that when they took my father away, my mother was still a very young woman and she turned gray overnight, but she tried very much to camouflage her feelings, and she did not want us to feel the despair that she probably felt, and everyone else there, too. We were gathered every day for different things. First, I mean, we had to part with all our dearest possessions. Then, they gathered us in the marketplace and we had to watch when they burned the main synagogue and the little -- there were little, they call them schtiebels, they were separate synagogues. They burned all our Torahs. They burned all the books of prayer, and we had to stand and watch. Everyone who was over 14 years of age was sent to slave labor, and that was right from the beginning after they, you know, ordered us to bring all the things to the marketplace. My mother and my sister ended up working. My mother was digging ditches, and so was my sister, and they marched them, they met at the marketplace in the early morning and they were marched back at night, and sometimes both my sister and my mother were black and blue from beatings, from, you know, awful treatment that they endured during the day. This lasted about two weeks. I'm not quite sure of the exact time, but then one day people were told not to go to work, and we were given approximately an hour to take whatever we could carry with us, and we had to congregate again at the marketplace. There, we were told we are going to move, we are going to live in a new place, and this was the ghetto. They marched us into one of the poorest sections of town, and we were assigned a place to live.

Q: Can we stop for a moment? Let's go back to these two weeks.

A: Yes.

Q: When your father was taken away, was everyone in the house, your mother, and sister and you, did you all --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you were all there?

A: Yes, yes, we were all there.

Q: Do you remember what happened after he -- do you remember his face?

A: Yes.

Q: What happened to you when he left?

A: His face was very sad and there were tears in his eyes. He tried to put on a jacket, a coat jacket, and they wouldn't allow him, so he went in his shirt sleeves. It was almost a bewildered look, but he turned his head, and they held him on each side, there was a Ukrainian, there were Germans, but the Ukrainians were the ones who grabbed him, and these were people, I'm sure, that he knew. I don't know who they were, but my mother said she knew who they were. And, there was a look, I can't describe it, but it was great sadness, and bewilderment, and love. It was a mix of many feelings in that one last look. And, my mother gathered my sister and me, we just looked and we started crying. And, that's the way they took him away. They took him out the back, the kitchen door, not in the front. It was a very poignant, very sad moment in our lives, but I don't know, but my mother, whatever she felt, she didn't show. She right away tried to tell us how wonderful it will be when we are all together again, from the very first. And, the next morning she got up, she was gray, completely gray. This lasted, again, all these horrible things, lasted for about two weeks, and then when we were herded into the ghetto life took a new turn for the worse. My mother and my sister were still marched to work every morning. The people, like myself, under 14 and very old, were left to ourselves. The ghetto was completely enclosed by a high fence that was reinforced with barbed wire. There were two gates, one in the back, I mean, one in the front and one in the back, and one could not enter or leave without a written pass. We had to wear the Star of David on the front of our clothing and on the back, for some reason it had to be yellow in color. Everything was very regimented. The Germans appointed a Judenrat. The Judenrat was a group of men who were sort of in charge of the ghetto, and anything and everything that the Germans wanted from the Jews they went through the Judenrat, because it was beneath them to go to an ordinary Jew to request things, so they did it all through the Judenrat. This is also a very sad occurrence, because here our brothers, our own kind, who are requested, "I need 200 people," you know, and they have to make the selection who these 200 people will be to deliver to the Germans, and at that point we didn't know what was going to happen to these people. Every now and then in the ghetto there were, they called them Lapanka, and these were round-ups again. The Germans would drive by with a van or a truck, and they would grab people randomly, and I mean it didn't matter if you were a worker, or if you were an old person, or a child, and these people would never be heard from again. And, sometimes during when people were working, during work, and consequently that made it very, very difficult. Every morning when I would get up and I would say goodbye to my sister and my mother, I never really knew whether or not they would return to the ghetto that evening, because they could have had a Lapanka at work. I forgot to tell you, about my father's library, and this was before we were gathered into the ghetto. One day, that was during the two weeks of our sort of being still neither here nor there, one day a van pulled up in front of our house and several Germans came out, very

well dressed, and they knocked on the door and came in, and demanded to know where my father's library was. And, my mother showed them, that was after my father was already gone, and they came in and meticulously took every single, precious book with them, and they even gave my mother a receipt for these books. And, that was one time when they addressed her as "Gnädige Frau"<sup>1</sup>, at that point she was a lady, not a Jew, because she had all these precious books that they appropriated.

Q: They took something else, didn't they?

A: Oh, yes. My father was given a gift from some of his students. It was, I guess, a relief map, you call it, it was built from plywood and it had every continent, every panel had a different continent, all the continents of the world, and that was in his study, that was not in the library, and when they saw that they took that off and they took that with them, too, and this was, it's almost as if they took everything that was the dearest to my father. First they took my father, and they then took all the dear possessions of his, and they drove away. Interestingly, at that point, it comes -- I mean, one has to think, how did they know about that? The local populace must have told them, somebody must have told them. These were our neighbors, our friends, who worked with my father and mother, and we considered them friends, and all of a sudden they turned against us, and for no reason at all, and to this day I cannot understand why they had to be so mean and ugly.

Q: We need to take a break now for the change of the film.

A: Okay. Has it been an hour?

Q: Yes.

A: My God.

Q: Okay, we can break now.

End of Tape #1

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<sup>1</sup>**German** (archaic): Gracious woman, a form of address reserved for ladies of high standing.

Tape #2

Q: Charlene, can you describe the day that you moved from your house into the ghetto, what that was like?

A: Yes. I would go a little bit back, because as soon as they took my father away, and then they took his library away, my mother came home from work one day, one evening, and whatever we still had, a little bit of jewelry, some gold coins, she sewed in some of these coins and jewelry in each of our clothing, and her own, and my sister's, and mine, and I sort of thought it was really exciting and fun at that point. I said, "Why are you doing that?" She says, "For a rainy day." And, I mean, these clothes were -- it was my coat, I had a heavy coat, and she says, "Wherever we go, whatever we do, you take that coat." And, that's what she told my sister, too. But, anyway, so we did have these things sewn in the lining of our clothing, and when the time came that we had to go to the ghetto, we were herded into the ghetto, we paid attention to take these pieces of clothing with us. What I grabbed, I remember, a pillow, and some underwear. I was wearing my high-top shoes, even though it was in the summer, and I took that winter coat and a sweater, and I don't recall, no toys, none whatsoever, and I don't know what my -- my sister tried to grab her violin, but my mother told her to leave it, and she took some food, we had dried noodles and some food that could be -- that wasn't perishable. My mother took some pots and pans and some of her clothing and one suitcase, and I don't know what she threw into that suitcase, but that's all I remember that we took with us, nothing else. She took some blankets, I think. And, when we were thrown into that ghetto, we were assigned one room. It was a large building, actually as far as I recall it was a three-story building, it was in the poorest section of town, and it was in great disrepair. We were assigned this one room, and there were three other families with us to share that one room. The entire house had one bathroom and one kitchen, and the running water was almost nothing, I mean there was very little water, there was no warm water, only cold water. If you wanted hot water you had to heat it on a wooden stove, and there was no wood. There was not enough room to sleep everyone on the floor in our room, and so the women, and there were two boys in that group, found some wood and they built bunks, I guess, so that we slept like in threes, because there was not enough room for all of us. Most of the people in our room were people who went to work. There were only, I think, three, four of us who were not quite 14 years of age, and we were the ones who were left at home in the house to fend for ourselves in the very beginning. The people who did not go to work did not receive any rations. The rations were very meager. I am not quite sure of the weights, but it was like maybe two slices of bread, some oleo, a little bit of sugar, and I think some vegetables. I don't think there was any meat at all, and these rations, first they were given daily, then when the Judenrat organized everything it was done once a week, and usually by the second or third day everything was gone. My mother and sister shared their rations with me. It was very difficult, and in the beginning there was an awful lot of chaos. The kids, like myself, the younger, were really left with nothing to do. We were very hungry. We were dirty. We were unsupervised, and it was very difficult to comprehend what really went on. We ate only at night, when our parents or whoever took care of us came home, and all day there was nothing to do. Consequently, the kids, like myself,



decided that we had to go outside and try and get some food. It was an unbelievable feeling to be hungry, and it's a hunger that is very difficult to describe, for a child to be hungry and there was nothing to eat. And, I was asked many times what did we play, what did we do, we pretended, and what we played about mostly is about food. We talked about food, we pretended about -- I mean, everything centered around food. And so, ingeniously, we dug out two holes in the fences, below the fences, so that a child could sneak out to the other side and, you know, take off the Star of David and try to act like a normal human being and see if we could obtain food. And, now and then, children brought home some food back to the ghetto. I did it many times. It was very dangerous, because if one was caught one would pay with life. I mean, this was the order, to shoot to kill the person, the perpetrator. I was very lucky, and now and then I would bring a slice of bread, I would bring a carrot, or a potato, or an egg, and these were very, very great achievements. My mother made me promise that I wouldn't do it anymore, but I disobeyed. One time -- no, let me go back to the ghetto again, in the very beginning, my mother and several other women organized a clandestine school for children who were below the age of work, and it was a wonderful thing because we had something to look forward to. It made us forget about the hunger and about all the inadequacies of living such a primitive life, and this school existed for several months. Several of the ladies, including my mother, would barter on the outside and they came home with crayons, with writing paper, with some books, and I mean they would tell stories, we would sing and we would color, and it was something to look forward to. It was really...if it only could have lasted, but it didn't. It lasted a few months, and pretty soon there was not enough jewelry or money to barter with, there were no more supplies, school supplies, and the morale sort of sagged in the ghetto. The women came home, they were too tired, and too hungry, and too beaten up to be able to go and put on a happy face for us kids. So, that disintegrated into nothing also. In the very beginning, there was like a -- not really a hospital, but there was one room, and there was still one doctor in the ghetto, and somehow they obtained some medical supplies. And so, in the beginning there was sort of a little hospital when people got sick or needed some medications. But shortly after the ghetto came into being, the doctor was grabbed in one of the round-ups, in the Lapanka, and that was the end of the hospital. From then on, people who became ill, first they stayed in their rooms, then there was no room in the rooms and you'd walk down the ghetto street and you would see people sick, or dying, or dead, and there was a committee within the Judenrat who was in charge of burying the dead. And, sometimes they wouldn't get to these people for days, because it was -- there were so many of them, and there was a lot of work to be done. It was a very sad sight. When one imagines the ghetto was completely cut off from the entire world, there was no newspaper, there were no radios, there was no mail, it was like we were in Mars, not on the planet Earth. The only way people did get information was through the workers who were going out of the ghetto and they somehow would gather rumors and information from the people on the outside. In retrospect, I think my mother did a super human job in keeping my sister, and me fairly healthy and sane. It was very demoralizing to live in these conditions when we had to share one bathroom, and this building, this was one of the bigger buildings in the ghetto, there were about 100 people, and just to go to the bathroom was a horrendous experience. There was no water to cleanse oneself. It was very difficult. I remember one time when my sister and my mother, when we got into the ghetto,

my sister was very lucky to obtain a new job. My mother was still digging ditches and repairing roads, but my sister was able to get into an old warehouse where young women were knitting and crocheting articles of clothing for the soldiers on the front, and that was a very, a choice job because you were sitting inside and, you know, it wasn't labor, you know, manual labor. One time she was ill, and she couldn't go in to work, and so, she gave me her pass and I was to take her place in the warehouse. And so, I gathered in front of the gate with all the other young women and passed as my sister. No one paid any attention, you know, as long as you had the piece of paper. And so, when we got into the warehouse I took her place, her friends showed me where she was sitting, and picked up a scarf that she started knitting the day before. I was not very good at what I was doing, and one of the German guards started staring at me intently, and he kept watching me for quite a while, and then he started cursing and yelling at me, and I know he said I wasn't doing it fast enough, and I still didn't do it much faster because I didn't know how, and he got very annoyed with me. He grabbed one of the knitting needles out of my hand and pushed it in my forefinger, and this is what it looks like now. I passed out, and I got home that evening and that was a bitter lesson for never to try and take my sister's place for the ration that she would have lost that day. There were many awful incidents and occurrences in the ghetto. One time there were three men, young men, who tried to escape from work. They were working and they were trying to make their way to freedom they hoped, instead they were caught and the Germans hung them in the ghetto. It wasn't the marketplace, but there was a central place where we all were forced to gather and to watch the hangings. And then, they let them hang there for several days, and each morning the people who went to work had to march by and turn their head to the right, and they were forced to look at these poor victims. There was one time when I snuck out of the ghetto and I was lucky to obtain two eggs, and I remember I was wearing a dress with little puffed sleeves, and I put an egg in each sleeve and tried to make my way back into the ghetto. I paid for these two eggs with a small gold ring that had a ruby in it that my mother sewed into my coat. I was quite proud of myself, and I just could picture my mother's and my sister's faces when they came home and we had two eggs to eat. Just before I was entering the hole, the camouflaged hole back into the ghetto, a Ukrainian guard spotted me, and he ran over and he started screaming at me, and he found the two eggs and threw them on the sidewalk and made me kneel down and rubbed my face in them, and screamed at me to get right back where I belonged and never to show my face again on the outside. I was petrified, and I didn't give away the hiding place, the hiding entrance, I marched back into the ghetto, or he threw me back into the ghetto and that was the end of that. I guess he was one of the kind ones because he could have killed me, or he should have killed me. When I told my mother and my sister that evening about my experience, she just hugged me. A few days later, one of my best friends, and I can't name her because she has family and I did not tell them about that, I didn't have the heart, she snuck out of the ghetto, and she obtained some bread, and as she was trying to get back into the ghetto she was caught and she was murdered. They displayed her body in the ghetto for about a week, and we were forced to march by and look at her, and they didn't allow the burial society to bury her. These were lessons that we learned every day, and, yet, the will to live was so strong that everyone tried to survive as best as one could, and took chances, because there was no other way. I snuck out many times after that and was lucky. And, again, even though I

promised my mother I wouldn't, but hunger is a very strong motivator. I don't know if there are any adjectives with which to describe what real hunger is. It's a pain, a physical pain to be hungry, where your insides become like a knot and your brain stops working. There was no brain, it just says hunger, I want to eat, I want to eat no matter what, I want to eat. That went on for a long time, like an eternity, but it seems like when winter came it was doubly difficult, because we had to contend, not only with hunger and horrible conditions of living, but there was the cold, there was no wood to heat the places, there was not enough clothing to protect us, and in spite of my mother's support and love there was creeping in a feeling of despair, and there was a lot of demoralization in the ghetto. People started being hopeless. There was no way out, it seemed like. But, again, the strongest survived, and, apparently, my sister, and I, and my mother were the few of the strongest because we did survive. I don't know how. I think it was, again, my mother's constant preaching almost and telling us not to give up hope. She was an amazing person. She tried to instill hope where there was little hope, and she tried to make up stories and keep us entertained with everything that had a happy ending. How she felt inside we don't know, I know that she didn't feel that way, but she tried to transmit it and give it to us, and it did work, somehow it did work. Somehow we lived through until the next spring, and by that time I think the ghetto was probably diminished in population by half. A lot of people died of starvation and cold. Some people were taken away in the round-ups, and others died because they gave up, not because they were ill, but they just gave up. They just felt they didn't have anymore strength to fight all these obstacles of life. And so, the Germans, every day there were different decrees. I mean, they made life more miserable. It was almost a design every day to torture by different decrees. I mean, they would demand money. They would demand more gold. They knew we gave it all up, no, we had to do more, we had to give more. It was just -- the Judenrat had a terrible time trying, you know, to be the mediator between the Germans and the Jews, and there were times, I understand, where they were having terrible arguments and discussions with our Jewish people in the ghetto, because it's as if they sat in judgment what to do and who to send out, and they really had no choice in what they were doing. By early spring, our community dwindled to about, as I said, half, and the Germans decided we had too much room and we were too comfortable in our ghetto, and so, one day they again gathered us all in the little place, it wasn't the marketplace because that was outside the ghetto, and we were told again that we can take whatever we wanted and whatever we could carry with us. By that time, our possessions were even more meager than they were last fall, and we marched again to a new place.

Q: Could we go back just a little bit so I can ask a couple questions?

A: Yes.

Q: What was it like in that house with 100 people? How did people get along? Was it mainly women at this point?

A: Well, predominantly women, and old people, and young kids, yes. There were several men, yes. How did they get along? They tolerated one another. The women tried to do -- to be the

soothe-sayers. They tried to appease everyone and to keep quiet, but tempers were rising, people were very argumentative, and people were hungry, and they were in pain, and they were not --

Q: We have to stop for a minute. There's a problem with the level.

A:<sup>2</sup> -- from brothers, my father helped them escape, and he's there, he says, "Can you tell me really what happened to my mother, sister and father?" His father was taken away with mine, too, but his sister was the one who was caught, and I couldn't tell him that, and I never did, so that's why I don't mention names because you never know, you know. But, that was her name, her name was Duba, actually, Dvora, you know, Duba, yes, but I didn't have the heart. But, we had a discussion, my husband and I, maybe I should have told him the truth, what good would that do?

Q: Are you rolling? Okay. When we were breaking, you were talking about what the household was like.

A: Yes.

Q: The big house.

A: Mostly, there were women. There were some kids, like myself, and there were some males, but, really, predominantly it was women, and there were some old people, very old people, some grandfathers, and several grandfathers and a grandmother, I think, there were altogether about 100 people. This was one of the largest houses in the ghetto. It was a three-story building. And, we did try to co-exist, and the women tried to always make peace, but tempers flared, and it was a difficult situation. And, I mean, when you think that there's one bathroom, and one kitchen, and I mean it was a primitive kitchen too, it was very difficult. So, in the beginning everybody was trying to be accommodative, but at the very end people were not as nice as one should be to one another.

Q: Did it smell?

A: Oh, yes, yes, horrible smells, yes. I remember we used to be -- we always slept with open windows, and, yet, you know, you tried to open the window and other people would say it's too cold, you know, I would rather be cold than choke, you know, from the awful smells. Yes, what a question, yes.

Q: Noise?

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<sup>2</sup>Ms. Schiff is relating a story of a man from Horochow whom she met after the war. He had left during the war and was inquiring about his family's fate. Added by Ms. Charlene Schiff in 3/94.

- A: Not that much noise, no, no, but the smell was awful, very, very disagreeable, yes.
- Q: Can you describe when and how the children, you and the other children, dug these holes?
- A: Yes. It started almost like a play in the very beginning when we were in the ghetto, it was still summer, and we said, we got together, had nothing to do, all we talked about is hunger, we said, well, let's try and dig a tunnel. And, we had some, like, shovels, actually, I don't know if they were toy shovels, but they were not full size, and there were some boys with us and they started it, and it was a game. We did it within three or four afternoons, because several of us had to watch, you know, on the outside and on the inside, and it was an exciting thing to do. We dug two such holes, and we camouflaged them so beautifully, and I'm proud to say that not one child ever gave away our two exits, not one. I don't know if the Judenrat inside the ghetto knew of the -- well, they knew that there were some illegal exits, but they sort of looked the other way.
- Q: How did you camouflage them?
- A: We camouflaged them with like rags, there was no grass or anything, stones, and broken chairs, and it was just done so that nobody paid any attention. And, on the outside, there was grass, and there were leaves, and I mean it just looked very normal, and some plaster and stuff like that on the outside, but not on the inside. It was done beautifully. I was very proud. I was not the main engineer of it, but there were some kids who were just wonderful at doing that, and it gave us a way of getting out.
- Q: When you went in and out, did anybody stand guard?
- A: Yes, oh, yes. It was a very well-organized --
- Q: Can you describe it?
- A: Well, what we did, first of all, for instance I said I want to go tomorrow, you know, so there were three or four of us together, and there was also an agreement, whoever went out, and whatever you got, in the beginning we tried to share, but then it was very -- it was not feasible. If somebody got a slice of bread, you wanted it for your family, so we decided whatever one got it was for him, or for her, and her family, and we took turns. And there were about 20 or 30 kids, and we took turns in standing guard, and who would get out, and mostly we volunteered to get out, because we wouldn't say, well, you go, but mostly we volunteered. And I went out a number of times, yes. And I don't know if I should be proud, it's nothing to be proud of, but when my friend was killed there was one other boy who was also murdered, but that was almost at the very end of the first ghetto, and they buried him right away. I don't know why, maybe because they knew we were going to move pretty soon.
- Q: You saw your friend killed?

A: Yes, I did. She was a beautiful girl. She was probably one, she looked like a baby doll, she had blond hair and blue eyes, and she was so beautiful. When she'd walk down the street, people turned their heads to look at her, she was so -- her features were so perfect. She was my friend. She was about a year older than I, and we became very good friends before the ghetto, because we didn't live very far away from one another. And then, in the ghetto, we were even better friends. She had a mother and one brother, and she had a brother who left Poland.

Q: This must have been difficult for you to see her, you saw her murdered?

A: It was very traumatic. I mean anybody, to see the hangings, and to see other incidents like that, were very traumatic, but this, this was my friend, my dear friend, and she looked so peaceful, and there was blood on her dress, and she looked like she was asleep. And, my mother kept comforting me, and she kept saying, "She's not suffering anymore, she's not in pain." Her mother died, my friend's mother died about a month after my friend was murdered in the ghetto. In the spring, when the Germans decided we had too much space and we were too comfortable, they built a new ghetto. I thought that was the poor section of town. Well, the new ghetto was really in the slums. This was a group of houses or a space where most people did not live for years already, but there were just a few dilapidated houses. The only difference between the new ghetto and the old was that the new ghetto was surrounded by a high fence and barbed wire on three sides, and the fourth side of the ghetto was bordered by the river. And, that part, that side, was not -- did not have any fences. We were assigned a little nook in a house right on the river, and, again, I mean, it was -- my mother made the best with what she had. We tried to make it home, and the main thing was to have enough space to sleep everyone on the floor. And, again, they had to build these bunks, because there was not enough space on the floor to sleep all of us. This time, we had only two other families with us in that little room, and these were all women and children. There were no boys, or elderly or men. My mother and my sister kept going to work again, as if, you know, nothing happened, or, I mean, as if they were still in the old place, and rumors began to fly that our end was near. It was spring, 1942, and my mother tried desperately while she was working, when she was on the outside, to make contact with some of our friends from before. She wanted to find a place where someone would hide the three of us, because that's what everyone tried to do. Finally, one day she came home and she was very excited, and she told us that she found two places. She couldn't find one place where the farmer or the people would be willing to hide three people, so she found two. One place would hide one person, and another place, the people were willing to take two people. And, there was my mother's difficult decision, how and who should go where. And in her infinite wisdom, she decided that my sister, being the older one, would be able to manage on her own, and mother and I would go to the other place, the two of us. And, by that time, I mean, she was making plans, or she was excited, or she tried to be excited for our sake, and she kept telling us exactly where we were going. I don't recall the name of the farmer that my sister was going to, but that was on the edge of town, and he -- the plans were that he would pick her up after work one evening, and that one morning when we all got up, we ate

our meager breakfast, and my sister took her little bundle with her, the most important things, clothing that she still had. She wasn't crying, and I wasn't crying either. We hugged, we embraced, and we said goodbye, and my mother kept saying how wonderful it would be when all this is over, we'll meet again, and papa will come home and we'll have great celebrations. And so, she and my sister went to work, and that evening my mother came back by herself, and she told me that sister went off and everything was working according to her plan. And I don't recall exactly, it wasn't the same evening, but maybe a few short days later, when there really were signs in the ghetto that something was happening, we saw the number of the guards increase immeasurably. I think they doubled the guards around the ghetto, and there were a lot more Germans in the ghetto and right outside. And, one sensed that there was some commotion, something was taking place. At that point, I knew that people really became hysterical, and a lot of people started building partitions in their, you know, rooms, thinking that they could build like false walls with scraps that they got from somewhere, and if they hide in these partitions, in these false walls, that the Germans wouldn't find them. Some people, you know, would make a hiding place in the chimneys of the houses, and some of them went and dug cellars and tunnels, all this within I think like two weeks after we moved to the new ghetto. Anyway, there was a lot of panic and chaos in the ghetto at that point, and a few days after my sister left, my mother came home from work and she says, "It's time to go." And so, she made me dress in my best clothes, and, again, I still had that coat with a few sewn in coins, and I put on my high-top shoes, and she got dressed and whatever she felt was still not threadbare, and she made two little bundles, one for myself and one for her. We ate our meager supper, and when it got dark, really dark, it was a dark night, it was very quiet, we stepped out of our room, we didn't tell anyone. At that point, no one shared information with anyone else. It seems like everyone was an entity unto oneself. We walked out, we didn't say goodbye to anyone. And pretty soon we were in the river. It was very quiet, and there were a lot of bulrushes and there's a lot of underbrush, and I held on tightly to my mother's hand, and all of a sudden shots rang out, and we ducked, and when it stopped we proceeded a little further. But then, the gunshots were sporadic, but we could not move because it was still, and when we moved we made noise. And so, we just stayed there, and we stayed the entire night, because these sporadic gunshots were making it impossible for us to move. The next morning, there were no sporadic gunshots, it was regular now, and it seemed to come from every which side. We heard a lot of noise, a lot of commotion, we saw fire, we heard screams, we heard babies crying, and it seems that it was none to soon that we got out. At that point, a lot of other people from the ghetto tried to do the very same thing we did, and they ran towards the river. At that time, the guards started screaming, the Ukrainian guards, and this is a phrase in Ukrainian "Wylaz Zyde ya tebe bachu," and that means, "crawl out, Jew, I can see you." That phrase rings in my ears constantly, and a lot of people came out. My mother held me down and we stayed put. And, that went on for several days, and my mother made me eat the soggy bread that was in the bundle. It tasted awful, and she kept saying I have to be strong, and I can't give up now, and she kept giving me directions of how to get to the farmer's house on the other side of the river that was supposed to have been our hiding place. And I felt I knew, and I told her, "Stop repeating it, I know how to get there," because we used to go there before the war and my mother used to buy some of the dairy products, like milk, and cheese, and butter

from that farmer, so I knew his name, I knew his family, and I knew where he lived, only we didn't go through the river, we went all around. That was in a little village called Skobelka. And we stayed pinned down, and at that point the gunshots were working full time. There were screams from the ghetto and fire, and it never let down even at night, night and day. I don't know how many days we stayed in the river, but it was several days, and I kept dozing off. And one time I woke up, or I thought I woke up, and I looked around, and my mother wasn't there. I really became panic stricken, and I didn't know what to do, and I just stayed there until the very end of that day. And, by that time, everything quieted down. There was no more sound except my own sobbing. I was crying. It was so still. And, somehow at that moment I felt I let my mother down. I fell asleep, and she probably couldn't wake me up, and she had to leave, and so, when it got real dark I made my way to the other side of the river, and by that time it was dawn. I was wet, and petrified, and utterly confused. I made my way to the farmer's house, and the farmer saw me and he led me into the barn, and I asked him, "Is my mother here?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, she is supposed to be here." He says, "Yes." I said, "Well, I'll wait until she comes." And, he said, "No, you will not wait here. I'll feed you, you'll stay until it gets dark, and you better leave." And, I looked at him, I said, "You made an agreement with my mother," and I asked -- I mean, I addressed him by his name, which I don't want to give now because I think I have a lot of questions and I would like to resolve them some day before I die when I go back there, and I asked him, "You made an agreement." He said, "I changed my mind," and he shrugged his shoulders and he said I have to go when it gets dark. If I don't go, he'll report me to the authorities. It was very ironic, because he was wearing a farmer's, like a coverall, and in the corner I saw my father's gold pocket watch with the chain, which I'm sure was part of the money that my mother tried to buy the hiding place for us. That evening, he didn't even come out, his wife came out, the farmer's wife came out, and gave me some food. She gave me an apple, and she said I had to leave. I was so stupefied and so bewildered, I walked out and I walked on the main street of the village, not realizing that anyone could see me and give me away. But, I just, I don't know, if there is a God he must have been with me, because I walked through the main street of that village and didn't encounter anyone. And finally I ended up in the fields which were right on that farm, I guess, I don't know. There were fields, wheat fields, all around, and they were almost ripe for harvesting at that time of year, and I sat down in the middle of the wheat fields and I sat there for two days. My food went, and I tried to gather my thoughts. I had a terrible sinking feeling that I let down my mother, and I felt very guilty about it, and right then and there I decided that I must find my mother. And that's when my odyssey really starts. The area where I come from is surrounded by many, many forests, and I felt, or I tried to feel, that my mother was there waiting for me and I had to find her, no matter what. And so, I started, I knew that I would have to go to the forests, and I started walking. And, the thing was that when you look at a forest it looks so close, and yet when you really start trying to reach it, it's much further than your mind tells you it is. And so, I walked most of the nights and hid in the forests during the day. But then, there was another problem. One had to eat, and I was hungry, and so, I had to find forests that were near villages where I could sneak into a garden, or a yard, or a potato cellar, or something where I could get something to keep me from dying from hunger. The very beginning, the first months, were very, very painful, very -- I mean, it's almost like I was in a daze. Several



things happened. One of them, which, again, is riveted in my memory, was an incident that involved six other people. The very first months after I was wandering in my search for my mother, I encountered stragglers from other ghettos, apparently, most of the surrounding ghettos, neighboring ghettos, were liquidated around the same time. It was the fall of 1942. And so, we would sit and exchange some information and try to find out if, perhaps, they knew anything about our loved ones and vice versa. And so that at one time there were six other people, some of them from Lokacze, from Beresteczko, and a few other neighboring villages, towns. And there we were at the edge of a forest, exchanging information and just glad to see other human beings like ourselves. All of a sudden, there were some children playing and they noticed us and they started screaming "Zhid"--just yelling "Zhide, Zhide," meaning "Jews"--and they ran back to the village. There was a very small remuneration for reporting a Jew, and I'm sure they wanted to report Jews and get the money for us. And so we didn't know what to do. First we tried to run into the forest. That forest happened to have been a forest where there was very little underbrush and consequently one could see very far, so it was not very good for hiding. There were many huge haystacks in that field because it was harvest time, and so we decided to go into a haystack to hide. Why we all selected one haystack, I cannot answer. I don't know. But we all ran into one haystack, and we tried to cover ourselves as best as we could. Pretty soon we heard the children back and adults. And they made a game out of it. They kept pushing their pitchforks into the haystack. And there were screams and cries, and after it got completely quiet, that was it. I waited and waited and waited. It was quiet. And it seemed it was an eternity, and then I made my way out of that haystack. And there I saw six bodies lined up in front of the haystack, mutilated. The only one I recognized there was a baby--that child must have been maybe two years old--that baby was on the chest of his mother. They were all undressed, their shoes taken away, lined up very neatly. I didn't even cover them, I just walked away. And I walked into that forest, and there was no place to hide and I walked and walked and there was no end to that forest. And so I decided to climb up a tree. And a good thing too because that next morning--for some reason I don't know, it was near a big town or something--but that forest was full of Germans and Ukrainians. They had a picnic or something. And I sat there on that tree trying not to move all day long. I'm sure if I had been below, I would have been found. It was really torture because the trees were, evergreens, you know, and they hurt when I was sitting there. But I sat there all day without moving. I went to the bathroom just like that, under me. And when night fell and they left, I climbed down and started walking until I got to another forest, which was I think dawn of the next day. There were many awful incidents. I remember once I didn't feel well, I was very hungry and I was very thirsty also. Thirst is just as bad and just as painful as hunger. And with my hands I clawed, I dug a little hole and I climbed in and I covered myself with leaves and I just lay there. I must have fallen asleep, I don't know. When I woke up, I felt better. I don't know how long I slept. Animals kept walking by, nuzzling, you know. There were snakes. There were smaller animals. I saw a bear one time, I think at that point, I did; and the only reason I can figure out that they didn't touch me is because I smelled like them. I'm sure they thought I was one of them. Not one animal tried to harm me except the stupid dogs in the villages. They were awful. The dogs--you know, you come to a village, or try to sneak into a barn or a shed and the dogs would give you away because they would bark and they

would really be vicious. I was bitten a number of times by dogs but never by an animal in the forest. One time I ran into a bunch of tents and this was a group of partisans. And I was very glad to see other human beings. They were cordial to me and they asked me if I was Jewish, and I said yes, which was a mistake because I spoke perfect Polish or Ukrainian. But then they said--I said I would like to join them. They said fine; there were some girls with them. Young women. But I would have to contribute a weapon. And I said "I have a little knife." And they thought it was very funny. And they would not accept me. But I got even with them: before I left, or I was told to leave, they fed me. But before I was told to leave--

[Technical conversation]

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: Charlene, we were talking about the partisans and they wouldn't let you in because you didn't have a weapon.

A: Yes, they made fun -- the partisans made fun of my weapon, a little penknife. Well, again, I was very saddened that I would be alone, but I got even with them in my own way, before I left I appropriated a warm long coat, a pair of boots, they were different sizes, I remember that, but they were warm boots, and some mittens and a shawl, a lot of warm clothing, and they had lots of it, and also I took some food, and I just left. My life in the forests is very hard to analyze. I think what kept me going is my quest, I mean my search for my mother. Maybe deep in my heart I realized that I would never find her, but I was afraid to admit it, because if I had admitted that, I would have given up, and I had to go on. So, I pretended, I think in retrospect I guess, I pretended that I'm looking for her and that I would find her no matter what. So, I kept on going. And, the hunger was awful, the thirst was awful, the cold was indescribable, terror and being afraid of everything and anything, because anything alive was my enemy. But, more than anything else was the pain of being all alone. Sometimes weeks and months went by without my hearing another human voice, and that is something that I cannot convey in words how painful and difficult it is. I started talking to myself. I listened for sounds. Sometimes I imagined that I heard voices of people, and usually when I heard people's voices they didn't bode me anything good, and, yet, I longed for it. So, in addition to being terrorized and tortured by all these uncertainties and fears, I missed a human voice, the sound of a human voice. Sometimes I would sneak into a yard to a barn, because I was hungry, but more so because I wanted to hear the sound of a human voice, and that was very difficult. I never felt that I could go on without living, without hearing another human's voice. I could go on with hunger and thirst, but I couldn't go on for any length of time without hearing a human voice. It was very difficult. There were many close calls that I had that I can't even begin to describe. One time I -- I don't know if I told that before, but I saw the Galowy, that's the man in charge of the forest, a forester, is that what you call them here, and he came up out of nowhere it seemed like. I was in my little grave, every forest that I planned to spend more than a day in I tried to dig a little hole and camouflage it, and all of a sudden I looked up and there he was on a horse, and I didn't even hear him coming. And, he was kind, but he says, "What are you doing here? You are not going to survive. I'm going to take you to the authorities, it's better that you give up." I said, "No, I'm not going to give up if you don't denounce me." And, finally, I took out a gold coin and that gold coin saved my life then. I still had two gold coins left after that, and each time they bought me my life in a roundabout way, and this guy came back, he followed me, and about a month later he followed me into another forest, and he knew that I had some more money, and so I gave him the next coin, and the third one I gave to the Russians, that was later on. How I lived in the forest, or in the forests, plural, I don't know, but it's an amazing thing, when one is hungry and completely demoralized, you become inventive. I never, when I even say it I don't believe it, I ate worms, I ate bugs, I ate anything that I could put in my mouth, and I don't know, sometimes I would get very ill, there were some wild mushrooms, I'm sure they were poison, I don't know, poisonous ones, I was ill, my stomach

was a mess, but I still put it in my mouth because I needed to have something to chew. I drank water from puddles, snow, anything that I could get hold of. Sometimes I would sneak into potato cellars that the farmers have around their villages, and that was a good hiding place because it was a little warmer in the winter, but there were rodents there and all. And, to say that I ate raw rats, yes, I did. Apparently, I wanted to live very, very badly, because I did indescribable things. I ate things that no one would dream of being able to. Somehow I survived. I don't know why, I keep asking myself, but I did. To this day, I'm still looking for my parents and my sister, none of them survived. I tried to go back, and it seems every year I remember more details, but I try not to, I try to forget, but I can't. I feel that I'm a prisoner of my memories, and I'm imprisoned in a jail that I can't break away from. But, I do feel that I have a mandate, and I must speak out for the millions who never had a chance. I'm their spokesperson. I have to tell the world what went on, so we can learn from these past mistakes, from the cruelty, and from the inhumanity of man towards man. I'm saddened that in this day and age we have learned very little, and I've had several incidents where after I made a short presentation to school children a parent was questioning the truthfulness of my story, and verbatim he said, "Oh, come on, that's a figment of your imagination," and that makes me very sad, and it makes me more determined to tell the world my story, because it did happen, and it should not happen ever again. I'm sure you want to know more details about my life in the forest. I don't know how I can tell you much more, except to tell you that I lived just like an animal. I ate and drank human waste, but I never killed another human being, and I don't think that should I meet face to face with people who are responsible for my parents' and my sister's murder, and for the millions of others, I don't think I'm capable of killing another human being. I could even forgive, but I cannot forget, and I do not want the world to forget. And, my message to people who will listen to my story is that, in spite of all this I do feel that there is hope for humankind, and we must learn from the atrocities and from the past that were so unkind to me and to millions of others.

Q: Do you want to break for a minute?

A: Yes, please.

Q: Can we take a break for a few minutes, please?

[Tape break.]

Q: Charlene, can you tell me what a day was like in the forest for you?

A: The day started when it started getting light, and usually at that time I would reach a forest, because I had to walk all night long. My one good thing was the darkness. So, early in the morning I would find a spot, dig a hole and cover myself and sleep, because I was exhausted from all the walking. Then, if I had something to eat, I would eat around noon or so, and then I would start wandering again in the forest, and make my plans for the next day. That was on good days, when I was healthy. Many times, I would dig myself into a grave and cover myself and stay there for days until I'd lose count, yes, until I was just so hungry, or so

thirsty, that I had to get up and go, but I would stay in the forest for many days at times.

Q: Did you have nightmares?

A: I don't know. I think the whole life was like a nightmare. I have nightmares now, but at that point I think it was all like a nightmare. I kept hoping to wake up. It was -- that's a very interesting question -- I think it was all very unreal to me, because it was not reality, and I lived in a very unreal world. I don't know if it was pretending or what, but it seemed maybe it was a self-defense mechanism, I did not think it was real. I don't know if I had nightmares. I don't know.

Q: Did you have daydreams?

A: Yes, oh, yes, yes. I remember once seeing a rainbow after a rain in the forest, and it was so beautiful, I will never forget that rainbow. And, I kept imagining and I kept remembering how my house looked back when, and I even smelled the smell, there are certain aromas now that, you know, I associate with home, and there was in that forest, which I loved the smell of the forest anyway, even under these circumstances, but I smelled the grass, and the leaves, and the earth, it was beautiful, but I smelled flowers, because when I looked at a rainbow I saw flowers, I saw the shrubs, and I saw the jasmine and lilacs that surrounded our house, and that was very pleasant and it gave me strength. Yes, I guess you can call it a daydream, yes. I wished that I had some tangible proof, or a photograph or something, of my parents and my sister, and I should have packed that in my bundle, but I didn't have that. I didn't have anything, any tangible proof, or anything that I could look and remind myself, because some days I was just wondering who I am, and who my family was. It's almost as if I couldn't visualize it in my mind, and I had to strain to remember. That was very difficult. One time I ran into a village, and ended up in a barn, helped myself to milk from a cow, and then they found me, a boy came into the barn and saw me, and I started running. There was no place to go, and he ran for his parents, apparently, and I ran and there was a well sort of, I guess, on the edge of the village. I don't know if it was an abandoned well or what, and I jumped in and I stayed there, I think, for a day and a half, and they didn't find me. But, I had to claw myself out of there, and, you know, the walls were round, and there was nothing to latch onto. That was a difficult thing, but I did somehow, I clawed myself out of that well, and that's another experience.

Q: What got you to jump in this well?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: What got you to jump in this well?

A: I saw it was there. Yes, there's no logic to it. It's just like when we went into the haystack, why did we all go into one haystack? And, they were huge haystacks, and I don't know if I explained, but when I told the story to my husband and son, they listened, but they didn't ask

any questions. And, I guess they didn't have the heart, but when we went back on our trip in 1988, we were in the car, and my son almost jumped out of the car, he said, "Oh, here, so that's what a haystack looks like." They are huge haystacks there, just like a barn, because here the haystacks are very small. And, there, they make them very big, and he says, "Now, I understand how seven people could hide in one haystack." I said, "If you didn't understand, why didn't you ask me?" He says, "I just didn't have the heart to ask." I don't know. I saw the well. There was no other place to go. It was too far to go to a forest, and I just jumped in, and they never looked there.

Q: You said you talked to yourself.

A: Yes.

Q: Out loud?

A: Yes, oh, yes, but you know the strange thing, I didn't know I talked a mixture of different languages. I never talked in one language. I don't know why. Yes, I talked to myself. I sang to myself, yes.

Q: Any song that you remember, particular song?

A: Yes, I remember several, but I'm not a singer, really. I remember a lullaby that my mother used to sing to me.

Lulej, Lulej--

I'm sorry, I can't.

Lulej, Lulej,

Lulej ma malenka

Lulej, lulej, siwy oczka z mrug

Nadwszystkimi, na dobry dzieczmy,

Czuwa, Czuwa, Czuwa stius.<sup>3</sup>

It means go to sleep my little one, close your eyes, and all good children -- over all good children watches an angel. I feel her presence now. I have so many questions. You have questions, but I have so many questions, and I have no answers, and it bothers me, and I don't know how I can die in peace because all these questions will be unanswered. And, the generations that come after me will have to deal with these questions that have no answers. But, in some small way, I don't mean to be so emotional, but I feel that story has to be heard.

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<sup>3</sup> Good night, good night,  
 Good night, my small one  
 Good night grey eyes half-closed  
 For all good children  
 Watched by a good angel.

Q: What other questions?

A: The questions are, why, when there is a war, soldiers die, some civilians die, why would one human being, or one race, want to eradicate another race? Why? Why can't we change the hate into love, into understanding? What is it in humankind that makes one react in such an ugly way? Why is there so much meanness in this world, which we see today, too? Why? I know there are no answers. I have an enormous amount of guilt for surviving. Why, why did I survive, when there were so many worthy people who really deserved to survive, I mean, never mind, you know, people who -- people who could contribute to culture, to history, to education, why did I survive? I have nothing to contribute, nothing. And, here, I'm a self-elected, self-appointed spokesperson for all these millions, and I'm not eloquent enough to speak in their name, and, yet, I have to.

Q: Can I ask you a simple question?

A: Sure.

Q: You said you talked to the animals.

A: Yes.

Q: What did you say?

A: I would reach out and I would talk to them, sing to them, and they were all good to me. The bear licked me, yes. I don't know if it was an old, old mother bear, I don't know, but she licked my face, he, she, it, yes. I don't know. I can't explain it. There were foxes, who huddled down next to me, kept me warm. Yes, there were, I don't know, animals that I don't know the name of, but there were deer, you know, beautiful, graceful deer, they didn't come very close, but they would stand and look at me and I'd look right back at them, you know, and their beautiful, graceful heads, you know, just cocked to one side.

Q: So, they were like comfort to you.

A: Yes, great comfort, and to think now I'm afraid of my own shadow.

Q: You must have missed affection a great deal.

A: Yes, I did, and that's why now I'm a hugger, I love to hug people, and I'm very affectionate. I missed it, and I'm trying to make up for it, and you can never make up for lost time. I've lost my childhood and my youth, and I can't make up for it. I also have a great gap in my formal education, and that's another thing that I can never make up for. I know my father would have been very disappointed in me today, I hope not, but he stressed education so much. I do want to bring out another thing, and I know I'm jumping now, this is already

after the war ended, I was liberated by the Russians, by the Soviet Union soldiers. Again, I was in one of my little graves, and I was very ill, I don't know how long, but it was the spring of -- it was spring, I don't remember, and there I was and all of a sudden somebody was shaking me, and there were these two pair of boots, that's what I saw from my vantage point, and these were two Russian soldiers, and they kept saying, "devushka, devushka, little girl, little girl" and they shook me, and I finally woke up, and I was very ill, and they took me to a military hospital. You see, they were still -- the war was still going on, and those were the front lines, and they happened to stumble upon me. They were very kind to me. They nursed me back to health. I was in several different hospitals with them. And, it was an act of mercy in a way, and I cannot adequately describe how gentle and kind they were to me. I hear other stories, and, I'm sorry, I cannot verify them, to me they were very good and they were my liberators, and I'll be forever grateful. But, after the war, when we started, everybody was searching for their loved ones, and I still didn't give up my quest, my search for my family. And, we were told that everyone who survived was gathering in Germany, and if we want to find our loved ones, that's where we have to go. And so, we went, when I say "we," there were groups, I wasn't alone at that time, and in a way I found a lot of comfort in other people, people like myself, but I wasn't alone, so we all went. We went from Luck, which is near my hometown of Horochow, we went to Krakow, which was Poland, it was after the war, because we still had to wait a while from the time I was rescued, I think it was about eight or nine months before the war came to an end, so we went to Krakow. From Krakow, we went to Bratislava, from Bratislava to Vienna, and then from Vienna to Germany. And, right after the war ended, they formed, when I say "they," I guess it was the Joint Distribution Committee from the United States, UNRRA<sup>4</sup> at that point, and some other committees, formed displaced persons' camps, we called them DP camps.

In the very beginning, it was curious that we were all thrown together. And, when I say "all," I mean the survivors, the remnants of the survivors, the people who helped the Germans and were running now from punishment, so to speak, so we all ended up in the same camps. And, the camps were no -- I mean, they were no -- I mean, it wasn't a very comfortable life, but it was heaven by comparison, but still, it was pretty rough, but the roughest thing was to confront these people who -- I didn't recognize anyone, but there were some of my compatriots who recognized Ukrainians and Poles who helped the Germans, and said, "What are you doing here?" you know, and, consequently, it was very tough. And, I mean, fights were going on all the time, and they finally did separate us and put us in different camps. But, I mean, a lot of these people pretended or said lies on their visas and ended up in the United States being our neighbors. I would like to also bring out another thing that bothers me in a way. Here I was, and I'm speaking from a personal point of view, and I know I'm not the only one, there I was an orphan, a survivor of unspeakable pain and atrocities of the war, and nobody extended a helping hand during the war. Now, after the war, wouldn't you think we would have priority to go out or to get out of Germany? But, no, I had to wait three long years. There were quotas. There were always quotas. There were quotas to get into the United States. When I finally did get hold of my family in the United

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<sup>4</sup>The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.



States, because I remembered my grandmother's address, I still -- I mean, they guaranteed that I would not be a burden to the government, and, yet, I had to wait three long years before I was allowed to come to the United States. Meanwhile, I tried on my own to get a student's visa, and I attended the University of Heidelberg for almost -- well, over a year, but that would have given me a student visa. I must say that the people at the University of Heidelberg bent backwards to accommodate me. There were such gaps in my formal education, it was non-existent, and, yet, I took some tests and they helped me and I was accepted as a full-time student. And, I will never forget that, I'm grateful for that. But, I still had to wait three years to come to the United States, and I don't think that was right to treat us in such a way.

Q: How was it in the camp, in the DP camp?

A: Well, I was in several. It was -- we had rooms, each one of us was assigned a bed. We had a shower once a week. We had rations, and now and then I would get -- we would get care packages, and the care packages had cigarettes, and cigarettes were a very welcomed commodity, it was traded for necessities of life. And, that's the way we lived, or that's the way I lived. And then I went to school and started again searching for my family, and it's very -- I don't know how to bring it out, but it seems to me to this day, I am not at peace with myself because I have nothing tangible to mourn. When one dies, there is a grave, a cemetery, I have nothing, and maybe that's why to this day I'm hoping against hope, I know it's ridiculous, that, perhaps, I could find someone in my family. To this day, when I walk on the street and I see a person who is very tall, my father was about 6'4", and my mother was almost 6 foot tall, and when I see people of that height and build I have to run in front of them to verify that that's not them, and that's very difficult for me. In 1988, my son expressed a desire to go back where I came from, he wanted to see the surroundings. And, after about a year of red tape, the Soviet Union allowed me to go to Lvov, but they said that if I wanted to go to my hometown, which is an insignificant little dot on the map, they cannot allow me now, they will let me know when I get to Lvov whether or not they would allow me to go to my hometown. And so, we took our chances and we did go. I couldn't go directly to Lvov. They told me I had to go via, at that time Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev and then Lvov, and that is a story of another -- for another time. We were supposed to be with a group, a tour group, because otherwise, you know, I could have gone on my own, they said, no, you can't do that. When we got to Leningrad, we come to the tourist people, and I said, "Where is the group we are supposed to join?" There was no group, so we were left on our own anyway, but, yet, I mean, the bureaucracy was such that I had to fight for everything until we got to Lvov, and it's a good thing I still speak the language, or else we would have been lost. But, anyway, we went, we finally ended up in Lvov, and that evening we were let know, they let us know that they gave us permission to go to Horochow, my hometown, for two hours only, and they stood there with their watches, you know, watching. Why, I don't know. I cannot understand it. When we finally got to Horochow, we went by car, and we had two drivers. These two drivers were supposedly our guides, but they really were the KGB men, and mind you, that's 1988, where when we had already glasnost and perestroika to some degree. We got to my hometown. I don't know where reality ends and imagination

begins, but it seems that was not my hometown. There were no sidewalks. There were no trees. There was nothing the way I remembered it. I looked for my house and finally an elderly gentleman, I mean, they came out of the woodwork, there were many people who came out, and they all, of course, remembered my family, and, of course, if they would only have been able to help they would have, so they tell me then, and they pointed out the place, supposedly, that was my home, my house. It's still there, but it doesn't look anything like my house. It's still on a terraced hill. There are no shrubs, nothing. On either side of the house, they added buildings, and they painted the house, it was plaster, I guess you call it, they painted it a horrible color of blue, and there was a woman standing in the door as if daring me to go up. I didn't have the heart, and I could not do it. So, I didn't go in, but it didn't even look like my house. Our son had a camera, and he tried to go around the side of the house to take a picture from the back, and he sort of disappeared. I didn't pay much attention. I tried to ask about things in the city, and any information about my family and the rest of the Jews from the ghetto, and all of a sudden one of our guides heard screams, a mother, I'm a mother, and I didn't hear it. And, there was my son screaming, "help, help." It turned out they ran, and I ran with them, and so did my husband, and we ran around the corner and there were two militia men, local militia men from Horochow, who tried to kidnap my son in a van and drive off. He doesn't speak Russian. He didn't know, you know, what was going on. They tried to force him into that van to drive off, and that's when a little fight ensued between the local militia and the two -- the guides who whipped out their KGB cards and then they let my son go. That's in 1988. I managed, I didn't, I know they erased, they leveled the ghetto, I didn't get to see anything, because time was taken away. I managed to find out that the river in which I was hiding was diverted, there was no river there anymore. I did not see the space, the place, but they told me there is no more river. They verified again about my sister, that she was denounced, paraded in the nude and murdered within days of the liquidation of the ghetto. My father, they think, he ended up in Dachau, but I'm not sure. When we were in Germany after the war, I mean after I got married, my husband was stationed in Germany in Munich, and we went up several times to Dachau and I looked and asked, but there is no way to verify whether or not my father was murdered in Dachau. But, there is another possibility now. They told me when I went back in '88 that there was a mass grave on the outside of my hometown, and possibly the 300 men who were grabbed in the very beginning of the German occupation ended up there. I don't know, and I was not given a chance to see that mass grave. No one knows anything about my mother. No one could give me any information. Of all the Jews, as far as I know, there is only one other survivor, an older lady who lives in the United States also, and there are some other survivors, but these are people who made their way from our hometown in an illegal way as the war started. That's as far as I know. I might be incorrect, but I have not found any other survivors.

Q: Let's go back to the ghetto for a moment. When you first had to put on the Star, your mother sewed it on?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What was that like? Were you angry? Were you bewildered?

A: I was bewildered, yes, very bewildered, and it was such a humiliating thing, it had to be yellow, I don't know why yellow, and you had to wear it on the front of your clothing and on the back, too, so they would see you coming and going, yes, it was very, very humiliating. And, I could not understand it. My mother, I remember, tried to tell me because we are so special, and I accepted it.

Q: When you went into the river with your mother, did you pull off --

A: Oh, yes --

Q: -- the Jewish Star?

A: -- yes, we didn't have them on when we left our house. We left them behind, and I do have one regret, I have a regret of not having any pictures of my parents and sister, and I could have taken them with me. I just didn't think. And, I guess, I don't know what my mother had, she had a little suitcase with her, I don't know, maybe she had some pictures with her.

Q: When you went into the river she had a little suitcase.

A: Yes, a little -- like a little satchel, yes.

Q: Did you get your period when you were in the forest?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No, not until I came into DP camp. No.

Q: You were fortunate.

A: I guess so, yes, not at all, no.

Q: Would you like to read your poem?

A: Yes. Is it time for me to read it now? Okay. Before I read it, I want to explain something. I'm having very difficult times, at times I'm very angry at God, and at times I question his existence, and in 1985, with the help of a wonderful Rabbi, Rabbi Elster, who was the Rabbi of Agudas Achim in Alexandria, he was a personal friend, he was a military chaplain in 19 - - in the early 1960s, and that's the way we met him, my husband and I, and we've kept up our friendship. And, he is, in a way, responsible for my speaking out. He was the first one who dragged me in, practically dragged me in, to a confirmation class, and he said, "Now,

you will speak and you will tell them your story." I said, "But, Rabbi, my English isn't perfect. I can't, I don't remember. I don't want to." He says, "You are going to do it," and I did it the first time, and this is the way things evolved. He is responsible for it, and the gathering of 1983, when I realized that I have a mandate and I have to speak out. This poem that I'm going to read was a poem that I wrote in 1985, when I decided, with the help of Rabbi Elster, to become a Bat Mitzvah. All I knew about Hebrew is that it goes from right to left. I didn't know the alphabet. I was very ignorant in that field. He, with his help in three months, I mastered all that is needed to become a Bat Mitzvah, and not just superficially. I chanted my entire Haftorah. I did all the prayers in Hebrew. I conducted almost the entire Saturday service in three months. And, I thought that by doing that my faith, my religion, will come back. It was a catharsis for about a year, and now I'm struggling with it all over again, and this is the poem that I wrote on the occasion of my Bat Mitzvah.

"I remember blowing bubbles in the air, rainbow colors, all so fair, nightingales  
and jasmine scent, all that love and beauty meant.  
I remember rainbow colors, no, no more, guards with rifles by the door, Star of  
David on my coat, I can't swim, I can't float.  
I remember a haystack in a farmer's field used by seven as a shield, and only one  
of us is left, filled with sorrow and bereft.  
I remember the bottom of a water well, will someone see me, will they tell, am  
slipping, clinging to the rounded wall, dear God, don't let me fall.  
I remember being hungry, snow and frost, cold, alone and very lost, why go on  
with such a life, stalked by terror's cutting knife.  
I remember my heart by now an empty shell, from all that pain, from all that hell,  
it's such a long and awful war, my wounds forever an open sore.  
I remember papa's hug and mama's kiss, darling sister I'll always miss, their loving,  
sweet and gentle faces, gaze at me from empty spaces.  
They are gone forever, all is vanished, and my soul to torment banished."

Q: Do you need to stop now?

[Tape break.]

Q: Charlene, do you want to tell me about a janitor?

A: Well, I want to tell you about this trip in 1988, which was very memorable for many reasons, and one very poignant incident happened in Lvov. We went to the University, where my father used to teach, and this was very meaningful to our son. He was, at that point, he just finished medical school, and I have always stressed education and, I mean, it seemed that, he says, here I am walking literally in the footsteps of my grandfather, he was at that point an assistant professor at Yale, and he said, "This is the first time I can connect," because in my home in Horochow he couldn't connect, there was nothing to connect with. As we walked into the university, which I vaguely remember these huge buildings, but this one special -- specifically, one building, and there was this old hunch-backed gentleman, and he says, "Can I help you?" And, I said, "Yes, I would like to just look around," and I

told him who I was, and "this is my son," and I don't know if he did it because he wanted to please me or, you know, he saw the anguish in my face, he said, "I remember your father," and he was such a nice gentleman. And, he said, "He always said hello to me." I don't know if it's true, but it made me feel good, and it made my son feel very, very -- I can't say happy -- but it gave him something to think about and something to remember about a grandfather that to him is just stories, you know, and one picture that I have. And, I thought that was one very, very pleasing or good moment in our trip. I would like to bring to the attention of my listeners, my future listeners, that in 1988, so many years after the war, we went to see the concentration camps in Poland, and we also stopped at Babi Yar in Kiev. Babi Yar is a place where a hundred thousand mostly Jews were murdered by the Germans within ten days. When we ended up -- when we got to Kiev, we wanted to take one of the normal tours, as we did in every city, to see all the most important things in that city, and we did that, and it was finished. And, I said, "Well, we didn't go to Babi Yar," and our guide says, "Oh, we don't go to Babi Yar. You want to go to Babi Yar, you make your own arrangements." So that, right away, made me very angry, but we did make arrangements, and next morning we went to Babi Yar. First of all, the guide keeps telling us about the hundred thousand Soviet citizens who were murdered there, no mention about Jews. Then, there is -- what do you call it when you commemorate -- a memorial, a memorial, and on the memorial in Russian it says that Russian citizens, 100,000 of them, were murdered here, no mention of the Jews. I got very angry, and I really gave them a piece of my mind. It wasn't because of me, but now I understand they have a new memorial that explains that they were mostly Jews and they commemorate the right people who were murdered there. Another thing, they kept saying nobody in Kiev knew what was going on. Well, the geographical location of Babi Yar is right in the middle of the city, how people could be deaf and blind is beyond me. That's one thing. When we got to Poland, Poland had several million Jews, now they have, I think, 5,000 Jews in the entire country of Poland. The anti-semitism in 1988, you could taste it, you could slice it with a knife, it was in the air everywhere, and everywhere they took us to the concentration camps, starting with Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, there was no mention of Jews, Polish citizens were murdered here. And, I, again, expressed my very, very unhappiness with the state of affairs. I understand that it's being corrected now, but I spent a week in Poland, that if I didn't die out of frustration and anger, it was just so obvious that the anti-semitism is still there, and I'm not accusing anyone specifically, but the country as a whole. And, I'm sorry I feel that way, and people might disagree with me, but, unfortunately, in 1988 all I felt is hate and despicable distaste for the Jews that the Poles have there. And I feel it's unfair. There are no Jews there to hate anymore, and, yet, it was so obvious everywhere we went that the Jews are very much disliked there.

Q: Charlene, when you were in the forest, how did you decide where to go?

A: I didn't. I just went happenstance. I learned how to, you know, tell north, south, east and west, and I kept going east, then after a while I went south, and that's the only way I went. I don't know, I did not have any plans of where to go and how. The forests are, they stretch for miles, and miles and miles, and thank God I had good legs, I guess, because I don't know how many hundreds of miles I must have walked in these years that I was there, but there

was no plan. I might have ended up in the same villages, for all I know, several times, I recognized them, yes, but I had no plan. I didn't know what I was doing. It was all -- you mentioned before, it was almost all unreal. I don't know. It was something was driving me to keep on going, and that was, I guess, the spirit of my mother, because I felt I had to find her. But, how I went and what I did, there was no plan. I had no plan, none whatsoever.

Q: What did you do for shoes?

A: Well, I had a pair of shoes, then they fell apart, and I used the leaves with boughs of evergreen, you know, to tie them around, and the next year I had those wonderful boots from the partisans. One was about two sizes too big, and the other one was a little too small, but who cared, they were wonderful, yes, that's what I did for shoes. But, I think the partisans, in some way, even though they didn't allow me to join their group, they saved my life, too, yes.

Q: Why don't we change the tape and go to a half hour tape. Can we do that? Thank you.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

- Q: Okay. You were talking about shoes, and your change of shoes, and how many miles you walked. Can you talk a little more about that?
- A: Well, yes, I don't know how many miles, but it must have been, if I say a thousand in the years, probably more, I know I walked, and walked and walked, and the original shoes, the ones--the high-tops, fell apart, and for a time I didn't have anything, I just put leaves and the evergreen -- the longer branches and wrapped them around, and that was all I had. And, sometimes I would get into the barns and get some straw, but I didn't have anything to fasten it with. One time I remember getting a little bit of burlap in a potato cellar and I made string out of that and tied the leaves around my feet. It was very rough until I got new shoes, and the new shoes were the boots that I appropriated from the partisans. But, until then, mostly I had no shoes, and I walked barefoot in the snow, and it was terribly cold. Part of my toes, you know, have no circulation, they are frozen. My hands are also partially frozen, frostbitten, and my stomach is ruined. Otherwise, I'm all right.
- Q: Did you have a hat?
- A: No, no, no, I didn't have a hat. When the partisans, you know, left me to myself, I appropriated a shawl, and I wrapped my head at that time, but until then, no, I did not have a hat. I had long hair, and sometimes I chopped it up with my little penknife because I had lice, and I was itching, and I had sores, and it was very difficult to take care of. So, now and then I would chop it off.
- Q: How did you use your penknife?
- A: Oh, the penknife was used for a million and one -- for everything. I used it to help me dig my little holes in the forest. I used it to cut up my potatoes, my raw potatoes, to cut vegetables from the gardens, or I sometimes would get these wild nuts in the forest, and in order to open them I would use the penknife because I didn't have anything else. I started doing it with my teeth, but my teeth were hurting badly. I don't think I could have survived without my penknife.
- Q: Is that how you killed the rats?
- A: Yes.
- Q: This is difficult to express, isn't it?
- A: Yes, it's difficult for me today to believe that I stooped that low, that I did that, but I did. I'm not proud of it. I feel very humiliated to share this with you, but, yes, I did it.
- Q: Well, I'm grateful that you told me.

A: Thank you.

Q: I know this sounds like a silly question, because you used the word humiliation, you were put in such a horrible situation--

A: I never shared these kind of details. When I speak at schools and all, I'm very -- not superficial, but I don't go into such details, because I don't feel comfortable talking about it, and I do feel humiliated, but I guess it has to be told and I hope whoever listens will respect me regardless. I did that to survive. And, perhaps, part of my survival, the meaning of my survival, is to talk about it now so people will know. Again, I feel that my parents have given me such a solid early childhood that I did have the strength to survive and to end up now reasonably well. I must thank my wonderful husband and son. They have supported me 150 percent, and I'm not a very easy person to live with, and my husband has been my friend, my nurse, my mother, my father and my lover, and he is a very understanding man, even though he says he could never walk in my shoes. He understands my moods. He understands my shortcomings, and he puts up with it in a very big way, and I appreciate it. I always say that my marriage is not 50/50, my marriage is 95, I take 95 percent, and I can only give five. But, he's a very special man, and my son has been very understanding, and very giving, and very loving, and now I have a grandson and another one on the way, so there are many happy things in my life. They don't compensate for my early life, but in a way I have many blessings, and I'm grateful for those.

Q: You told me that in the ghetto there were many actions where they picked people up.

A: Yes, these round-ups, the actions, we called them Lapanka, and they started early. They started, actually, the first one was when they rounded up my father and the other men, before we were herded into a ghetto. One action, one such action after my father was taken, took place a few days later, and everybody was at work, the adults and the children 14 and over, and I found myself alone. We were still in our house at that point, and I saw, you know, they would come with sirens and all, you know, make a big to do about it, they let you know that they are coming to grab you. And, near our house there is a magnificent big one, a big Christian cemetery, and I ran to that cemetery to hide. It had many trees, and little chapels, and little mausoleums, and that's where I ended up. When I came back in 1988 to visit my hometown, there was an elderly gentleman who told me that he remembered me and he saw me in that cemetery where I was hiding. I did not know that someone saw me and didn't report me, but he told me he saw -- how else would he know where I was. He took me to that cemetery, because it's very close to our home, and he showed me the little chapel where I was hiding. I was hiding there, yes, for several hours.

Q: So, you were always very quick.

A: Yes, you had to be quick on your feet, or else you would not survive, yes. But, you know what helped me in a way, I guess, it helped me also I was a tomboy, I was always running,



doing things that other young girls, perhaps, were not so eager to do, and I was comfortable with that, yes. So, maybe that helped. And, there were other round-ups in the ghetto later on, too. I would say there was one on the average of once a week, once every other week, yes.

Q: Were you feeling fear all the time?

A: Yes, yes. I still feel it when I talk about it, I still feel fear. And, I don't know, it's also a very - it's an indescribable kind of feeling, because fear is something that you fear people, you fear, you know, emotions, you fear nature, I was fearing fear itself. I was always in fear for everything that was going on. I was always -- I was not at ease with anything that was going on in my life. But, while we were still in the ghetto, while my mother was still there, she was such a -- she was solid as a rock, and she gave us all the comfort that we needed, and that was enough.

Q: So, you never saw her cry?

A: Never saw her cry, never, not when they took my father away, no. She just hugged us. She took my sister and me close to her and she hugged us. We cried, she did not. She probably cried that night, but she didn't cry then, no. She took his jacket to the ghetto with us, the jacket -- the sports jacket that he was going to put on, because he was always a very formal dresser, you know, and she took it. She had it in the river with her, yes.

Q: She was wearing it?

A: Yes.

Q: So, they were very close.

A: Yes, they were very close. They were very close, from what I saw they were very loving, very understanding of one another, and complimenting one another on everything they did and everything they said. And, I mean, I was telling this to some of my friends and they said, ah, I mean, you are idealizing it, there's no such a human being to be so -- I mean, two human beings to be so perfect and all. I said, "My parents and my sister were perfect," and that's the way I remember them. I don't remember one flaw, nothing. I can't remember anything that they did that I didn't admire, and I was very, very lucky, very lucky.

Q: Did you ever pray to God when you were in the forest?

A: I don't know if I prayed to God, but I did pray, but I was also very angry with God, very angry, and I kept saying, "God, if there is a God, why did you let this happen? Why do I have to be all alone now?" And, it was always centering around me, I was very selfish, I guess, in that respect, and I was always referring to myself, selfishly, why did this happen to me, why did I end up like this. I did not -- I don't know, I couldn't see on a larger scope, it was just my own person at that point. But, yes, I did.

Q: Did anything funny happen?

A: Not funny, but I saw little birds, you know, being hatched, or what do you call it, you know, and it was a miracle of birth and it was beautiful to watch. Nothing funny, but interesting things happened like that, and I watched, and I was fascinated by that, and it gave me strength to go on, because if a bird can survive, I can survive, too. And, that was beautiful to watch. But, funny, no, I don't remember anything funny happening, no.

Q: So, laughter was --

A: No, I don't remember laughter. I don't remember playing in the ghetto, except talking about food and pretending, you know, that we were at a banquet, and who is going to have the first, you know, piece of the meal, the first part. And, it was always centered around food. Maybe our group was an exception. I understand in the concentration camps kids were playing, and, you know, with rag dolls and all. I don't know. We didn't play, no.

Q: You said that when you were in the forest that you couldn't trust anybody.

A: No, how could I trust anybody? Everyone I knew betrayed me. It seemed I could not, to this day I cannot understand, people who were our friends, people who were our neighbors, didn't extend a helping hand in our time of need. And, I cannot understand that. I cannot. I don't want to refer to it, but in a way Bosnia nowadays, it's almost a paradox, the Croatian people are the ones who were helping the Germans, and the Serbs were the victims, now the Serbs are trying to take revenge, I guess, in a way to put it very simply, on the Croats. But, I was one of the first of our group, the survivors, who wrote letters to anybody and everybody who would only read that we want all these atrocities to stop, because it's like a vicious circle, like a catch-22, enough is enough. But, in the beginning, right after the war, I was very confused. I hated with a passion. I was angry. I think that anger has subsided somewhat. I try not to hate, because hate is such a wasted energy, and I try to put my life to good use, and I do as much as I feel I can. I'm not working anymore now, so I do try to relate my story in schools as often as I possibly can, but every day I come back from a presentation it's like the wound has been opened anew. And, people tell me, oh, it's so long ago, it shouldn't hurt. Every day it hurts the same, and even more, because I remember details that I haven't spoken about before. But, as I said before, I think I'm trying to learn to forgive, but I can never forget, and I don't want the world to forget, and that is one of my missions, to bear witness, as Elie Weisel says, he was another one of my early inspirations, and I feel that if he can talk about it I have to make myself talk about it. I'm not as eloquent, and I'm not as smart as he is, but in my own small way I try to do the best I know how, and maybe that's my mission in life and the reason for survival. I don't know.

Q: Do you think you can sing one of those songs you sang to yourself?

A: Oh, there's another lullaby that my mother -- and, these were all in Polish, I don't know why,

we spoke Yiddish at home, but I guess it was part Polish and part Yiddish, because the songs that I remember mostly are Polish. There are some that my father used to sing, "Oif dem pripiczik brent a feierl", , and he used to sing that to us. But, the other one is, let's see --

Guzety led gwazd,  
 Dulety le miast,  
 Gzwadzy miastomny ja znasz,  
 ze dzieczy musial spai  
 a spie kochanie  
 a czego prognac znamy znar dostanies,  
 wszystkie dzieczy nawet zwie,  
 padgrozynie sa wsnie,  
 a ty jedna tylko nie,  
 a, a katki dwa  
 szary bury, szary bury  
 a, a katki dwa  
 odbydwa<sup>5</sup>

I mixed up the stanzas, but that's a lullaby that my mother used to sing.

Q: And, you sang that to yourself?

A: Yes.

Q: Well, Charlene, you've brought us a gift. Thank you.

A: Thank you for allowing me and giving me the time, and I appreciate it, and your presence here is a comfort to me. I could not have done it without you, Joan, I mean it sincerely. Thank you.

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<sup>5</sup> Stars

Village  
 You knows the stars of the village,  
 The children must sleep  
 Sleep, dear ones  
 You shall be surprised  
 All good children, even the bad ones  
 All are sleeping  
 But you yourself are not  
 Two kittens  
 Two dark paws  
 two kittens  
 Both of them

Q: Okay. Let's do the photographs.

A: What happened, are you coming apart? This picture of my parents and sister is a composite. When my husband and I were stationed in Japan, I'd been asking my family here in America to try and find some pictures of my family, and they did find some, but none of them looked like my parents and sister that I remembered. And, finally, they found these pictures, and this is the way I really remember my family. I remember my mother, I remember the suit, it's a black suit with a stand-up collar, and the scarf that she is wearing is multi-colored, even though here it looks just black and white. My sister is wearing a beautiful white lacy dress with eyelet, and the little bolero has red and white polka dots. I remember it as if it were yesterday. And, she's wearing, I think, white ribbon in her hair. Father looks just as if he is right here right now. I remember his hair was sort of longish, and he parted it in the middle, and his eyeglasses are very dainty, very delicate, and you could hardly see the gold little rim that went around his ear, and he's wearing a collar with a tie, like a bow-tie, and it's also, it's a suit, I don't remember exactly what suit this is. But this is the way I remember my family, and to me, looking at them right now, is very important and very meaningful. I love you.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Conclusion of Interview